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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 16 November 2022

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Devolved Finances

1. **Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): What assessment his Department has made of the impact of the reduction in the Scottish block grant on devolved finances. [902188]

3. **Anne McLaughlin** (Glasgow North East) (SNP): What assessment his Department has made of the impact of the reduction in the Scottish block grant on devolved finances. [902190]

8. **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): What assessment his Department has made of the impact of the reduction in the Scottish block grant on devolved finances. [902195]

9. **Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): What assessment his Department has made of the impact of the reduction in the Scottish block grant on devolved finances. [902196]

11. **Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): What assessment his Department has made of the impact of the reduction in the Scottish block grant on devolved finances. [902200]

12. **Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): What assessment his Department has made of the impact of the reduction in the Scottish block grant on devolved finances. [902201]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr Alistair Jack): Scottish National party Members may want independence, but they certainly do not have independence of thought. The UK Government are providing the Scottish Government with a record block grant settlement of £41 billion a year over the next three years. That is the highest spending review settlement since the advent of devolution, and I hope that the SNP will join me in welcoming that, although I will not hold my breath.

Patricia Gibson: So much for “Jackanory”. According to the House of Commons Library, the Scottish block grant was cut by 4.1% this financial year and is set to be

cut by a further 6% in the next financial year. That is a two-year real-terms cut of nearly £5 billion. The UK Government repeatedly claim to be increasing the funding for Scotland, but that is clearly not true, so why do the Minister, the Secretary of State and his Government refuse to admit that they have cut the block grant and plan to cut it even further, and when will the Secretary of State for Scotland stand up for Scotland?

Mr Jack: This Secretary of State is standing up for Scotland. The £41 billion settlement over three years was a record figure; it is the highest figure since devolution began and the first grant was agreed in 1999. I am standing up for Scotland, but I recognise that the Scottish Government have tough choices to make. Inflation is affecting the whole world and they will have to make responsible choices. I do not believe that it is responsible for them to cut their public services by £1.25 billion.

Anne McLaughlin: Independent research shows that the Scottish block grant will be cut by £5 billion in real terms over the next two years. What if the Scottish Government have £5 billion less to spend and our councils have less to spend, despite cost and demand going up? Let us consider Glasgow City Council. The city treasurer, Councillor Ricky Bell, said today:

“The consequences of what looks likely to be passed on to Scotland’s public services will be catastrophic and communities, already reeling from 12 years of Tory austerity, are being pushed to the brink of destruction.”

What can he do, other than support independence, to stop those communities being destroyed?

Mr Jack: Supporting independence will certainly not help the finances of Scotland; many independent economists have made that observation. As I said, it is absolutely a choice that the Scottish Government have to make about how they spend their budget. If they need to do so, they have tax-raising and borrowing powers. That is a decision for them, but equally, they have to choose what their priorities are. I would say that keeping £20 million in the budget for an independence referendum that no one wants is not responsible.

Alan Brown: Thanks to Brexit, the UK has the highest inflation in the G7, which has caused an additional £1.7 billion to be knocked off the Scottish budget due to pressures such as energy increases, wage increases and the cost of living. Instead of giving a robotic answer about the biggest budget being awarded—the Secretary of State wrongly stated that Scotland has borrowing powers, which we do not for our revenue budget—will he say what discussions he has had with the Chancellor about additional revenues coming to Scotland to offset the inflationary pressures?

Mr Jack: I must set the record straight: borrowing is available for both capital and revenue, and there is an emergency figure, as was available during covid. The hon. Gentleman raises a point about inflation. Rising energy costs and rising food prices, as a result of Putin’s illegal war in Ukraine, have affected continental Europe and the United Kingdom. This is a global issue. The Bank of England is taking steps, and the Chancellor’s statement will take further steps tomorrow, to stabilise the markets. What we are very clear about is that we have put in place support for people through the household

support scheme, the energy price cap and the £37 billion that the Chancellor announced earlier this year. As we have always said, we will protect the most vulnerable in society.

Deidre Brock: Public sector pay increases are a sensible way for a Government to help their citizens with a cost of living crisis, but the UK Government are denying devolved Governments the ability to do that by cutting devolved budgets. Would a better use of public money not be to shut down the Scotland Office propaganda unit and transfer its budget to the Scottish Government to help fund pay rises for tens of thousands of people in Scotland?

Mr Jack: The hon. Lady and I have this discussion on many occasions, because this is one of the points that she is keenest to make in the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. She knows the answer, which is that the Scotland Office's spending on its communications pales into insignificance in comparison with the Scottish Government's.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: The block grant for Scotland covers many of the Government spending priorities that affect the people of Scotland from day to day, such as health, education and local government. However, I am afraid that there are many areas it does not cover, from pensions and most social security to consular services for Scots imprisoned abroad, such as my constituent Jagtar Singh Johal of Dumbarton, who has been arbitrarily detained for five years by the Government of India. We know that the Prime Minister met the Prime Minister of India at the G20 summit. Does the Secretary of State know whether they discussed Jagtar's detention? If he, as Scotland's man in the British Cabinet, does not know, why not?

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's supplementary does not relate to the question, so it cannot be answered.

Alison Thewliss: Anti-poverty groups such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Child Poverty Action Group have praised the Scottish Government for expanding and trebling the Scottish child payment—a watershed moment for tackling poverty in Scotland. Families in Scotland now get £100 every four weeks for each child up to the age of 16, which will have a significant impact. Instead of trying to hamstring such positive anti-poverty activity by cutting the block grant, will the Secretary of State increase spending for Scotland so that we can put it into the pockets of needy families hammered by Tory austerity?

Mr Jack: There has been an increase. As a Barnett consequential, there is an extra £82 million coming to Scotland this year through the household support fund. As a result of the rates cut in England, there is an extra £296 million coming this year. We have devolved some of those benefits, so it is the Scottish Government's choice how they spend that money.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): Yesterday, Nicola Sturgeon wrote in the *Financial Times* that the Scottish Government's budget this year has

“not received a single additional penny from the UK government.”

The Secretary of State will know that that is completely false. It is another example of this fibbing First Minister, who has recently been forced to correct the official record in the Scottish Parliament for false claims made there. Does the Secretary of State agree that that is a misleading and incorrect quote from Scotland's First Minister? Will he outline what additional funding has gone from the UK Government to the Scottish Government this year?

Mr Jack: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As I have just said to the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), the extra funding from Barnett consequentials that is going to the Scottish Government this year from the household support fund is £82 million; it was £41 million last year. The council tax rebate in England has generated another £296 million that is going to the Scottish Government.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): In my right hon. Friend's assessment, did he reflect on what the impact on the Scottish block grant would be if hon. Members on the separatist Benches achieved their ambition of breaking up our United Kingdom?

Mr Jack: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. Scotland is the best-funded part of Great Britain, and there is a Union dividend there of £2,000 per man, woman and child.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): The Secretary of State, or should I say Lord Jack-elect, was blindly loyal to the former former Prime Minister, the former former Chancellor, the former Prime Minister and the former Chancellor over the summer. They crashed the British economy on the back of handing out tax cuts to the richest. The economic crisis was created around the Cabinet table in Downing Street by the people the Secretary of State sits beside, and it will be paid for by working Scots. What price does the Secretary of State think Scottish public services and Scottish working people should pay for his Government crashing the economy?

Mr Jack: First, as I have said in previous answers, we are facing a global economic downturn as a result of Russia's illegal war in Ukraine. On the hon. Gentleman's final point, the Prime Minister has made it very clear that he wants to protect the most vulnerable in society.

The hon. Gentleman refers to my previous roles in Cabinet. I do acknowledge that mistakes were made. The Chancellor took immediate steps to restore market stability when he came into his new role.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree about one other thing. Along with leading economists, we can all agree that the biggest risk to the economy of Scotland is the reckless—[*Interruption*—I was just waiting for the temperature to rise—the reckless plans of the Scottish Government.

Ian Murray: It is the reckless plans of both Governments that pose a danger to Scotland, but the point is—and this is what the Secretary of State denies—that it is about not just the last 12 weeks but the decisions of the last 12 years.

A few weeks ago, a constituent came to my surgery in tears. My constituent's 1.79% five-year fixed-rate mortgage rate was expiring, and the remortgage rate was nearly 6%. That familiar story, which means going from a stable income and affordable bills to the crushing anxiety of being unable to pay for the roof over the heads of one's family, was totally avoidable, but this Government and Secretary of State chose to ignore the experts, ignore their own officials and ignore independent bodies such as the Office for Budget Responsibility, and the result has been a Tory premium on everyone's mortgage. Does the Secretary of State think that he and his new Prime Minister should stop refusing to say sorry and give the public an apology, which is the least that they deserve?

Mr Jack: I do understand how concerned people are about their mortgages. Obviously, a number of factors are influencing interest rates, but we are doing all we can to limit those factors and to support the people who need support most at this difficult time.

Mr Speaker: I call the Scottish National party spokesperson, Mhairi Black.

Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): It is very concerning to hear the Secretary of State dispute the figures from the House of Commons Library. Let me emphasise that Scotland's block grant is being cut, our services are being eroded by Tory cuts, the economy is being undermined by Brexit and Scotland, as part of the UK, is facing the deepest recession in Europe. This Government's response is more austerity, despite Scotland's rejecting that premise for more than 50 years. Will the Secretary of State and the rest of his disaster capitalist Tories get out of Scotland's way, stop denying democracy, and allow Scotland to choose its own path out of this nightmare?

Mr Jack: As the hon. Lady knows, the party that is denying democracy is the one that does not accept the result of the 2014 referendum.

Mhairi Black: I would not be here if we had not accepted the outcome of that referendum, and I do not need any lectures on democracy from a soon-to-be-unelected baron. No matter how much this Government deny it, Scotland's budget is being cut. Let us put independence aside for a moment. Does the Secretary of State think that it is the Tories who are causing Scotland's demise and short-changing us, or is it this Union institutionally?

Mr Jack: As I have said before, the Union brings a Union dividend of £2,000 per man, woman and child to Scotland. It deals with last year's deficit of—according to the Scottish Government's own figures—£23 billion. It is a Union that delivers jobs. As we announced yesterday, it is delivering 4,000 jobs on the Clyde for the building of five type 26 frigates. This is a Union that serves the whole United Kingdom well. At different times, different parts of the United Kingdom pull their weight in different ways, but we are all much stronger together.

Public Expenditure and the Cost of Living

2. Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): What assessment his Department has made of the potential effect of the Government's spending decisions on (a) public expenditure and (b) the cost of living in Scotland. [902189]

7. Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): What assessment his Department has made of the potential effect of the Government's spending decisions on (a) public expenditure and (b) the cost of living in Scotland. [902194]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (John Lamont): Without pre-empting the details of the Chancellor's statement tomorrow, I can say that the Government's position is that, while tough decisions will be necessary, we remain committed to targeting support at the most vulnerable people in our communities across this land. As well as benefiting from a record block grant settlement to the Scottish Government, the people of Scotland benefit from higher levels of public spending, as is demonstrated through the Union dividend of about £2,000 a year per person.

Chris Stephens: The number of food bank parcels handed out by the Trussell Trust has doubled since 2015 as a direct consequence of austerity. Can the Minister assure the House that there will be no further return to austerity so that we can tackle the root causes of food poverty and the cost of living?

John Lamont: I hope that, as the Member of Parliament representing Govan, the hon. Member will join me in welcoming the £4.2 billion defence investment in Glasgow's shipyards for the building of those five Type 26 frigates, which will support hundreds of jobs in his constituency.

The UK Government will always act to help the most vulnerable people in our society. The Government are helping to protect households from significant energy bill rises through the energy price guarantee, holding down inflation, and that is on top of the targeted support for the most vulnerable, including £1,200 in direct payments this year. As for other measures, I encourage the hon. Member to wait for the Chancellor's statement tomorrow.

Angela Crawley: Last week I hosted a cost of living event in Hamilton, and every day I am inundated by people contacting me about the potential loss of the triple lock on pensions. My constituents were just getting by before the cost of living crisis, but they are now avoiding supermarkets, struggling to pay heating bills and fearing starvation and hypothermia this coming winter. Will the Minister act now to prevent pensioner poverty and call on the Chancellor today to guarantee the triple lock on pensions and to ensure that they rise in line with inflation?

John Lamont: As I said earlier, the focus of this Government is on supporting the most vulnerable people in our society, and we will always take this responsibility seriously. The Government will act, as they always do, to take the action necessary to support the constituents that the hon. Lady has mentioned. She mentioned the

potential effect of Government spending decisions. I will gladly tell her about the very real effect that the SNP Government's spending decisions are having in Scotland: they have wasted hundreds of millions of pounds on ferries that do not float; a fortune has been wasted on malicious prosecutions at Rangers football club; their mistakes have cost hundreds of millions of pounds to fix Edinburgh Sick Kids and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Glasgow; and, worst of all, they have spent millions of pounds pushing for another independence referendum that does not match with the priorities of the people of Scotland.

Trust in the UK Government

4. **Richard Thomson** (Gordon) (SNP): If he will make an assessment with Cabinet colleagues of trends in the level of trust in the UK Government in Scotland. [902191]

5. **Allan Dorans** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP): If he will make an assessment with Cabinet colleagues of trends in the level of trust in the UK Government in Scotland. [902192]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (John Lamont): There are no current plans to do so. However, trust is important, and I hope that Members opposite share my concerns at the use of inaccurate or misleading statistics covering energy and health by the SNP Government in Edinburgh.

Richard Thomson: This year's Scottish social attitudes survey has revealed that 66% of people trust the Scottish Government to work in Scotland's interests just about always or most of the time, which compares with only 22% who trust the UK Government to behave in the same way and 46% who consider that they can never trust the UK Government to work in Scotland's best interests. That is a quite remarkable set of findings. Does the Minister have any useful insights into why the people of Scotland might feel this way?

John Lamont: The Prime Minister has been clear about the need to rebuild trust and to put the public above politics. We will act with integrity, professionalism and accountability at every level of Government. The hon. Member refers to the social attitudes survey, but I would suggest that the figures from the survey that should cause that the SNP most concern are the falling levels of satisfaction with the SNP-run NHS in Scotland. Two thirds of Scots, 66%, believe that the standard of the NHS has fallen in the past 12 months. The priority of the SNP should be the NHS, not another independence referendum.

Allan Dorans: Allowing former Prime Ministers to fill the Lords with their friends, funnelling public funds to cronies during a pandemic, crashing the economy and debasing and embarrassing this Parliament by allowing a sitting Member to appear in a reality TV programme—is it any wonder that the people of Scotland do not trust the Conservative Government? Does the Minister think that trust in the Government is low because of this, or is it distrust in the Westminster system itself?

John Lamont: I struggled to hear parts of that question, but the people of Scotland can always trust this United Kingdom Government to be upfront and honest about the challenges that we face, unlike the SNP Government in Edinburgh, who refuse to come clean about the huge economic impact of their plans to divide Scotland with another referendum.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Select Committee, Pete Wishart.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I say to the Minister that his Government will never regain the trust of the Scottish people as long as they do not respect the democracy of our Parliament. [Interruption.] The Secretary of State might have his bolthole in the House of Lords, but the Minister and all his other Scottish colleagues will have to face the wrath of the electorate, so what representations has the soon-to-be Baron Jack made on behalf of him and his colleagues to make sure that they are safely ensconced in the House of Lords? [Interruption.]

John Lamont: I struggled to hear the end of the hon. Gentleman's question.

We remain committed to Scotland remaining at the heart of the United Kingdom. We respect the result of the 2014 referendum, and I encourage the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) and his colleagues to do the same.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister, Liz Twist.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): When the Prime Minister was anointed, he stood in Downing Street and said he would put integrity at the heart of his Government. That was just three short weeks ago. Since then, one of his key Ministers has had to resign for threatening to slit someone's throat; his Home Secretary is clinging on to her job—the one she resigned from a week before being reappointed; his predecessor has appointed his old mates and cronies to the House of Lords; and the old but newly appointed Deputy Prime Minister has been outed as a bully. Does the Under-Secretary think that speaks to integrity at the heart of Government?

John Lamont: The Prime Minister has been crystal clear about the need to put integrity at the heart of his Government. It is also certain that the people of Scotland can trust this United Kingdom Government to deliver for Scotland, whether through the covid-19 vaccines or the record £41 billion budget for the Scottish Government. This is what really matters to my constituents in the Scottish Borders and to people across Scotland.

Floating Offshore Wind

6. **Selaine Saxby** (North Devon) (Con): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on Scotland's role in delivering the UK's target of 5 GW of floating offshore wind energy by 2030. [902193]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (John Lamont): The Government recognise the important role that infrastructure plays in supporting the commercialisation of floating offshore wind at scale across the United Kingdom, including in the Celtic sea,

and are committed to building capacity in infrastructure and supply chains to support the growing offshore wind industry.

Selaine Saxby: My hon. Friend will no doubt be aware of the Kincardine floating wind farm off the coast of Aberdeen, but he might not be aware that the fabrication of its turbines took place in Rotterdam because UK ports do not have the capacity to do that work. Does he agree that, to realise the potential of this industry, investment in port infrastructure is crucial and that the lion's share of this investment should be in the Celtic sea?

John Lamont: I commend my hon. Friend for raising this issue, as it is an important part of the Scottish economy. Scotland is a world leader in floating offshore wind, and it is home to both the world's first and the world's largest commercial floating wind projects—Hywind Scotland and Kincardine. The ScotWind leasing round, announced earlier this year, includes nearly 18 GW of potential floating wind capacity, underlining the scale of the opportunity.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): What discussions has the Secretary of State had with his colleagues and with his Scottish Government counterparts about the number of jobs created in Scotland through greater investment in offshore wind?

John Lamont: We continue to engage with our colleagues in the Scottish Government on this and a number of other policy areas, I would be happy to meet the hon. Lady to discuss further opportunities that we might be able to create in future.

Energy Bills: Support for Households in Scotland

10. **Wendy Chamberlain** (North East Fife) (LD): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on support for households with energy bill increases in Scotland. [902198]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (John Lamont): The UK Government's energy price guarantee will reduce the unit cost of electricity and gas so that typical households across Great Britain, including in Scotland, save around £700 this winter, reducing bills by roughly a third.

Wendy Chamberlain: When people face energy price increases, it is important that they have confidence that the bills they receive from their provider are correct. After an intervention from my office, we have sorted out my constituent's bill, but she has now had another invoice. This seems to be a growing trend, as I am now dealing with seven cases. What discussions has the Scotland Office had with Ofgem? With rising prices and higher energy costs in Scotland, it is critical that we address this issue.

John Lamont: I am concerned to hear about that case. Ofgem is independent of the Government but, if the hon. Lady sends me the details, I would be happy to raise the case directly with Ofgem.

Scotland's Role in UK Defence and Security

13. **Alexander Stafford** (Rother Valley) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on Scotland's role in the defence and security of the UK. [902202]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr Alister Jack): I have regular discussions with the Ministry of Defence on matters relating to defence in Scotland. This includes the crucial role of the armed forces presence at our strategic bases in Scotland. RAF Lossiemouth and His Majesty's Naval Base Clyde are vital to maintaining the security of the United Kingdom and our NATO allies. The defence industry is also vital to Scotland's economy, and I am delighted to see that the new Type 26 frigates, costing £4.2 billion, will be built by BAE Systems on the Clyde in Govan. This will secure thousands of Scottish jobs for years to come.

Alexander Stafford: The British armed forces are the pride of our nation and represent every corner of our beloved United Kingdom. I am proud that our nuclear deterrent is based at Faslane, with our brave submariners working to keep Britain safe. It is highly regrettable, however, that some would strip us of our nuclear deterrent in Scotland. In an ever more dangerous world, and facing threats from Russia and China, what assurances can my right hon. Friend give me that our base on the Clyde and all other military bases in Scotland are not going anywhere?

Mr Jack: I completely agree with my hon. Friend: our nuclear deterrent plays a key role in protecting every United Kingdom citizen from the most extreme threats and to abandon it would put us all at greater risk.

Mr Speaker: Before we come to questions to the Deputy Prime Minister, I would like to point out that the British Sign Language interpretation of proceedings is available to watch on [parliamentlive.tv](https://www.parliamentlive.tv).

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [902229] **Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 16 November.

The Deputy Prime Minister (Dominic Raab): I have been asked to respond on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who is attending the G20 leaders' summit in Bali.

After the missile strike in Poland yesterday, we reaffirm our solidarity with Poland, we express our condolences to the victims and we are working with our allies to determine precisely what happened. The Foreign Secretary will be making a statement shortly.

Mr Betts: I begin by associating myself with the Deputy Prime Minister's comments. I am sure the whole House will want to reaffirm our complete support for Ukraine and for Poland in the face of Russian aggression.

When he got the job, on his first day, the Prime Minister promised “integrity, professionalism and accountability”. I assume that the Deputy Prime Minister agrees with that promise and would expect all Ministers to follow such principles. Therefore, does he also agree that the Prime Minister should ensure, in line with his promise, that no Minister who has a complaint of bullying upheld against them should continue to serve in his Government?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his shared solidarity on the issue in Poland. He is right to quote what the Prime Minister said, and I take it as an article of personal faith that we behave with absolute integrity and accountability. I am confident that I have behaved professionally throughout, but immediately on hearing that two complaints had been made—I believe they were made yesterday; I was notified this morning—I asked the Prime Minister to set up an independent investigation, and of course I will comply with it fully.

Q2. [902230] **Nicola Richards** (West Bromwich East) (Con): Last week, many of my constituents were celebrating the Gurpurab of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, who travelled the world with an important message about equality and Seva—selfless service. We see that running through many of the actions carried out by Sikhs and others in my constituency, through organisations such as the Midland Langar Seva Society and the Guru Har Rai Gurdwara. Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking the community for their ongoing Seva and extend his best wishes for Gurpurab?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend. At this important time of year for the Sikh community and the Sikh faith, I join her in what she has said. The Sikh community make an outstanding contribution in her constituency, with the Midland Langar Seva Society and the Guru Har Rai Gurdwara, but they also make an amazing contribution to the whole country, and we are grateful for it.

Mr Speaker: I call the deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): I join the Deputy Prime Minister in his remarks regarding the Sikh community and, most importantly, the incident in Poland last night. I know that the whole House stands united in our support for the Ukrainian people and sends condolences for the tragic loss of life. Britain has an unshakeable commitment to NATO and our allies, including Poland. The Government have rightly requested that we establish the facts and avoid unhelpful speculation, so I understand that the Deputy Prime Minister might not be able to go further today, but does he agree that, last night’s events aside, the fact that Russia is launching missile attacks on Ukrainian civilian infrastructure while world leaders meet shows the utter contempt that Putin has for international order?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Lady. I entirely agree with what she said. President Putin started this war, and whatever determination is made in relation to the events yesterday, they result whether directly or indirectly from the unlawful aggression perpetrated by the Russian Government. That is why the Prime Minister is out at the G20 rallying support,

making sure that we wean ourselves off energy dependence on Russia, and making sure that our energy supply is from other parts of the world. I agree 100% with what the right hon. Lady said.

Angela Rayner: It is right that we condemn Putin in the strongest terms. The G20 is also an opportunity to work together to tackle the economic challenges that we all face, yet, as our international allies race to crack down on multinationals using tax havens to stash profits abroad, this Government are dragging their feet to protect their profits. We have a Budget tomorrow, and it has been briefed that tough choices will be impacting families across Britain. Does the Deputy Prime Minister accept that every pound hidden in tax havens is a pound lost from the pockets of working families?

The Deputy Prime Minister: We want people to come to this country to create the jobs and to generate the tax revenue—whether that is through non-dom status, which, given the changes that we have made, is stricter under this Government than under the last Labour Government; or whether it is the Prime Minister’s approach to big-tech companies, where he has led the charge with the G7 presidency in making sure that there is an international approach, delivering global minimum corporate tax rules. We have lowered the tax gap—the difference between the tax owed and the tax raised—to its lowest level, certainly lower than under the last Labour Government, and we will continue to do so.

Angela Rayner: I notice that non-dom status has not been abolished, Mr Speaker. The Conservatives would have us all believe that the economic problems are out of their hands, when the truth is that it is working people paying the price for their choices. They have chosen to protect corporate profits and not household incomes. There are 38 countries in the OECD’s two-year growth league table. Where does the UK rank in that table?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The right hon. Lady will know that, on the latest data, unemployment remains at a 50-year low. *[Interruption.]* The shadow Chancellor says that it has gone up. It is half the level left by the last Labour Government. When it comes to GDP, she will know that the IMF has said that we will have the strongest growth in the G7.

Angela Rayner: I think the economic situation that families face speaks for itself. I will answer the question for the Deputy Prime Minister. The answer is 38th out of 38 on growth. If there were a World cup for growth, we would not even qualify. Working people are paying the price for 12 years of Tory failure—the wrong choices by the wrong people.

After days of dodging and denial, this morning, the Deputy Prime Minister finally acknowledged formal complaints about his misconduct, but his letter contains no hint of admission or apology. This is Anti-Bullying Week. Will he apologise?

The Deputy Prime Minister: On the economic challenges, which are global and caused by covid and the war in Ukraine, we have got a plan to grip inflation, balance the books and drive economic growth. If we listened to the right hon. Lady, debt would go up, unemployment would go up and working Britons would pay the price.

The right hon. Lady asked about the complaints. I received notification this morning and I immediately asked the Prime Minister to set up an independent inquiry into them. I am confident that I behaved professionally throughout, but of course I will engage thoroughly, and I look forward, may I say, to transparently addressing any claims that have been made.

Angela Rayner: Let me get this straight: the Deputy Prime Minister has had to demand an investigation into himself because the Prime Minister is too weak to get a grip. We have a Prime Minister, who has been in office less than a month, with a disgraced Cabinet Minister who resigned with his good wishes; the Home Secretary, who breached the ministerial code and risked national security, still clings on; and now the Prime Minister defends his deputy, whose behaviour has been described as “abrasive”, “controlling” and “demeaning”, with junior staff too scared to even enter his office. And that is without mentioning the flying tomatoes. The Deputy Prime Minister knows that his behaviour was unacceptable, so what is he still doing here?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am here, and happy to address any specific points the right hon. Lady wishes to make. [HON. MEMBERS: “Flying tomatoes?”] That never happened. I will thoroughly rebut and refute any of the claims that have been made. She has not, in fact, put a specific point to me. If she wishes to do so—and this is her opportunity—I would be very glad to address it. [*Interruption.*]

Angela Rayner: Maybe the Deputy Prime Minister just does not think there is a problem, or maybe he is suggesting that civil servants are liars. Now he is reportedly banned from meeting junior staff without supervision, while we await an inquiry that the Prime Minister has not even instigated from a watchdog that he has not even appointed. In the Prime Minister’s letter, he did not say how and when this will be investigated, or by who—no ethics, no integrity and no mandate. And still no ethics adviser. When will the Government appoint an independent ethics adviser and drain the swamp?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The recruitment of the new ethics adviser is already under way and taking place at pace.

There is a reason that the right hon. Lady has come to the Dispatch Box with her usual mix of bluster and mud-slinging: it is because Labour does not have a plan. We are helping people into work; she is in hock to the unions. We are protecting our borders; she voted against every single measure to control illegal immigration to this country. We are delivering cleaner growth and energy security; she wants to send billions in reparation payments abroad. The British people want a Government who can deal with the real challenges, and Labour Members are not up to it.

Q3. [902231] **Lucy Allan** (Telford) (Con): Hope House Children’s Hospice provides dedicated end-of-life care to children from Telford and across Shropshire. This Sunday, Hope House is holding an online fundraiser called the Big Night In; it aims to beat last year’s target of half a million pounds. Among the fabulous prizes are premium tickets to the Telford steam railway polar express. The lucky winners will enjoy a Christmas

adventure to the north pole, complete with hot chocolate, cookies, golden tickets, and the first gift of Christmas from Santa, which is the reindeer’s silver bell. Please will the Deputy Prime Minister log on to Hope House Children’s Hospice’s Big Night In this Sunday? If he is lucky enough to win a pair of tickets to the Telford polar express, I shall be delighted to go to the north pole with him.

Mr Speaker: She might want you to go there. Be careful!

The Deputy Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend, and congratulate her and Hope House Children’s Hospice on the amazing work they do. I have been working very closely with Shooting Star Children’s Hospices, a similar organisation in my constituency. If my hon. Friend ever gets bored of the trains, I should say that I jumped out of an aeroplane at 15,000 feet to raise money for Shooting Star, and she would find it a thoroughly enjoyable experience.

Mr Speaker: I call the deputy leader of the SNP, Kirsten Oswald.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): I associate myself and my colleagues with the remarks made about the immense contribution of our Sikh communities.

SNP Members extend our full support and condolences this morning to Poland, following the death of two civilians last night. While a full investigation is ongoing, we reiterate our calls for Russia to end its brutal war of aggression against Ukraine.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister was asked six different times to apologise for the disaster of the Tory mini-Budget and the financial crisis it caused, and all six times, he refused to say sorry. This morning, people are waking up to the news that this Christmas, they will be hit with the worst inflation in 41 years, so will the Deputy Prime Minister stand up today and do what his boss would not? Will he say sorry?

The Deputy Prime Minister: May I thank the hon. Lady for what she said about both Poland and the importance of our solidarity with the international community against the appalling illegal invasion by Russia of Ukraine?

Inflation is clearly a problem. As Chancellor and now as Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend has for months been making clear that it is the No. 1 economic challenge we face. We have a plan to grip inflation, to balance the books and to drive economic growth. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor will make the autumn statement tomorrow, setting out our plan to take the Scottish people, and everyone across the United Kingdom, through these challenges.

Kirsten Oswald: If the Government cannot even say sorry for the mess that they have made, what hope do we have of them fixing it? Let us be clear: tomorrow’s Budget is imposing austerity 2.0 on all our constituents. That is the political choice that the Tories are making. But there are always different and better choices. Only this week, the Scottish child payment rose to £25 a week—a 150% increase in eight months—and it will help 400,000 children. If the Tories will not say sorry for the mess that they have made, will they at least make the right choice for once? Will the right hon. Gentleman’s

Government join the fight against child poverty tomorrow, follow the lead of the Scottish Government and match the Scottish child payment?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Lady will know that we are facing challenges that are faced all around the world, because of covid and the war in Ukraine. We have seen rising inflation in Germany, the eurozone and the US. The reality is that this Prime Minister and this Chancellor have a plan—more detail will be set out in the autumn statement—but of course, the UK Government will continue to work collaboratively with the Scottish Government to safeguard and protect the most vulnerable right across the United Kingdom. I think that is what the Scottish people expect.

Q4. [902232] Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): Belper Mills in my Mid Derbyshire constituency are in a state of disrepair. The community is hugely worried about their future. It matters not just for my constituents but for the whole country, because the mills are part of a UNESCO world heritage site. If appropriate redevelopment is not agreed soon, the site risks losing its world heritage status. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government will pay close attention to this case to ensure that we do not lose our world heritage status? Will he come with me to visit the mills and discuss potential solutions with local people?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for her campaigning on this. Yes, we will of course continue to monitor the condition of Belper Mills and the planning applications. The best I can say is that we strongly encourage all the local bodies—whether it is the council or the applicant—to continue to work together because, above all, her constituents will want to continue to celebrate the proud and rich tradition represented by Belper.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): I am sure that the Deputy Prime Minister will join me in welcoming the comments made yesterday by the Foreign Secretary to the European Scrutiny Committee—that securing Northern Ireland's place within the Union will be the priority of the Government in the negotiations with the European Union on the Northern Ireland Protocol. One of the benefits of the Union is the support that the Government of the United Kingdom are providing to households and businesses across the entire country to tackle the cost of living crisis. Will the Deputy Prime Minister assure me that the £400 energy support payment that is due to be made to households in Northern Ireland will be announced as soon as possible?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Gentleman. What he said about securing Northern Ireland's place within the constitutional and economic integrity of the UK is absolutely vital. The Prime Minister has been very clear on that, as has the Foreign Secretary. Of course, the Chancellor will say more tomorrow on the economic measures and, in particular, on the fiscal measures that the right hon. Gentleman referred to.

Q10. [902238] Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Even if an illegal migrant is stopped on a French beach, he will simply come back the next day as no one

is ever arrested. Will the Deputy Prime Minister ensure that we remove all pull factors for illegal migration by using his new Bill of Rights so that we have the legal power to arrest, detain and deport illegal migrants, and, for instance, have a review about a national identity card so that people do not just vanish and never get deported?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I totally agree that we need to strain every sinew to stop this appalling trade in misery. There is no silver bullet, although I think the agreement the Home Secretary made with her French opposite number will help, and we are embedding UK officials with their French counterparts for the first time. My right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) is right to say that the Bill of Rights can also help, not least in preventing interim orders from the Strasbourg Court from being recognised in UK courts. On ID cards, we already have e-visas for people coming to visit and live in the UK, and they act as digital evidence of a person's immigration status. What is clear, however, is that we will have to do all these things in the teeth of opposition from Labour Front Benchers.

Q5. [902233] Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Our small rural schools in Wyre face particular difficulties. The headteacher at Scorton and Calder Vale St John Church of England Primary Schools told me that:

“Budgets in schools like ours are stretched as we have to pay for lots of additional services which larger schools can provide in-house.”

She has to hire the village hall for PE because the schools have no hall, and she has to hire taxis to bring in school meals because they have no kitchens. Given the school budget cuts, what does the Deputy Prime Minister advise this headteacher to cut from our local children?

The Deputy Prime Minister: We are very sympathetic to the challenges that all our schools face. More will be said about specific measures tomorrow, but the hon. Lady should stand assured that we are the top spenders as a percentage of GDP on primary and secondary education in the G7, and that standards, which matter to pupils and parents the most, have increased, with the proportion of schools rated good or outstanding up from 68% in 2010 to 87% today.

Q11. [902239] Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): The Deputy Prime Minister will be aware of the opportunities but also the challenges that face Torbay's tourism and hospitality sector, including increased energy costs and the impact of business rates. What consideration is he giving to the situation of Torbay's iconic industry and further measures to support it?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is a fantastic champion for Torbay. The Chancellor will make a statement tomorrow and I cannot speculate on the spending decisions, but my hon. Friend will have noticed already the tourism recovery plan, which will help recovery from the pandemic and is also part of the wider levelling-up agenda.

Q6. [902234] Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Private rents in my constituency are completely out of control, and since the Government broke the

economy and broke the mortgage market, the hope of earning a home is quickly receding. With the cost of living skyrocketing, Tory tax rises through the roof, and an extra 1 million people in the private rented sector since 2010, will the Government get a grip and tackle housing in my constituency and across the country?

The Deputy Prime Minister: As a former Housing Minister, I know how important these issues are. I can tell the hon. Lady that the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities is looking very carefully at the situation of renters and landlords, and legislation is to be brought forward shortly.

Saib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con): My constituent Mikey Akers, who has verbal dyspraxia, said a few weeks ago:

“I am not ashamed of my disability, I am ashamed of the people who judge me without knowledge or understanding”.

According to the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists and the Dyspraxia Foundation, 5% of children are affected by speech and communication needs and more needs to be done to raise awareness in society. Will my right hon. Friend agree to convene a meeting with the Prime Minister to raise awareness about verbal dyspraxia, so that inspirational people like Mikey are never again left without a voice?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for being a doughty champion and highlighting Mikey’s campaign. All children and young people should receive the support they need to make the very best of all their talents and potential. He will know that in March we published a Green Paper covering a range of these issues, and I will certainly make sure that he gets a meeting with the relevant Minister.

Q7. [902235] Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Can the Deputy Prime Minister tell the House if he has ever entered into a non-disclosure agreement connected to a complaint against him?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is referring to an employment dispute that was settled before I entered the House. It was not an NDA but it did involve a confidentiality clause, which was standard at the time.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): All our constituents want to see an end to the dangerous and illegal channel crossings. One of the best ways to do that is to make sure that services are delivered in the first safe place to which refugees flee. In that context, will the Deputy Prime Minister, as a former Foreign Secretary and Development Minister, commit to backing the work of Education Cannot Wait, which delivers education in refugee camps?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the brilliant work that Education Cannot Wait does. She will know the importance of the campaign for girls’ education under both the previous Prime Minister and the current Prime Minister. We will certainly look at what more we can do to support that brilliant work, particularly for children growing up in refugee camps.

Q8. [902236] Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Ind): Does the Deputy Prime Minister’s comeback, on which I congratulate him, and the new direction of tomorrow, signal that the ban on no-fault evictions from the Conservative manifesto is back on after there was zilch from the previous Prime Minister? If so, will he get it on the statute book, using emergency powers if necessary, so that no family gets left, on a whim, out in the cold this winter?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities is looking at all such matters. He will have heard what the hon. Lady has said and, although I will not prejudice what further measures he is going to bring forward, I will ask him to write to her to address her specific proposals.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): I wonder whether my right hon. Friend has noticed that the people who are currently criticising him—[HON. MEMBERS: “Give him a job.”] No, thank you. The people who are currently criticising him have a record of bullying that is second to none. A Labour Member of Parliament left Parliament because of antisemitic bullying; a distinguished BBC journalist needed bodyguards at Labour party conferences; and a current right hon. Labour Member was suspended from the service of this House for bullying. Does my right hon. Friend think, as I do, that this is at the very least hypercritical, and may be a stronger word that is not necessarily parliamentary?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend makes his point in his usual inimitable way. All I will say is that I think it is important that we all take responsibility for our actions, and that is precisely what I have done today.

Q9. [902237] Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): A 1958 instruction from Whitehall ordered medics to take blood samples regularly from exposed veterans during nuclear weapons tests. I have been made aware that many veterans and their families have been reported being unable to obtain the test results, so are denied the ability to make any sense of what they, and in some cases their families, suffered. Will the Deputy Prime Minister investigate and inform me of the legal rights of these men to obtain their medical records? Will he undertake to ask the Prime Minister to order that the medical files be opened to veterans and the UK Health Security Agency immediately?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Lady, who has been a consistent champion on this issue, for which I recognise and pay tribute to her. My understanding is that the information is available to veterans and their families, who may request details of their service and medical records, but if the hon. Lady would like to write to me, I will make sure that she gets an adequate answer on her more specific point.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): I rise not to perpetuate partisanship nor parrot party lines, but merely to amplify the sentiments of the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey). The nuclear test veterans—those brave servicemen who did so much so long ago to ensure our safety—were

recognised by former Prime Minister David Cameron and, in a meeting with the hon. Lady and me, by the former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson). Will the Deputy Prime Minister and our new Prime Minister recognise them too, not only by doing what the hon. Lady has asked for but by giving them the service medal that they so richly deserve and that we owe them?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My right hon. friend is absolutely right. We should forever be grateful to all those service personnel who participated in the British nuclear testing programme. I can reassure him that we have asked officials to look again at recognition with medals. Any recommendations will be announced in the usual way.

Q12. [902240] **Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): Seven years ago, in my first PMQs, a Conservative Prime Minister told me to stop “griping” and “get behind” his rail investment plans. A few weeks ago, the new Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy said that there “wasn’t really much point” in going ahead with Northern Powerhouse Rail. Time and again, Tory Prime Ministers have promised NPR only to break their promises. Will the Deputy Prime Minister now put on the record whether he supports Transport for the North’s preferred option for NPR, with a stop in Bradford?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I can tell the hon. Lady that our £96 billion integrated rail plan will make Northern Powerhouse Rail a reality. We are committed to the project; the precise details will be set out in due course.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): If migrants who crossed the channel from France illegally were immediately returned to France, it would stop illegal migration to this country, break the economic model of the people smugglers and, perhaps more importantly, stop thousands of people descending on northern French cities, which would benefit the French. When the Prime Minister spoke to the French President, was a returns policy discussed? If so, what was the President’s response?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this issue. I cannot tell him the precise read-out from the meeting—I have not seen it yet—but I can tell him that the Home Secretary’s deal and agreement with her French opposite number means a 40% increase in officers patrolling beaches in northern France; UK officers embedded with their French counterparts for the first time; investment in port security infrastructure; more technology; and more wider European co-operation. We have taken all those measures in the teeth of the opposition from the Labour Front Bench, who have opposed every single measure that we have taken to stop illegal immigration, including things where I would have thought there would be cross-party consensus, such as life sentences for traffickers who play on human misery.

Q13. [902241] **Ms Anum Qaisar** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): It is not trade unions that have run public services to the ground—it is the Tories. It is not asylum seekers fleeing war and famine who are inflaming

tensions—it is the Tories. It is not those in low-paid jobs who are trashing the economy—again, it is the Tories. Can the Deputy Prime Minister inform the House when the Tory Government will finally accept responsibility for their economic, social and political mismanagement, rather than blaming everyone else?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is not a matter of blaming anyone; it is a matter of a team effort and shared endeavour, working with the Scottish Government, to make sure that we get a grip on inflation, which is the No. 1 priority. It has to be said that if the hon. Lady takes the position that we agree with inflation-busting pay rises—as difficult as these decisions are—we will only see inflation stay for longer. That will hurt the most vulnerable in our communities, whether in Scotland or across the rest of the UK.

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con): Now then. We have a brilliant Home Secretary but the Deputy Prime Minister will be aware of the wicked and vicious bullying campaign led by the Opposition over the last four weeks or so to get her sacked. Can he reassure me and the people of Ashfield that the Home Secretary will be given all the tools that she needs to solve the migrant crisis and keep the bully boys out of No. 10?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We fully support the Home Secretary and the important measures she has taken, whether on the Rwanda scheme, implementing the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, or the new deal with France to make sure that we collaborate with our international partners on a shared issue. He can also rest assured that that will be opposed tooth and nail by the Labour party.

Q14. [902242] **Kate Osborne** (Jarrow) (Lab): In 1936, people from my constituency marched to Parliament demanding jobs. They were living in poverty and were hungry. Some 86 years later, 39% of kids in Jarrow are still hungry. Will the Deputy Prime Minister and the Government end that scandal and commit to providing free school meals to all 800,000 children—40,000 of whom are in the north-east—from households in receipt of universal credit?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Lady. She will know that we have extended the eligibility of free school meals to 1.9 million pupils. On top of that, there is the £200 million holiday activities and food programme and the £1,200 of direct payments to the most vulnerable. I gently say to her that we also need to keep an eye on the macroeconomic picture. The No. 1 priority is to get inflation down, and we will not be able to do that if we follow the Opposition’s plans.

Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con): Given that we have the highest burden of taxation in living memory, it is clear that the Government’s financial difficulties are caused by overspending, not due to under-taxing. Does the Deputy Prime Minister therefore agree that if the Government have enough money to proceed with HS2 at any cost, then they have sufficient money not to increase taxes; but if they have so little money that they have to increase taxes—the last thing for a Conservative Government to do—then they do not have sufficient money for HS2? So can I gently urge the Deputy Prime

Minister not to ask Conservative MPs to support any tax rises unless and until this unnecessary vanity project is scrapped, because I for one will not support them?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend. I think I followed the various steps of logic in that question. I understand her opposition to HS2. I think we have some very difficult decisions to make. They will inevitably involve a balanced approach. I will leave it to the Chancellor to set them out in the autumn statement tomorrow.

Q15. [902243] **Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): In my Caerphilly constituency, we have five food banks. One of those food banks is run by the Trussell Trust, and it has issued over 2,000 food parcels during the last six months. There is a question from the users of that food bank, which is: will the Government give a firm commitment to ensuring that benefits will always be enough to purchase essentials?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Member raises a really important point, and we are doing everything we can to support those who may be reliant on food banks or otherwise struggling to make ends meet. He can see that with the £1,200 cost of living support that

is going to the 8 million most vulnerable households, the energy price guarantee and further measures for pensioners. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor will set out further measures tomorrow. Of course, as I have said before, the No. 1 priority is getting inflation down. We will not be able to do that if we follow the spending plans of the Labour party.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): My right hon. Friend is also the Justice Secretary, and everybody in this House, irrespective of party, will know that for the reputation of this House standards are important. He has said that from the Dispatch Box this afternoon. However, in response to some of the points raised by Opposition Members, am I naive to still believe in that good British tradition that one is innocent until proven guilty?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I have said I will co-operate fully with the independent investigation. In fact, I welcome the opportunity to address these complaints. I think, though, that it is important that we have zero tolerance for any bullying and hold the highest standards in public life, and it is important for all of us to adhere to those standards.

Migration

Mr Speaker: Let us start the first urgent question—*[Interruption.]* Sir John, what are you doing? *[Interruption.]* Well, why didn't you go out the other way? Give him a job on that Front Bench! I call the shadow Home Secretary.

12.38 pm

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will make a statement on migration.

The Minister for Immigration (Robert Jenrick): The continued rise of dangerous channel crossings is completely unacceptable. This phenomenon is not only a clear abuse of our immigration laws and deeply unfair on the British people, but puts the lives of those who attempt these journeys in grave danger. This Government are determined to put the people smugglers out of business and to make this route unviable.

This week, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary met her counterpart, Minister Darmanin, to agree a new multi-year strategic and operational plan with France. That will be supported by UK investment of up to €72 million in 2022-23. It includes a 40% uplift, with UK-funded officers patrolling the French coast over the coming months, improved security at ports, cutting-edge surveillance technology, drones, detection dog teams and CCTV, to help detect and prevent those crossings. For the first time, reciprocal teams of embedded officers will be deployed on the ground in control rooms, to increase joint understanding of this issue. This renewed partnership will enable us to build on our joint partnership with France, which so far has seen good progress, with more than 30,000 illegal crossings prevented since the start of the year, hundreds of arrests made and 21 organised crime gangs dismantled.

Beyond our ever closer collaboration with France, we will also work closely with other international partners, including further upstream, to help address issues closer to their source. The UK will be joining near neighbours and other countries, to agree collective action to tackle illegal migration. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is today discussing those issues at the G7 Interior Ministers meeting in Germany.

These are issues of the utmost seriousness, and they have been discussed at prime ministerial level. We are taking action to deter those intent on exploiting the UK's generosity, by implementing the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, pursuing migration partnerships with safe countries such as Rwanda, cracking down on those here illegally, and expediting returns agreements. There should be no doubt whatsoever about the Government's determination to grip this problem and deliver the strong and secure borders that the British people desperately want and deserve.

Yvette Cooper: Twenty-seven lives were lost in the channel a year ago, and a criminal gang profited from sending people to their deaths. Will the Minister tell the House whether anyone has been prosecuted or convicted for that awful event? We have long called for a stronger agreement with France to stop these dangerous boat crossings. That is why it is important that there is

scrutiny on this issue. Additional beach patrols are welcome, and intelligence sharing is vital—it is unfathomable that it was not happening already.

The level of convictions is pitiful: just four a month, on average. The Minister said that 21 gangs had been dismantled, but on Monday the Home Secretary said that it was 55. Which is it?

Journalists report 100 gang members operating in one small corner of Calais alone. The scale of response to the criminal gangs is tiny compared with the scale of the challenge, and the Government are simply not doing enough. This multimillion-pound criminal industry is putting lives at risk. The Minister referred to a joint intelligence cell. How many national crime agencies are currently involved in that, how many are deployed in Europe, and what will that number increase by? We need to know.

This agreement does not include anything on safe returns or safe family reunion. The number of children safely reuniting with family has plummeted since the end of the Dublin agreement, and charities warn that they are trying to go by boat instead. Asylum returns have plummeted from 1,000 people returned to the EU in 2010 to a tiny handful today. Of the 16,000 referred to the third country unit, just 21 returned. Did Ministers even try to get an agreement on returns and family reunion, and if not, why not? What is the Minister's timescale for getting a grip on the total collapse in Home Office decisions on asylum, and at what point will they double so that we get a faster pace? The way the Home Office is handling local authorities has been disgraceful, with many of them not being told what is happening.

Finally, what is the £140 million from the Rwanda agreement actually being spent on? Too often, the Home Office talks about things but is not delivering—this is too important.

Robert Jenrick: I am pleased that the right hon. Lady welcomes our agreement with France. She is right to raise the anniversary of the tragic and abhorrent deaths that occurred in the channel one year ago. I am pleased that a concerted effort with partners across Europe has led to arrests and the disruption of gangs, and to the capture and destruction of boats, directly as a result of that. The good work that our intelligence services did with respect to that incident is now being rolled out with respect to other criminal gangs right across Europe.

The agreement that we have reached with France will enable our world-class intelligence services to be directly in the room with their French counterparts, ensuring that the intelligence they are gathering, which is rich—I observed it myself on visiting the clandestine command in Dover—can now be passed on in real time to their French counterparts, ensuring that more crossings are stopped, more arrests are made and more criminal gangs are disrupted. That will make a positive impact in the months to come.

I politely point out to the right hon. Lady that she is becoming like a broken record on immigration. She opposes everything helpful that the Government have done and suggests nothing useful. She voted against the Nationality and Borders Act that created deterrents for people crossing the channel. She voted against measures that would have increased sentences for people smugglers.

She would scrap our world-leading migration partnership with Rwanda. She voted against our plans to remove dangerous foreign national offenders. One of the key policy platforms on which her leader, the Leader of the Opposition, stood for the leadership of the Labour party was to close down our immigration removal centres—the very centres where we house people like foreign national offenders, murderers and rapists as we are trying to get them out of the country.

The truth is that Labour is the party of uncontrolled migration and the party of mass migration. We understand the instincts of the British people, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and I will do everything to ensure that their will is implemented and we secure our borders.

Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con): The Minister knows well the problems that I have with Serco's procurement of accommodation in my constituency and I thank him for his engagement in recent days. Given the woeful communication with MPs and local authorities in recent days and weeks, can he confirm that lessons will be learned and that communication will be stepped up?

Robert Jenrick: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the productive and constructive conversations that we have had. It is absolutely essential that the Home Office and partners such as Serco treat local authorities and Members of Parliament with respect and engage with them productively. Since my arrival in the Department, I have set in place protocols so that all Members of Parliament and local authorities will be notified in good time before hotel and other accommodation is procured, and so that we move to a better procedure, whereby there is effective and constructive engagement in the days prior to taking the accommodation.

It is worth saying, however, that those are the symptoms of the problem. The core of the issue is the fact that 40,000 people have chosen to cross the channel this year alone and that places immense strain on our system. That is what we need to tackle, that is what Government Members are committed to doing and that is what the Opposition refuse to address.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): The £120 million totally wasted on the Rwanda plan could have quadrupled the number of caseworkers and cleared the backlog in asylum cases urgently. Can we have a Department focused on the nuts and bolts of getting the job done, instead of crazy, brutal and counterproductive headline-chasing policies? After all, that is the root of all our problems—that and the lack of safe and legal routes. A number of months ago, I tabled a written question asking for a list of all the safe and legal routes and it would not even have filled half a page. So can we do something about that?

The revelations in ITV's "The Crossing", a documentary about 27 channel deaths last November, were utterly heartbreaking and horrifying. Did the Home Secretary discuss with her counterparts how best to ensure that disputes about precisely where a boat is play a distant second fiddle to saving people's lives?

May I end by saying how disappointed I am? The Minister distanced himself from the Home Secretary's crass comments on migrants, but today we have heard him talk about murderers and foreign offenders. We are talking about asylum seekers, and he brings up murderers as if they are one and the same thing. It is an absolute disgrace, because he knows the impact that that has on not just asylum seekers but all migrants.

Robert Jenrick: The hon. Lady needs to face the facts. We on the Government Benches will always behave with decency and compassion, because those are our values. But we will not be naive. We are capable of making the distinction between genuine refugees and genuine asylum seekers fleeing persecution and human rights abuses, and Albanian economic migrants coming to this country for all the wrong reasons. We are also perfectly capable of making the distinction between good people who deserve our protection and support, and bad people who are foreign national offenders who need to be removed from the United Kingdom as soon as possible. I am surprised to see her joining in with the Opposition, who want to close down the very detention centres where we keep those people while we try to get them out of the country.

The hon. Lady says she is disappointed that we are pursuing Rwanda. I think Rwanda is an important part of our efforts to tackle illegal migration because deterrence has to be suffused throughout our entire approach. Everything we do to create further pull factors to the UK ensures more people cross the channel in perilous ways and more pressure is put on our public services. It prevents us from helping the people who genuinely deserve our support, such as those who come from Ukraine, Afghanistan or Syria under our resettlement schemes. I will say again—I have said it before: if the SNP wanted to help with this issue, it would address the fact that proportionately Scotland, in particular SNP local authorities, takes fewer people on those resettlement schemes than any other part of the United Kingdom.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I do not envy my right hon. Friend having to do this urgent question, having done a few myself. I know he will recognise that system-wide reform of asylum is needed. The deal with France is welcome, but it is only a small part of what needs to be done overall. The particular point I want to focus on is the issue of notification and engagement with local authorities, which seems to have disappeared, as he will be aware from the situation in Torbay. Can he reassure me that that will now be restarted? At the very least, it is common courtesy to notify MPs and local authorities—we should not find out via third parties.

Robert Jenrick: Yes, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his good service in this role and others previously. He was highly respected and is missed by his former colleagues at the Home Office.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that we need good engagement with Members of Parliament and, crucially, local authorities. When we are bringing groups of migrants to a local area, often with complex needs, we need to ensure the local authority is involved in that, can prepare for their arrival and provide good services. One issue that has been experienced in recent weeks is that the sheer number of individuals crossing the channel

[Robert Jenrick]

has put immense pressure on the Manston facility. As the Minister responsible, my first duty and priority was and is to ensure that Manston operates legally and decently. That has meant that we have needed to procure a lot of accommodation relatively quickly and that has meant some procedures have been weaker than any of us would have wished. I hope we can move forward from that, stabilise the situation, and get into a pattern of engaging MPs and local authorities in the manner that they deserve.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): Today, my International Development Committee launched an inquiry into how and why the Home Office is spending foreign aid to support refugees in this country. Does the Minister have a budget or a blank cheque? Does he have official development assistance specialists in the Home Office to make sure that that money represents value? Does he think it is morally right to be spending money, which should be going to the poorest in the world, to prop up the Treasury? Other countries are spending their own money to fund refugees in their own countries.

Robert Jenrick: First, it is the Home Office's responsibility to ensure that money is spent wisely and provides taxpayer value. How it is accounted for under overseas development aid or otherwise is a matter for the Treasury, not for me and my officials. But the point at the heart of this is that we need to ensure we stop people crossing the channel illegally. We do not want to be spending billions of pounds addressing this issue. The Opposition, I think, do because they oppose every single measure we take to try to address it. We want to get people out of hotels. We would like to move to a system that is based on resettlement schemes, such as the Ukraine and Syria schemes, whereby we choose people at source, they come to the UK and we are able to prioritise our resources on them, and we do not, frankly, waste hundreds of millions of pounds managing a problem of economic migrants who should not be in the UK.

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): This weekend, a new migrant hotel was set up in my constituency. I was contacted on Sunday and told that it would be happening—future tense. I subsequently found out that it had actually happened already, on Saturday. As yet—it is now Wednesday—we still have no details on who, how long and what is in place around that facility. On Monday morning, several local people presented themselves as homeless, having been kicked out of the same hotel, which was previously used by the local authority as temporary accommodation. My right hon. Friend must surely agree that this is wrong and untenable, and will cause a huge amount of anger locally. The Government need to stop this—he knows that—but can he, at the very least, ensure that, after this urgent question, he is able to investigate in his Department to ensure that local stakeholders and councils are able to get the information they need urgently to put the support in place that they need at local level?

Robert Jenrick: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I believe my officials have already reached out to his council to provide it with further information. As I said earlier, this is not the situation that any of us would want to be in. It is the product of record numbers of

people crossing the channel and a failure to plan in the months prior to this sudden surge. What we need to do now is move forwards and ensure, as our first duty, that Manston is operating legally and correctly. We must then ensure that any further accommodation is procured in a sensible way—simple and decent accommodation, not luxurious hotels—and that we have proper communication with local authorities. That is my objective and I am very happy to work with him to achieve it.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Unlike some of those who are criticising the Government today, the Democratic Unionist party has supported most of the measures that the Government have brought forward. We understand that there are genuine asylum seekers who need help. In my own constituency just last weekend I met many from Ukraine who are grateful for what this country has done for them. Almost every year, Ministers come with a new plan to deal with this problem, yet it gets worse all the time. The numbers are increasing, and frustration is increasing too. Does the Minister not agree that one way of stopping people coming via the dangerous route they are using at present, giving revenue to criminal gangs and stopping priorities being dealt with for real asylum seekers, would be to ensure that those who enter this country illegally are not allowed to apply for asylum in the first place?

Robert Jenrick: The right hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. We have already taken action through the Nationality and Borders Act 2022. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and I are reviewing our legal framework to ensure it meets the scale of the challenge we are currently facing. If we conclude that further steps are necessary, he can be assured that we will take them urgently. He makes a strong and compelling case that there should not be a route to a life in the UK if you choose to come here illegally.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): I strongly support the Minister in what he said by highlighting that most of the Opposition parties—certainly the Labour party and the SNP—have zero credibility coming to this House and questioning him when they vote against and criticise absolutely every legal measure we bring in to tackle this problem, which all our constituents care deeply about. I am sure the Minister would like to know what my constituents are asking me. They want to know why we cannot turn back the small boats and dinghies when they are in the channel. Of course, we all understand we have an obligation to save lives at sea, but surely that does not extend to people who seek to undermine our generous hospitality and our asylum system, which is there for genuine refugees. Please can he change the law to do that?

Robert Jenrick: My hon. Friend makes a very important point and speaks for the British public, millions of whom ask exactly the same question. We are pursuing returns agreements with safe countries and have secured one in the last 12 months with Albania. One thousand Albanians have already been removed under that agreement. Clearly, I would like that number to be significantly higher and we are reviewing what further steps we can take. We would like to secure a returns agreement with France. The agreement we reached this week is a good first step, but the Home Secretary will be meeting other

northern European Interior Ministers through the Calais group shortly to discuss what the next steps might be. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is prioritising the issue and the broader relationship with France, as we can see in the positive conversations he has had thus far. If it is possible to take the agreement further, we will certainly try to.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): On Monday, as part of Parliament Week, I spoke to a group of 100 asylum seekers and refugees who are learning English at Hammersmith & Fulham College. Some had been in local budget hotel rooms with their families for a year and a half, having had no Home Office interview since they arrived. All are willing and able to work but are prevented from doing so. Does the Minister realise that, along with indefinite detention, this is a failed policy, which is not only cruel and inhumane, but hugely wasteful of public money?

Robert Jenrick: I respectfully disagree about indefinite detention. There is an important role for detaining individuals, particularly foreign national offenders, while they are here in the UK and until we can remove them from our shores. If we had further capacity, we might detain more people, frankly.

As for whether migrants whose asylum claims are being processed should be able to work, there are arguments—and differing opinions—on both sides of the House. On balance, I take the view that it is not wise to enable asylum seekers to work because there are already significant pull factors to the UK as a result of the relative ease of working here, access to public services and the fact that we have relatively high approval rates for asylum seekers. I am not persuaded that it would be wise to add a further pull factor to the mix.

Sir Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for what he is saying and doing on this vital subject. I shall be here all next week, ready to vote for whatever legislative changes are necessary to protect people who need asylum and to defend our country from people who deliberately and wilfully break our laws. So will he please apply the toe of his shoe to the bottoms of the people who need to draft the legislation that we can all support?

Robert Jenrick: I am grateful for that intervention and I will take that back to my officials in the Department. My hon. Friend can be assured that the Home Secretary and I are doing everything we can. If we can make further legislative changes in the spirit of what he said—relating to individuals who come here not for safety from persecution, human rights abuses and war, which asylum was designed to support, but from safe countries looking for a better life—we will do so and secure the borders as a result.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): As we heard, on 24 November last year at least 27 people drowned while attempting to cross the channel in a dinghy, including a little girl. Five are missing and only two survived. A documentary called “The Crossing” that was shown on ITV on Monday night presented evidence that the tragedy happened in UK waters, notwithstanding multiple distress calls from the people in the dinghy while the French and UK coastguards

passed the buck over many crucial hours. I understand that solicitors acting for the families of some of the deceased and one of the survivors passed evidence to that effect to the British Government in March this year. The normal political response to loss of life on that scale would be the prompt announcement of an independent public inquiry. Will the Minister tell me what it is about the people who drowned that means that no independent public inquiry has been announced into the circumstances of their drowning?

Robert Jenrick: The events of a year ago were very shocking and deeply tragic, and my sympathies go out to the individuals’ families and friends. As a result of that incident, I assure the hon. and learned Member that very significant further steps have been taken by British authorities to enable those crossing the channel in dangerous crafts to be helped ashore in the UK. We are at the point where, I think, 98% of boats that attempt the crossing and pass the median line are helped ashore by Border Force, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution or the Royal Navy. I pay tribute to those British authorities; I have met them and they do that difficult work superbly. We will not be able to secure the passage of everyone who chooses to get in an unsafe dinghy at the behest of people traffickers and cross the channel. The best advice is, “Do not make that dangerous passage. It is illegal and extremely perilous.” That is key: we should not encourage people to make that crossing in the first place. We cannot assure safe passage to everyone.

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): Stoke-on-Trent, decades ago, voluntarily entered the asylum dispersal scheme, but enough is enough. We have done our bit for this country to protect some of the vulnerable people and illegal economic migrants who come here through safe countries such as France. I am sick to the back teeth of hotels being used in our great city and being dumped on by Serco because we voluntarily entered that scheme. The local authority is against it, as are the police and all three Stoke MPs, and for good reason. Islamic extremists such as Hizb ut-Tahrir are operating around the corner from the hotel. The far right is looking to recruit in our city. There is public anger and outrage about local services being depleted while services elsewhere are reinforced. When will the Minister tell Serco that Stoke-on-Trent has done its bit and to use it no more? If he will not, why not?

Robert Jenrick: We have taken further steps during my short tenure in the Department, and while my right hon. and learned Friend has been Home Secretary, to provide a fairer distribution of migrants across the country. The Home Secretary ensured that there was the mandatory dispersal of children, so that all local authorities can play a part in ensuring that children are in safe accommodation, whether that means in children’s homes or with state or private foster carers. We are also attempting to procure accommodation in a much broader range of local authorities. Historically, the issue centred on cities, including Stoke-on-Trent. We are now seeking to procure accommodation more broadly in smaller cities, towns and, in some cases, rural areas. That means, I am afraid, that as long as numbers are so high, more parts of the country will experience this issue, but it will ensure greater fairness in how we tackle it as a country.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Is it true that the Home Secretary disagreed with the ideas of the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss), on extending the seasonal agricultural worker scheme to help to provide important extra, temporary migrant labour for our farming sector?

Robert Jenrick: I am not aware of any such disagreement.

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): According to Home Office figures, the 116 asylum seekers who arrived in Warrington last week can expect to spend about 400 days waiting for their cases to be dealt with. What steps is my right hon. Friend taking to speed up the process so that those who do not meet the test for asylum can be returned to the safe countries from which they came?

Robert Jenrick: My hon. Friend raises an important point. Productivity in the Home Office fell very sharply during the covid period and has yet to recover in its entirety. That is wrong and we need to change it. We need to ensure that caseworkers review and decide on cases at least at the same speed as they did a couple of years ago. A pilot in Leeds on how to do that has more than doubled the productivity of caseworkers. We want to get that still higher and roll it out across the country. The Home Secretary and I will say more shortly.

Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian) (Alba): As legislation rightly progresses to address the shameful sacking of UK seafarers by P&O, another injustice is arising through the Home Office's actions. The extension of the offshore wind workers immigration rules concession 2017 means that UK seafarers are being replaced by cheap Filipino crew. That is happening 15 km from the coast of Fife in an offshore wind field operated by the state companies of France and Ireland. The contracts have largely gone abroad and the jobs are now going south. Given that this is an urgent question about migration, why is the Minister allowing that to happen? The UK crew who require that employment and have been working hard are now being replaced by workers providing cheap labour, who, frankly, are being exploited and brought in by unsavoury contractors.

Robert Jenrick: We are not allowing that to happen. The Nationality and Borders Act 2022 led to a short extension in the practice until April 2023, at which point it comes to a close. Measures relating to the valid criticisms of the hon. Gentleman will be put into effect shortly.

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): We all agree that putting asylum seekers in hotels is not really a great policy, so we need to process their applications as quickly as possible. Is it possible for each hotel to be given a timeframe for the processing of applications? That would give confidence to the local community that the hotel will be returned to its normal activity sooner rather than later. It might also incentivise Home Office staff to improve their productivity.

Robert Jenrick: I will take that suggestion back to the Home Office. Our objective is to ensure that we process claims as quickly as possible; a great deal of work is now going on in the Home Office to achieve that and to

bring productivity back to where it should always have been, frankly. We want to bring use of the hotels to a close as quickly as possible. We have already set out some of the steps we will take to achieve that, such as considering larger sites and dispersing individuals in local authority accommodation and the private rented sector elsewhere in the country. The real task, however, is to prevent people from crossing the channel in the first place. We cannot build our way out of the issue; we have to reduce the numbers making the crossings.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): York wants to do all it can to support people seeking asylum, but as a result of providing initial accommodation as opposed to contingency accommodation, it is not receiving the funding that it vitally needs. When will the Government provide parity in the funding that local authorities need to support people who are seeking asylum? When will the Government bring forward a homes for refugees scheme so we can ensure that people are settled in our community and are getting the support they need from families?

Robert Jenrick: I will happily speak to the hon. Lady separately about the specific concerns of City of York Council. The hotel accommodation is fully funded by the Home Office, but I appreciate that there are knock-on costs for local authorities. I met London Councils earlier today; if not for this urgent question, I would have been meeting representatives of councils across the country to hear their concerns and see how we can improve the situation.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): On addressing the illegal crossings, the Minister said that the new initiative would cost about £72 million. In 2019, when I was on the Select Committee on Home Affairs, we were told that the joint co-ordination centre with France would help to address individuals illegally crossing. Did that system work? How much did it cost? How will the new system work? My constituents in Kent are at the forefront of the illegal crossings. The Government consistently tell us that they will take tough, firm, decisive action, but instead the numbers have increased. How will the new system work better than the previous system?

Robert Jenrick: I do not want to overstate the value of the agreement, but it is an important step forward and might presage further agreements with France in the months and years to come. It contains at least two important steps. First, there will be a 40% increase in French personnel on the beaches of northern France intercepting crafts about to enter the water and making arrests. French officers on the beaches currently intercept about 40% of craft, so increasing personnel by 40% will lead to a significant improvement. Secondly, the joint centre that we will establish with our French counterparts will ensure that the very sophisticated intelligence that the British security services are now drawing up on what is happening in northern France can be delivered to their counterparts in real time.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Diolch yn fawr iawn, Llefarydd. The Home Office is spending millions on the Rwanda scheme, on the new border scheme with France and on hotel bills, but I am told by

a council with a hotel in its area that it has yet to receive any money from the Home Office. Serious concerns have been expressed by the Children's Commissioner for Wales about the welfare of migrant children in hotels. How is the Home Office working with the Welsh Government, Welsh local authorities and Welsh health trusts to ensure that services are fully funded? How is the welfare of migrant children in Wales being monitored?

Robert Jenrick: If it were not for this urgent question, I would have been meeting representatives from Welsh local authorities, including the Welsh Local Government Association. I will reschedule that meeting as soon as possible; one of its aims is to ensure that we have the best possible engagement with local authorities and support them with the broader needs of individuals, including health and education.

Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con): Senior police officers in my constituency tell me that the majority of the serious organised crime and the drugs trade in Blackpool is now orchestrated by Albanian gangs. Does the Minister recognise that some of those who cross in small boats and subsequently abscond when they arrive in this country are playing a part in fuelling a crime epidemic in towns such as Blackpool?

Robert Jenrick: The evidence presented to us by security services such as the National Crime Agency shows a significant and concerning link between Albanian migrants coming to the UK and criminality. My hon. Friend and others have raised the issues with me anecdotally. We screen all migrants when they arrive illegally at Dover, and we have counter-terrorism officers and others there to ensure that we catch as many individuals as possible, but I am afraid that there is a serious problem. That is why we need to take the most robust action possible on economic migrants from Albania and remove them as swiftly as possible.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind): Diolch, Mr Speaker. Will the Minister inform the House whether the British Government have found an airline willing to facilitate their Rwanda policy? Privilege Style has joined Titan Airways and AirTanker in stating that it will not participate in deportation flights. Is it not the reality that commercial operators are turning their back on the Government's immoral policy?

Robert Jenrick: I do not believe that the Rwanda policy is immoral. I do not think that there is anything ethical about allowing individuals to cross the channel illegally, risking their lives and those of their children. We want to create a system that is suffused with deterrents so that people do not make the crossing in the first place and so that if they want to claim asylum, they do so in the first safe country that they enter. France, of course, is a perfect choice.

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): When our own citizens, never mind visitors, come to this country, they dutifully form a queue and present their passport at border control. Does the Minister agree that it makes a complete and utter mockery of our border control systems when people arrive illegally, thereby committing a crime, and are then put up in hotels across the country, where they are fed and watered and do not

have to pay energy bills? My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (Andy Carter) spoke about cases going on for 400 days; I know of others that have gone on for years and years. When will we implement the Rwanda plan? When will we push back? When will we return people to France directly? Deterrence will be the main thing that stops them crossing in the first place.

Robert Jenrick: I totally agree. Deterrence must be the test to which we hold all aspects of our immigration policy. We will implement the Rwanda plan as soon as it has passed through the courts, and I think it will make a significant impact on deterring people from making this dangerous crossing.

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend share my grave concerns about the radio chatter recorded just this week by one of my constituents? It records a high level of co-operation between the French navy and UK Border Force as the French navy escorts migrants through French waters to be picked up on our side of the median line. The new French deal is trying to stop beach landings. Welcome as that deal is, does it include a requirement for the French navy to stop and pick up migrant dinghies while they are still in French waters?

Robert Jenrick: We do not support the chaperoning of crafts to the median line to be picked up by British vessels and brought to Ramsgate, Dover or other British ports. Ultimately, that is counterproductive: it creates yet another pull factor to the UK. These are exactly the things that closer co-operation with France should enable us to resolve.

Jane Hunt (Loughborough) (Con): EU nations are safe. Does my right hon. Friend agree that eligible asylum seekers should claim asylum in the first safe country where they arrive and put their first foot down on safe soil? When will we be able to spend Home Office funding on fighting crime and supporting our police, rather than on dealing with illegal trafficking into this country?

Robert Jenrick: If there are further legislative changes that we need to make, my hon. Friend can be assured that we will make them; I will be grateful for her support. The Home Secretary and I are looking at the most robust possible measures to tackle the issue.

Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con): Peterborough is a caring city that supports more asylum seekers than any other town or city in the east of England. In the past week, two hotels have been stood up to accommodate single men who have crossed the channel in small boats. One in particular, the Great Northern Hotel, is most inappropriate. Will the Minister outline the criteria by which the Home Office will award longer-term contracts for hotel accommodation? Will he listen to me, my local council, the local police, local health support services and local refugee charities about why the Great Northern Hotel in particular is so inappropriate?

Robert Jenrick: I know that, like many other Members on both sides of the House, my hon. Friend has been campaigning vociferously on this issue and is deeply concerned about it. We want to ensure that we can move

[Robert Jenrick]

as quickly as possible—as quickly as is legally possible—to a system whereby we apply sensible, common-sense criteria. That includes ensuring that prominent business hotels such as the Great Northern are not chosen to house asylum seekers, and that instead we choose hotels that provide decent, value-for-money accommodation in appropriate places.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): As if the acquisition of the Best Western Buckingham Hotel, costing hotel staff their jobs and putting unacceptable pressure on local services, were not bad enough, Buckinghamshire Council learned at third hand from a London borough just this morning that an asylum seeker who is under investigation for a very serious offence was transferred to the asylum hotel in Buckingham by the Metropolitan Police but was not escorted into the premises, and has since gone missing. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that process is wholly unacceptable, as were the lines of communication which meant that my local council learned the facts from a London borough rather than from the Home Office or the police, and will he give a commitment that everything possible is being done to apprehend that individual and ensure that until the investigation has been completed the individual is in secure accommodation?

Robert Jenrick: That does sound like a very concerning incident. My hon. Friend has my assurance that I will raise it with the Home Office and, indeed, the police, and will report back to him.

Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con): On 23 September, when I was crossing the channel—quite legally—I spotted the French warship *Athos* behaving very strangely. I have here a screenshot of the warship, which I took on a navigational device. It was circling a small open boat full of people.

Craig Mackinlay: Escorting it.

Giles Watling: The warship made no attempt to pick those people up, as it should have. As a yachtsman, I can tell the House that they were in danger and should have been taken off the boat, but the warship was, as my hon. Friend says, escorting that boat to our shores.

I am pleased with the deal that the Home Secretary made, and it is, as my right hon. Friend said, a good first step, but in my view it does not go far enough. Should we not push to get British boots on the ground and on the beaches alongside their French counterparts, in joint operations, to keep people on the shores of France, or on the shores of the continent?

Robert Jenrick: My hon. Friend has made an important point. Of course we would like to have an effective returns agreement with France, and we would like to have British officers supporting their French counterparts in northern France. Those issues remain for discussion with France, but it is an important first step that we now have our officers working with their French counterparts in the control centre so that the very sophisticated intelligence that we are now gathering is being shared in real time and acted upon by the French.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Yesterday the National Crime Agency confirmed that Albanian organised crime gangs are ferrying thousands of young men to enable them to enter the country illegally so that they can set up, take over and run cannabis farms across the country. On arrival they claim asylum, and the Home Office then transports this criminality to communities up and down the country to infiltrate the local crime scene.

Once such community is Kettering, where there is a disgraceful proposal to house potentially up to 150 Albanian single males in a 50-room hotel with no kitchen facilities, slap bang in the middle of the town centre. This is the biggest night-time economy in north Northamptonshire, and it is near a family park. These young men will be milling around getting into all sorts of trouble. I cannot think of a worse location for an asylum hostel. Will the Minister meet me as a matter of urgency so I can explain to him why the proposal should not go ahead? From where I am sitting, at this present time, His Majesty's Government is neither protecting our shores nor protecting my local community from an increase in imported crime.

Robert Jenrick: My hon. Friend has raised important concerns, and I should be more than happy to meet him. He and I have already spoken, but a formal meeting would be an obvious next step.

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): Communities such as Ilfracombe, which is on my patch, are dependent on the tourism economy. What steps is the Home Office taking to support local tourism economies which are being damaged every single day? These hotels are not welcoming their normal visitors. What more will be done to expedite the return of tourist hotels to their communities?

Robert Jenrick: We want to ensure that we exit the hotels as quickly as possible, and wherever we can we will do that in a prioritised fashion, so that when hotels are particularly unsuitable and particular harms are being done to local economies—including tourist hotspots—they should be at the top of the list as we exit these hotels and move to a more sustainable future.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): My constituents are angry and frustrated about the present situation, and are genuinely concerned about the possibility that a local hotel might suddenly be found to accommodate asylum seekers. However, I also see the other side of the coin in my role as the Prime Minister's trade envoy to the western Balkans. I meet many Albanians who are here legally and are working in our health service and other public services, but who are being targeted by unruly elements in our society, so there are losers on all sides. Neither the Albanians nor my constituents can understand why the Government cannot get to grips with the situation and process the applications in a seemly manner and on time. What additional resources are being put into ensuring that that happens?

Robert Jenrick: We have put further staff into the processing centres, and there will shortly be 1,500 decision makers working through the claims. As I have said in answer to earlier questions, we are determined to ensure that we return to sensible levels of productivity so that

we can bust the backlog. However, that is not the sole problem here. Ensuring swift approvals of applications will only create a further pull factor, so we have to take other action as well.

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): Along with a number of colleagues, I have studied the Australian approach to dealing with illegal immigration. It is often derided by those on the left who say that it was not successful, but it was successful. My colleagues and I met a number of officials to see what was being done. That is why we welcome the Rwanda scheme. Will my right hon. Friend give us some sense of the timescale for the scheme, and also reassure us that he is engaging with Australian officials? The Australians had a huge problem of illegal immigration, but they embraced offshore processing and no longer have a huge problem. It is very clear what works and what does not.

Robert Jenrick: We are determined to bring the Rwanda proposals into force as soon as possible. Unfortunately, the matter is currently being heard by the British courts, but we are optimistic that our case will be successful, and once it is, we will of course bring those proposals into effect as quickly as we can for all the reasons that my hon. Friend has given, to ensure that there is a proper deterrence factor for those making an illegal crossing.

I suspect that that was the last question, Mr Speaker, so may I thank you for the work that we have done together? I know that you too have been very concerned about hotel accommodation in Chorley. My officials are in conversation with your local authority, and hopefully we can improve the position as soon as possible.

Iran

1.28 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Foreign Secretary to update the House on the current situation in Iran and the treatment of protesters.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (David Rutley): The news on Sunday that the Iranian regime had sentenced a protester to death was tragic. It is an act that the UK Government utterly condemn, in the strongest possible terms. Sadly, this is yet another act of desperation on the part of a regime that clearly cares more about its own survival than about the human rights of its own citizens. This is not the first time we have seen the Iranian regime use barbaric methods to clamp down on those standing up for basic freedoms. Following the 2019 fuel protests, more than 300 people were tragically killed.

The latest violence levelled at protesters has been utterly appalling. We have seen over 14,000 people detained so far, and over 300 deaths, of which 43 were children. The UK opposes the death penalty in all circumstances, but it is all the more abhorrent when those sentenced are being arrested for standing up for their rights. My fear—which I am sure my hon. Friend shares—is that the frequency of these death sentences is only likely to increase as the regime processes the thousands of arrests that have been made during the protests. The Iranian judicial system is notorious for its lack of transparency and process, and this barbarism is just one of many threatening and intimidating techniques that the regime has rolled out in response to the protests.

The repeated targeting of journalists and systematic constraining of media freedom, including restricting internet use, in Iran, which I know is important to the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous), is yet another sign of the regime's weakness in the face of grassroots protesters. These threats have extended to journalists residing in the United Kingdom, and on Friday the Foreign Secretary summoned Iran's most senior representative in the UK to the Foreign Office to make it clear that this would not be tolerated and that the UK would always stand up to threats from other countries.

On Monday we announced a second round of human rights sanctions against 24 Iranian security officials for their part in the violent crackdown on protesters. That is on top of the sanctions we introduced last month on the morality police and seven other individuals, and we continue to keep our sanctions list under review. The Government are also driving efforts in multilateral forums to hold Iran to account. We firmly support a special session of the Human Rights Council that will press to mandate a UN investigation into the protests. We are working closely with the US and other international partners to remove Iran from the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

What we are seeing in Iran is a grassroots movement from the people of Iran, who are showing outstanding bravery in the face of a brutal crackdown. Iran needs to stop trying to blame this on everyone but itself, take responsibility for its actions and instigate real change. That is what the Iranian people have been bravely calling for and it is what they rightly deserve.

Bob Blackman: I thank Mr Speaker for granting this urgent question, and I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for presiding over it. I thank the Under-Secretary for his response.

The House will be aware that, since the murder of Mahsa Amini, there have been nationwide protests in Iran over the past six to seven weeks. Contrary to the reports that the Minister mentioned, the reports I have are that more than 60,000 people have been arrested. These are men, women and children just protesting about the murder of one young lady. The individuals who have been arrested have been tortured, they have been denied legal representation, they have been denied medication and in most cases they have been denied bail as well. When bail was first introduced, huge sums were demanded from families who simply did not have the money. We should remember that the President of Iran, President Raisi, was responsible as the prosecutor in Iran for 30,000 executions of political prisoners in 1988, so the direction from the top is very clear. As my hon. Friend has mentioned, journalists in the UK have been threatened, and indeed the Foreign Secretary called in the *chargé d'affaires* on Friday about those threats. We are also aware that sentencing and executions are beginning in Iran, and that many thousands of people may end up being executed.

I have a series of questions for my hon. Friend the Minister. What representations have been made to Iran directly on the treatment of the protesters? What action has been taken at the United Nations to remove Iran from positions of responsibility? He has mentioned one position but there are many others that Iran shares. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is directly implicated in the torture of individuals in Iran. What more do we have to see before the IRGC in its entirety becomes a proscribed organisation in this country? President Macron has made it clear that progress on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action negotiations is impossible during these events in Iran, so does my hon. Friend agree that making any progress on the so-called nuclear deal with Iran is impossible in these circumstances?

Finally, will my hon. Friend join me in wishing the England team every success in beating Iran on Monday?

David Rutley: I thank my hon. Friend for his insightful comments, as always, on this vital issue. I join him in wishing every success to the home nations—both England and Wales, of course—in all their matches. We always want to keep sport and foreign policy separate, because our concerns are not with the Iranian people, whom we absolutely support. Our concerns are with the Iranian regime, which my hon. Friend and many others have consistently and rightly called out.

My hon. Friend has made a number of important points. I reiterate that we are utterly appalled by the detention of what we calculate to be about 14,000 people. He has come up with a much bigger number, but whichever number it is, they are most often held without due process, and that is completely wrong when they are really just protesting courageously for basic human rights. He talked about the freedom of journalists. The Foreign Secretary has rightly made sure that the Iranian *chargé d'affaires* understood that we would not tolerate threats to journalists based in the UK, but we are also calling out and condemning the persecution of BBC Persian staff and will continue to do so.

My hon. Friend made an important point about where things stand with the JCPOA. Quite understandably the situation that we find ourselves in now, following Iran's recent actions, has made progress even more difficult, but I can assure him that we are actively considering next steps with our international partners. He also asked about the IRGC. He is a dog on a bone with this subject, and I know that it means so much to him. As I have explained to him before in the Chamber, we are very concerned about the IRGC's destabilising activity. The list of proscribed organisations is kept under constant review, but we do not routinely comment on whether an organisation is or is not under consideration for proscription.

I think the last point my hon. Friend raised was about the United Nations. As I said earlier, we are pressing for support for a special session of the UN Human Rights Council and for a UN investigation. I know from Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office oral questions that there is concern about Iran's presence on the UN Commission on the Status of Women, and we have joined the US to forcefully seek for it to be removed from that. I hope that he and all hon. Members understand that we are absolutely committed to the task of calling out these acts and taking the required action at this stage.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I call the shadow Minister.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) for bringing forward this urgent question. Iranians have been protesting in almost every town and city for several months, and these protests, led by women and girls, are demanding in a loud and clear voice the end to brutal repression under the Islamic Republic. Iranians are calling for human rights, for an end to state violence and for the right to live free from the Islamic Republic's diktats on what women should wear and how they choose to live their lives.

This movement is going from strength to strength, but the regime's crackdown has been brutal. More than 15,000 people have been detained, and 227 Iranian parliamentarians have supported calls for the detainees to face the harshest punishment—the death penalty—with only 63 voting against. Two brave protesters have now been sentenced to death, and human rights organisations have grave concerns about the fate of many more. The UK must stand unequivocally against the death penalty, which is a gross abuse of human rights. The vote by the Iranian Parliament represents an escalation in the brutality of the response to these protests. At home, the Met police have warned about threats—described as presenting an imminent, credible risk to life—against British Iranian journalists. The UK must act to ensure the safety of those journalists, whose work is vital to the success of protesters in Iran.

Will the Minister please tell the House what further sanctions will now be put in place on those linked to the regime, in response to this escalation? Can he tell me what steps the Government are taking to protect journalists and UK nationals who are critical of the regime? I acknowledge the steps being taken with the UN, but what other diplomatic steps are the Government taking to garner international opposition to the violence and human rights attacks by the Iranian regime on its own citizens?

David Rutley: As always, the hon. Gentleman asks thoughtful, thorough and relevant questions. He says these protests are grassroots in nature, which is why it is so important that Iran does not try to confuse them with international action. These are grassroots protests, which is why we stand by the Iranian people.

We absolutely condemn the use of the death penalty, particularly in these circumstances, and we continue to call it out in our interactions with the Iranian regime. We have taken steps to seek protection for journalists and for those on the ground in Iran with BBC Persian. Our sanctions are under constant review. As I said, we took further steps on Monday against 24 officials in the light of these horrific repressive activities by the Iranian regime, and it will be kept under constant review. We are working with international partners at the UN on the basis I have already talked about. We will work to broaden those coalitions in driving for action.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): We are seeing further savage behaviour from a toxic regime against its own people, and the sparse coverage in our own media is a cause of disquiet at a time when politicians, the media and civic society should be united in giving moral support to the Iranian people as they seek basic human rights.

These abuses are not only happening in Iran. We know Iran has been sending drones to Russia, to oppress the people of Ukraine. We know Iran Air was used to transport those drones from Tehran to Russia. Why, as I have asked before, is Iran Air, an organ of the Iranian state, still operating daily flights out of Heathrow rather than being banned?

David Rutley: My right hon. Friend is a strong advocate on these matters, and I reassure him that we have taken urgent steps in response to Iranian activity in support of Russia's military action in Ukraine. We have already put sanctions in place. I will take away his point about airlines and speak to Lord Ahmad, who covers this policy area. I will also raise it with the Foreign Secretary.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I call the SNP spokesman.

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP): I warmly commend the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) for securing this urgent question. He is a long-standing advocate on these issues. I also commend the Minister for his measured response to an almost impossible situation.

The SNP, along with other colleagues, stands foursquare with the brave protesters of Iran, led by women and girls, against an oppressive, despotic regime. We have already seen 500 or so people killed, with two people, that we know of, being formally executed and thousands, if not tens of thousands, being at risk of execution in Iran's jails, which are known for their opacity and lack of judicial standards.

The SNP supports the Minister in supporting the protesters, but we have three concrete questions. First, surely now is not the time to cut BBC World Service funding. It is the time to build up that funding. I appreciate that we will have a statement tomorrow, but, surely, is this not an open-and-shut case?

Secondly, on asylum rules, there is only so much we can do against the Iranian regime, but will the UK offer a safe haven to those fleeing damage and persecution? Thirdly, I always urge dialogue, however difficult, but I find it increasingly difficult to promote dialogue on the JCPOA with this regime at this time. Does the Minister think it is finished? If so, with what will we replace it?

David Rutley: We are grateful for the cross-party support on these issues, which sends a very clear message from across the United Kingdom.

BBC World Service is obviously going to be important. It has an independent editorial and operational approach, but we are actively supporting it by funding its work on disinformation and so on. All I will say is that there has been some misreporting about its radio content, as most people are moving to digital. There is a digital-first process, as most people who listen to BBC Persian do so via television or online. We are working on that dimension.

The hon. Gentleman also spoke about sanctions, which we continue to monitor and push forward. I will gladly meet him after this urgent question to discuss the other issues.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): There are reports that the Iranian authorities are using live ammunition to shoot at teenage girls. There are stories of young women being arrested, forced into marriage and raped. These children just want the most basic of rights, so it is good to hear from the Minister that the UK is working to remove Iran from the UN Commission on the Status of Women. Can he categorically confirm to the women and girls of Iran who may be listening that we will always stand on their side against oppression and that we will not stop until we have used every single tool in our diplomatic and sanctions toolbox?

David Rutley: My right hon. Friend is a terrific advocate for women, both in her amazing work at the FCDO and outside. The sad death of Mahsa Amini is a shocking reminder of the repression faced by women in Iran. We stand four-square with them. I am the father of two daughters, and we have to be ever-mindful of the rights of women, particularly in countries that have a brutal regime such as Iran's. We will continue to stand four-square with them.

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab): Sanctions are needed against those who commit abuses in Iran. Can the Minister explain what his Government are doing to ensure that the burden of sanctions does not fall on ordinary, innocent Iranians?

David Rutley: That is a good question. Our focus is on targeting sanctions against those who perpetrate the most heinous acts, but the sanctions are under constant review.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): I welcome my hon. Friend's strong statement of British values towards Iran and his strong statement of support for the brave women and girls who are protesting for their fundamental human rights. Our values and rights ought to dictate our policy. Will he comment on the slightly more difficult contrast with countries such as Egypt? Egypt has 60,000 political prisoners, including Alaa Abd el-Fattah, a

[Crispin Blunt]

British-Egyptian citizen about whom the Prime Minister made representations at the recent summit. We still do not have consular access to him.

Will my hon. Friend also comment on our policy towards Israel and the composition of its new Government? That must give very grave cause for concern, as must the fact that Israel has now been found guilty by the world's three most distinguished human rights organisations of running an apartheid policy, and of being in gross violation of the fourth Geneva convention.

David Rutley: I reassure my hon. Friend that human rights are at the forefront of our conversations, dialogue and diplomatic activity, whether with Iran, Egypt—we have already talked about the case of Mr Fattah—or Israel. It is at the forefront of our work, particularly in the middle east.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) for securing this urgent question, and I add the Liberal Democrats' voice to the solidarity with the brave Iranian people, who deserve so much better.

May I press the Minister on giving safe haven to some of these brave protesters? They are patriots, and they clearly want their country to be a better place, but their being locked up and executed is not the way to ensure Iran's future stability. Surely it would be better to offer them temporary safe haven in this country, so they can go back and rebuild. What consideration has he given to a resettlement scheme?

David Rutley: There may well be routes available for these individuals, and I will certainly bring it to Lord Ahmad's attention.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): It has been clear for many years that Iran is a rogue state, presided over by gangsters posing as clerics and seeking to maintain control through the actions of thugs posing as police officers and militia. It is clear that the regime is terrified of losing that control, which is why it is now resorting to executing its own citizens for confected crimes. Does my hon. Friend agree that now is the time for the United Kingdom to position itself on the right side of history by declaring unequivocally that it supports the demands of the brave people of Iran for regime change in that country? I understand that he will not comment on what proscription the Government may be considering, but will he take it from me that very many hon. Members would be delighted if they woke up tomorrow morning to discover that the IRGC had been proscribed today?

David Rutley: I understand the points that my right hon. Friend makes. The destabilising activity of the IRGC, be it in Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon or Syria, is very concerning, in the region and beyond. We are constantly keeping that proscription under review but, as he knows, I cannot comment at this stage.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): What measures are the Government taking to curb the activities of agents of the regime attempting to operate in this

country and elsewhere in Europe? In particular, what actions are being taken to ensure that Iranians with diplomatic status in this country are genuine diplomats?

David Rutley: Obviously, I cannot comment on the detail of these things, but I am sitting next to one of my esteemed colleagues at the Ministry of Defence, the Minister for Armed Forces, and all these issues are constantly monitored.

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): Lots of grim things are happening in the world, but many of us will be particularly troubled and disturbed by what has been happening in Iran recently. My heart goes out to everyone who is protesting, particularly the women and girls. I support the views expressed by many of my colleagues today, because I think that the IRGC should be listed as a terrorist organisation, but I would like to ask the Minister about the Christian community in Iran. Last Friday, I met a Christian who fled Iran and is now a key part of the local church in Ipswich. What steps are the Government taking to support the Christian community in Iran and the many people fleeing persecution?

David Rutley: That is a good question, and on a subject that I feel strongly about too—I note that the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) is in his place and he feels strongly about these issues too. We raise those issues about Christians and about other minorities in Iran, as we absolutely need to do.

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): We know that we have Iranian nationals here in the UK who have clear links to the regime. We also know that Iranian and, in particular, Iranian-heritage journalists based here in the UK have been subjected to incredibly serious harassment and threats. A recent report from MI5 said that up to 10 assassination attempts have been made on British residents this year. What is the Minister doing to work with his colleagues across Government to ensure that those speaking out against the regime who are based here in the UK are safe, and that those who are propping up the regime and living in the UK know that that is utterly unacceptable?

David Rutley: As I have said previously, in response to a very serious issue that has been raised, the Foreign Secretary asked the chargé d'affaires to come to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, where it was made clear to them, in no uncertain terms, that we do not allow or condone any of these intimidatory activities. We are constantly monitoring that situation and we will call that activity out.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): Iran's Human Rights Activists News Agency has reported that protestors have already been murdered and buried in unmarked graves. This is similar to activities that happened in 1988, when 30,000 people were killed—President Raisi was also involved with the organisation of that. My hon. Friend will know, as he has already listed these things, that the IRGC will orchestrate such behaviours—it did so for the bomb plot that targeted myself and my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East. We do not want the Minister to comment on proscription, we simply want him, in the face of overwhelming evidence, to proscribe the IRGC in its entirety.

David Rutley: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that issue and I completely understand, given the circumstances he and other colleagues found themselves in, why it is particularly poignant for them. However, as he says, it also has a much wider reach. I note that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is in his place. He is very aware of these issues and we have had conversations about them, along with Lord Ahmad.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): Women protestors in Iran are bravely protesting for their fundamental freedom to live their lives as they choose. The UK has a responsibility to support them. Will the Minister explain how the UK intends to do that?

David Rutley: As others have said, it is vital that we support these brave Iranian people; it is a grassroots-led protest movement. As I have highlighted, we have made sure that we are calling out this activity at every opportunity, we have put sanctions in place and we are undertaking multilateral activities, one of which, importantly, is working with the United States to remove Iran from the UN Commission on the Status of Women. We have already talked about that.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): I join my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East and other right hon. and hon. Members in reiterating my call that the Government should proscribe the IRGC. It is impossible to separate the Iranian regime's violent repression of its own civilian population from its broader ambitions for regional dominance and to develop a nuclear weapon. Today, the International Atomic Energy Agency board of governors convenes for an important meeting to discuss Iran's many nuclear transgressions. Will the Minister assure me that the UK will be leading efforts to call for a motion of censure in the light of Iran's flagrant breaches of the imploding joint comprehensive plan of action nuclear agreement?

David Rutley: That is another important point. There are many dimensions to what is going on in Iran, but it is clear that Iran's latest actions have made progress on tackling the Iranians' nuclear activity much more difficult. As I have said, we are considering the next steps with our international partners, but it is vital that Iran co-operates with the IAEA.

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): More than 14,000 protestors have been arrested in Iran since September and now there is real concern that many of these brave women—journalists, activists, lawyers and educators—are soon to be executed by the regime. I am grateful to the Minister for his answers to the questions today, but perhaps he could give an answer as to how the UK Government are going to work with international partners to ensure the safety of these women and ensure that they do not face the death sentence.

David Rutley: As I have said, it is vital to make sure we call this out. The fact is that we have seen common cause and a common voice across the Chamber today in condemning these actions—not just the repression of these protests, but the death sentences that have been meted out. We will continue to do that, particularly in multilateral forums, as I have highlighted. We need to keep putting the pressure on this brutal regime.

Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con): I know that the Minister has been pressed on these issues already today, but it is important that he hears the strength of feeling across this House. As the violent enforcer of the supreme leader of Iran, the IRGC must be held accountable for its ongoing crimes against the Iranian people. As the principal financier and arms supplier of terror groups across the middle east, it is also responsible for targeting innocent civilians from Iraq and Israel through to Yemen and the United Arab Emirates, and it has been linked to the deaths of more than 100 British military personnel. Does the Minister share my concerns, and those of others from across this House, that the IRGC is likely undertaking activities in the UK? Does he agree that the IRGC must be proscribed?

David Rutley: I completely understand why my hon. Friend has added his voice to those with concerns about the IRGC's activities. We are concerned too, as its activities in country and in the region are incredibly destabilising. I cannot add anything to what I have said about proscription, but we monitor the IRGC's activities and we will call it out and confront it.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister is right when he says that there is universal condemnation across this House, where we have today talked powerfully about human rights abuses and the persecution of the people of Iran, particularly the women fighting for their most basic freedoms. Does he agree that if we are to learn the lessons from our suffragette forebears about deeds not words, government needs to join up? Some 11,000 Iranians are making an application for asylum in the UK and only 98 such applications were granted last year. Iranians are the third largest group of people in the channel-crossing boats. In the previous urgent question today, people felt that the very same people whose persecution we are now talking about should be penalised. What discussions has the Minister had already with his Home Office counterparts about providing sanctuary to those people, who we recognise are being persecuted and do not wish to leave languishing in hotels?

David Rutley: As I have said, there are routes available. I will make sure that the hon. Lady's points are raised with Lord Ahmad, who covers this policy area. Her words will also not be lost with the Foreign Secretary here.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Many constituents have contacted me in support of the brave women and girls and their allies protesting in Iran, and that was before the latest despicable attack on them. The death penalty is being given to who claim basic human rights. Next weekend, I, like many women, will be marching to reclaim the night. Such a protest attracting the death penalty would oppress and silence us all. What will the Minister do to ensure that every protest, every arrest, every act of torture and every threat of death receives global attention, and how does slashing the BBC Persian radio service contribute to that?

David Rutley: I have already responded to the point about BBC Persian. We recognise the bravery of the people the hon. Lady mentions, and we have put sanctions in place to call people out. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady talks about amplifying that message. One key step

[David Rutley]

that we are taking is working to remove Iran from the UN Commission on the Status of Women. That is a positive step forward in this context.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): In the light of the unacceptable response to protests by the Iranian authorities, what are Ministers doing to ensure that Iran is removed from the UN Commission on the Status of Women, as women have borne the brunt of many of the abuses?

David Rutley: As I have said, we are working with our international partners, and we are working very closely with the United States on that specific point. The hon. Lady is right: it makes a difference, and we will push that matter forward.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister very much for his response to the questions and for his desire and determination to assist the protesters in their quest for democracy in Iran.

Iranian protesters are calling for a non-religious state, where the rights of women and religious minorities are protected—an issue on which both the Minister and I agree. A revolutionary court in Tehran has started sentencing protesters to death on charges that allegedly include “enmity against God” and “corruption on earth”. Those charges have a chilling effect on protesters and religious minorities and have led to fears of large-scale executions in Iran in the coming weeks. Does the Minister agree that, as a country, we must pursue every available measure to support Iranians asserting their fundamental human rights and sanction officials responsible for these violent crackdowns?

David Rutley: The hon. Gentleman always makes these points with conviction and real passion. I share his views. We want to support the Iranian people—women, girls and those of religious minorities—in their struggle. We will take every possible step forward that we can, and, with cross-party support here, we will have extra weight and clout in making those calls for action.

Missile Incident in Poland

2.3 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (James Cleverly): With your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will make a statement about the missile strike in Poland overnight.

At approximately 7 pm local time last night, there were missile explosions in a village in eastern Poland, approximately four miles from the border with Ukraine, killing two civilians and wounding four, during an extended Russian bombardment of Ukrainian territory.

As soon as I received the report, I contacted my Polish counterpart to express the sympathy and solidarity of the United Kingdom—I am sure the whole House will share that sentiment—and to offer our practical support. I then spoke to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in a trilateral call with my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary, while the Prime Minister was attending the G20 summit in Indonesia.

The Prime Minister immediately called President Duda of Poland to convey the UK's condolences for the tragic loss of civilian life and to assure him of our unwavering support to a steadfast NATO ally. My right hon. Friend then spoke to President Zelensky about the latest situation and also attended an ad hoc meeting of G7 leaders called by President Biden to discuss the evolving situation.

This morning, I spoke to the Polish Foreign Minister and I commended Poland's decisive, determined, but calm and professional response to the situation. It is wise to advise the House that, at this point, the full details of the incident are not complete, but, earlier today, Jens Stoltenberg, the NATO Secretary-General, said there was

“no indication that this was the result of a deliberate attack”.

He added that the incident was

“likely caused by a Ukrainian air defence missile fired to defend Ukrainian territory against Russian cruise missile attacks.”

Poland will lead the investigation to establish exactly what happened, and the UK stands ready to provide any practical or technical assistance. In the meantime, we will not rush to judgment; our response will always be led by the facts.

The House should be in no doubt that the only reason why missiles are flying through European skies and exploding in European villages is Russia's barbaric invasion of Ukraine. Secretary-General Stoltenberg was absolutely right when he said today that what occurred in Poland is “not Ukraine's fault” and that “Russia bears ultimate responsibility”.

Yesterday, Putin launched one of the heaviest attacks since the war began, firing wave upon wave of more than 80 missiles at Ukrainian cities, obliterating the homes of ordinary families, destroying critical national infrastructure and depriving millions of Ukrainians of power and heat just as the winter sets in. This brutal air campaign is Putin's revenge for Ukraine's successes on the battlefield, where Russian forces have been expelled from thousands of square miles of territory. Now he is trying to terrorise the people of Ukraine and break their will by leaving them shivering in cold and darkness. I have no doubt that he will be unsuccessful in that endeavour, but this is why Britain is helping Ukraine to

strengthen its air defences, and we have provided more than 1,000 surface-to-air missiles thus far. I know that the House will be united in our support for Ukraine's right to defend her territory and her people.

On Monday, I signed a memorandum of understanding as part of our £10 million commitment to help Ukraine rebuild its critical energy infrastructure. The tragic incident in Poland last night is ultimately the result of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. That is the only reason why it has happened, and it would not have happened otherwise. That is why the UK and our allies stand in solidarity with Poland, and that is why we are determined to support the people of Ukraine until they prevail and their country is once again free. Madam Deputy Speaker, I commend this statement to the House.

2.7 pm

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): I thank the Foreign Secretary for advance sight of his statement. I am grateful for the direct communications that we had on this matter on Privy Council terms last night.

This was a serious incident that led to a tragic loss of life. I join the whole House in sending condolences to the families of those killed, and I expressed them directly to the Polish ambassador last night.

Poland and NATO allies deserve praise for taking the correct steps to assess this incident carefully and avoid escalation. It is right that we continue to proceed with cool heads to determine exactly what has taken place and work in lockstep with Poland and our NATO allies.

As my right hon. Friend the shadow Defence Secretary and I restated on our visits to NATO headquarters in Brussels last week, Labour's commitment to NATO is unshakeable. We also note, as the Foreign Secretary did, the NATO Secretary-General's words earlier today. He said:

"Russia bears ultimate responsibility as it continues its illegal war against Ukraine."

This incident highlights the sheer recklessness of Putin's war and the ongoing need to guard against miscalculation and deter aggression. Yesterday saw one of the largest barrages of missiles against Ukraine since the war began, cruelly targeting civilian infrastructure as the winter approaches. Ukraine will continue to have our total support and complete solidarity in its brave fight against Russian aggression. It is right that we play our full part in strengthening Ukraine's air defence capacity.

As the world gathered in Bali with an agenda to address common problems, one leader did not show, instead hiding from scrutiny and condemnation. Putin's warmongering is being met with ever greater isolation. On Monday, the UN General Assembly approved a resolution calling for Russia to be held accountable for invading Ukraine, and recognising the need for

"an international mechanism for reparation for damage, loss or injury"

caused by Putin's wrongful acts. Labour stands with the international community in demanding that Russia is held accountable. Her actions are bringing death and destruction in Ukraine, and economic pain for the whole world. The numbers in the latest UN vote are proof that more needs to be done to build and sustain global opposition to Putin's barbaric war. What strategy have the Government put in place to strengthen opposition to the invasion, particularly across the global south?

The result of this war will depend on who has more endurance: Putin's Russia, or Ukraine and its supporters around the world. Labour stands fully committed to work in support of Ukraine until it wins its freedom—that is what must happen.

James Cleverly: I find myself in complete agreement with the shadow Foreign Secretary. It is absolutely right that we stand in solidarity with our allies—our formal allies in NATO, and also the Ukrainian people as they defend themselves. He speaks about endurance; I have spoken in the past about the need for strategic endurance, recognising that we must send the message to not just Vladimir Putin, but every other potential aggressor around the world, that we will defend the UN charter, international humanitarian law and the right of territorial integrity until the job is done. We must maintain that strategic endurance.

The shadow Foreign Secretary is absolutely right to ask about support for the international coalition that has condemned Russia's actions. Some 141 countries voted for the resolution at the UN General Assembly at the start of the conflict, and 143 voted to condemn the illegal annexation of the eastern and southern oblasts in Ukraine. However, that coalition needs to be supported. I and the Ministers and officials within the Department regularly engage with countries in the global south that are worried about food security, fuel security and the availability of fertiliser. We have worked in conjunction with our international allies, particularly Turkey, to ensure that the Black sea grain initiative is supported. We hope that that initiative will be extended, and we are lobbying for that extension to occur so that Vladimir Putin cannot use hunger or the fear of hunger as leverage to support his illegal attempted invasion of Ukraine.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I welcome the Foreign Secretary's remarks about strategic endurance. From our point of view, that must surely involve the continued supply of the munitions that have enabled Ukraine to resist so effectively so far. Can the Foreign Secretary assure the House that he and the Defence Secretary have made appropriate representations to the Chancellor and the Prime Minister that tomorrow, we must not send a signal of weakness in respect of how much we are prepared to invest in defence?

James Cleverly: My right hon. Friend makes an incredibly important point about the need to send an important message to the world, and indeed to our Ukrainian friends, that we are in it for the long haul—that we do have that strategic endurance, and we will support them until the job is done. My right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary and I have discussed this issue on a number of occasions; indeed, we will have high-level representation at the Ramstein donor conference, which is occurring as we speak, to ensure that we listen to the needs of Ukraine, and that both the scale and nature of our support are co-ordinated with Ukraine so that it can defend itself against the evolving threats it sees from Russia.

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP): I also thank the Foreign Secretary for his statement, and commend him for its welcome, measured tone. Speaking for the SNP, I also express our total solidarity with, and condolences to,

[Alyn Smith]

the people of Poland, and commend them for their restraint overnight—I think a lot of us did not get much sleep last night, as we were contemplating what might be the consequences of this incident. If this was a tragic accident, it was a tragic accident, but as the Foreign Secretary rightly says, it is the Ukrainians who are on the frontline, and have been for many months. The responsibility for the fact that rockets are flying at all sits entirely at the door of Vladimir Putin, and the SNP stands four-square as part of the global coalition in Ukraine's defence.

Sadly, the Kremlin's tactics in Syria surely tell us that this is going to continue, if not get worse: as we see land advances by the Ukrainian forces, we will see more indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure by air. As such, what assessment has the Foreign Secretary made of the need for further air support, not just for Ukraine but for neighbouring countries? I appreciate that 1,000 or so missiles have already been given, but what more do we need, and is it now time to be talking about a no-fly zone over Ukraine and neighbouring countries to deter—to the extent we can—further Russian aggression?

James Cleverly: I would also like to put on record my recognition of the fact that right across the House, including from the SNP Benches, we have had a unanimity of voice on the world stage. If Vladimir Putin felt that his aggression in Ukraine could in any way drive wedges between people who are like-minded on these issues, he was wrong. That is true in this House, and it is true on the international stage.

I thank the hon. Member for the points he has made. He has made an incredibly important point about the evolving threat. As I said in my response to my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), it is now clear that as Russia sees failures on the battlefield, it is moving to attacks from the air. We have provided surface-to-air defence missile systems and AMRAAM air-to-air defence missile systems. We will be looking at further air defence donations that can come from the international community and also, importantly, making sure there is integration in the air defence cover that Ukraine is able to provide. We know what Putin intends to do—as I have said, he intends to starve and freeze the Ukrainians into submission—and we have to stand shoulder to shoulder with them in order to prevent him from doing so.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I presume that the Foreign Secretary agrees with me that article 5 of the NATO treaty is just as relevant now as it has ever been—in other words, that an attack against any member of NATO is an attack against all of us—and that we should make it absolutely clear to Russia that that remains the case.

James Cleverly: My right hon. and gallant Friend makes an incredibly important point about the importance of our collective defence. I remind the House that the NATO Secretary-General's assessment is that this was not a deliberate attack, so in this instance, article 5 would not be the most appropriate response. Again, I commend the Polish Government on their swift and decisive, but calm and measured, response to this incident.

I had a conversation this morning with our permanent representative at NATO in Brussels; NATO also acted swiftly and calmly by discussing this incident, and the response will be calibrated to the facts on the ground. However, as I say, my right hon. and gallant Friend is right that our collective defence is a cornerstone of our safety.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): I thank the Foreign Secretary for his statement. We all, obviously and correctly, totally condemn the Russian invasion, the war against Ukraine and the illegal occupation, as we condemn illegal occupations everywhere else. Possibly more than 200,000 people have already died in this conflict, and with the current trajectory, tragically, there are going to be many more deaths of Ukrainians and, indeed, Russian conscripts. There are going to be devastated families all around.

I hear everything that the Foreign Secretary has said, but he did not say anything about the possible role of the United Nations or any other world body in trying to bring about a process that could at least halt this conflict, restore the status quo in terms of land areas, and try to bring about an early end to this war. Otherwise, we are going to have hundreds of thousands more dead as a result of what is, of course, the totally wrong occupation of Ukraine.

James Cleverly: I remind the right hon. Gentleman that calls for halting the war were not emanating from Moscow when the Russians felt that they were on the front foot. They were not calling to halt the war when those tanks were surrounding Kyiv; nor were they calling to halt the war when they thought that President Zelensky's Government would collapse. I find it interesting that calls to halt the war are coming from certain places now that Russia is on the back foot and losing territory in the east and south of Ukraine.

It is important to make the point that ceasing a conflict is not in itself a neutral act. The Ukrainians have been attacked and murdered, their cities damaged, and their critical national infrastructure put beyond use. It is incredibly important that the message is sent—both to President Putin and to other potential aggressors around the world—that those who start conflicts such as this have to be prepared for the consequences of the nation defending itself and its friends around the world helping it to do so.

Ultimately, of course, we want this war to come to an end. We would prefer for it to come to an end quickly, but it has to come to an end on terms that are acceptable to the Ukrainian people, and only the Ukrainian people can decide when that time is.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): May I add my voice to the condolences to the people of Poland? President Duda is a very thoughtful man, and we should all be deeply thankful for his calm and rational approach in recent hours.

Putin is using military missiles to destroy Ukrainian infrastructure. He is doing so because he wants innocent Ukrainians to freeze and starve to death this winter. There can be nothing more evil than that. Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that we and our allies will continue to provide Ukraine with the support that it needs to take down those missiles before they land?

James Cleverly: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right in her assessment of what Vladimir Putin is attempting to do. I remind the House that the rocket attacks we saw overnight were targeting locations deep to the west of Ukraine, hundreds of miles away from the line of contact—specifically, they were targeting critical national infrastructure. At the start of the conflict, it was our anti-tank missiles—the NLAW missile systems—that helped the Ukrainians to defend themselves. Now, they need air defence and energy generation, and we will continue to supply them with what they need until they prevail in this conflict.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): A swift and measured response is absolutely the right call. I thank the Foreign Secretary for the tone of his statement, which was spot on. I am very aware of how, across the House, we have pulled together and, at every moment, spoken with one voice. Through the Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Act 2022 and the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill, we have tried to put in place as many measures as possible to punish Putin and his cronies. One area is largely missing from the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill, however: golden visas.

We have still not seen the Home Office's report on the visa scheme. The Government could this afternoon accept the amendments to the National Security Bill, which would compel them to publish that report within two weeks. Will the Foreign Secretary look at that? We in this House must strain every sinew to hold Putin and his cronies to account.

James Cleverly: I remind the hon. Lady that that scheme is closed and has been for some time. Obviously, visas are a matter for the Home Office rather than the Foreign Office, but I remind her that, in a number of instances, people come to this country because they are fleeing persecution in the countries of their birth. I know that, for a number of British nationals of Russian heritage, that was very much the case.

I am very proud that the UK was one of the first countries to bring in sanctions specifically to target the money people around Vladimir Putin and to choke off the supply of funds that helped him to prosecute this conflict. We will continue to work in conjunction and co-ordination with our international allies to do likewise.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for making it so clear that it is irrelevant whose missile it was and that the state of affairs is the responsibility of the aggressor: Putin's Russia. In that context, can he use this incident to amplify to our allies in Europe, and to some of our colleagues in the Government, that Putin's Russia is not just at war in Ukraine, but at war with us? His hybrid campaign—cyber-attacks, assassinations, sabotage of critical national infrastructure in European countries and, of course, the energy war—is against us. Unless we defeat Russia in the war in Ukraine, it will be a defeat for the west. Therefore, we must galvanise ourselves and put ourselves on the right footing and in the right frame of mind to ensure that the Ukrainian people prevail.

James Cleverly: My hon. Friend makes an incredibly important point about the multiple things that are at stake in this conflict. We have seen military lives lost, civilian lives lost and, sadly, in ground that has been

ceded by the Russian military, what appears to be evidence of widespread and systematic human rights abuses. Those are the things that we are defending against, but in addition, we are defending the UN charter and the concept of adherence to international law. As he rightly said, we in the UK have been the recipients of cyber-attacks and attacks on our homeland that we have attributed to Vladimir Putin and the Russian regime. All those things are at stake all at once. We have to defend ourselves against the full range of threats, and he is absolutely right to highlight that.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Russia must bear the responsibility for all the consequences of its illegal war. It is clear that Putin's strategy is to use energy as a weapon by attacking energy infrastructure in Ukraine and seeking to hold Europe to ransom with spiralling energy costs. I am glad to hear that we are supporting Ukraine in rebuilding its infrastructure. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that we must never again be subject to the whims of fossil-fuel autocrats, and that we instead need clean, secure and homegrown energy?

James Cleverly: The hon. Lady makes an important point. Her words echo those of the Prime Minister and mine on the international stage. What we have seen, through Vladimir Putin's attempt to use energy supply to blackmail countries that are supporting Ukraine in its self-defence, is a warning that we have to wean ourselves off hydrocarbons—particularly those through which we are reliant on autocratic states such as Russia.

That incentivises us to work at renewable energy generation and storage here in the UK, and to work with our international friends and partners to wean the world off hydrocarbons, which is exactly what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I did when we went to Sharm El Sheikh for COP27. It is one of the points that he is discussing with the membership of the G20 in Indonesia at the moment. We have been at the forefront of many of the green energy generation technologies. We are absolutely committed to making sure that we help the Ukrainians to defend themselves in the here and now, and that we all defend each other through a greener and more sustainable energy mix in future.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): In this unfortunate incident, two facts seem to be clear. First, the strategy of the Russians is to hold a military line across the south and the east and to destroy Ukraine's civilian infrastructure; we probably agree on that. I understand fully the great work the Government are doing, which is generally fantastic, and the fact that we are the largest donor in Europe by some distance. However, there is a simple fact that we cannot get around. The Ukrainians have been saying for months that they do not have the air defence equipment to protect the cities and the infrastructure and the water supplies and the electricity and their own troops. Despite the fantastic work that the Secretary of State and his team are doing, the Ukrainians do not have enough air defence kit, and this is becoming critical to the survival of the Ukrainian state and its people's morale in the coming months.

James Cleverly: My hon. and gallant Friend, who has made a career, both in uniform and out, of analysing these things, is absolutely right in his assessment of the immediate tactics that the Russians are endeavouring to

[James Cleverly]

use. By extension, he is also right about the need to help the Ukrainians with their air defence systems. I am assured by my right hon. and gallant Friend the Minister for Armed Forces that exactly that issue will be discussed at Ramstein, at military-to-military level and at Foreign Minister-to-Foreign Minister level. The equipment and the integration of that equipment are key, and will remain an absolute priority for us.

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): I know the whole House agrees that this is a time of great tension and uncertainty, and this incident demonstrates the dangers posed by Putin's warmongering, but it is critical that clear channels of communication remain open on all sides. Will the Foreign Secretary set out what steps the Government have taken to establish contact with his Russian counterparts having learned of the incident in Poland, in order to prevent escalation?

James Cleverly: The hon. Lady will understand that we maintain lines of communication wherever possible and practical. The House will remember my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary updating the House a number of weeks ago on a conversation that he had had with the Russian Government's Defence Minister Shoigu. She and the House will understand why at this stage I am not willing to go into the details of all the lines of communication, but I assure them that we maintain our desire to avoid miscalculation and unnecessary escalation, and to give the opportunity for more sensible decisions to be made in the Kremlin.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Earlier this year, when I and other members of the Foreign Affairs Committee visited Ukraine and Poland, it was clear that in the border area there are significant flows of civilians and efforts to get humanitarian support to them, so yesterday evening's incident is deeply troubling. Regardless of the missile's origin, it is Putin's Russia's fault that the incident occurred. Will my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary assure me that this country will continue to provide the Ukrainians with air defence systems, such as the lightweight multi-role missile produced by Thales here in the UK?

James Cleverly: I can assure my hon. Friend that we are looking at the systems produced in the UK that are used by the British armed forces, but we are also working with our international partners to procure these systems from wherever in the world they are available, because the Ukrainians need them. They need the numbers and they need them now.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): My thoughts and those of my constituents are with all the people killed or injured in the strike and their families. We are grateful for the measured tone of the response from Poland, NATO and the Foreign Secretary. In his annual threat update, the head of MI5 said that the Kremlin is actively attempting to rebuild its espionage network, following the expulsion of spies from Europe at the start of the war. How is the Foreign Secretary working with international allies to prevent this?

James Cleverly: The hon. Lady will understand the long-standing convention that we do not discuss intelligence matters on the Floor of the House. I can none the less assure her that the threats and the risks that the heads of our security and intelligence agencies have put in the public domain are absolutely understood by the UK Government and our allies, and we continue to work very, very closely with our defence and security partners around the world on precisely the issue she highlights.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con): The Prime Minister was right to say at the G20 summit that Putin's casual disregard for human life will ripple around the world for years to come. Can my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary update the House on conversations that the Prime Minister has had with our global allies at the G20 to convince Russia to withdraw from Ukraine?

James Cleverly: I am not able to give a full update because the meetings in Indonesia are still going on, but I spoke with our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister late last night and I can assure my hon. Friend and the House that this is very much in the thoughts of leaders at the G20. Obviously, the conversations at the G20 cannot just be about Russia and Ukraine, but the implications for the global south and for many member countries of the G20 are very much at the forefront of our thinking, particularly for energy security and food supplies and the need to ensure that the hungry people of the world are not made more hungry as Vladimir Putin uses their hunger and their need for energy as leverage in his brutal war of aggression against the Ukrainians.

Gareth Johnson: Does the Foreign Secretary agree that whatever the outcome of the investigation under way into exactly what took place in Poland yesterday, responsibility for the deaths in Poland is 100%—not just mainly, but 100%—Russia's? The Russians are the aggressors; they are the ones who commenced this military action and they are the ones who should be held responsible for those deaths.

James Cleverly: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Ukraine has the right to defend itself against aggression. The Ukrainians enjoy our enduring support as they defend themselves against aggression. The only reason the missile systems are being engaged in the border area between eastern Poland and western Ukraine is Russia's attacks on targets in western Ukraine. This is the fault of Russia; the deaths are the result of Russia's action. It is Vladimir Putin who has blood on his hands because of his illegal invasion of Ukraine.

Angela Richardson (Guildford) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for the world-leading response by this Government to support the Ukrainian people in the face of Putin's barbaric assault on their nation. Will he confirm that we will redouble our efforts to provide vital food and humanitarian aid to the people of Ukraine, and that we will help the Ukrainians with energy equipment and the means to repair the infrastructure to keep the lights on and the heating working this winter?

James Cleverly: My hon. Friend is exactly right. In addition to the military and economic support, we have provided and will continue to provide humanitarian

support to Ukraine. Just yesterday, I signed a memorandum of understanding on support valued at £10 million to help the Ukrainians to rebuild the energy infrastructure being targeted and damaged by Russian attacks, and we will continue to provide that support.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): The Foreign Secretary is absolutely right to be led by the facts, and hopefully those facts will become clearer, given reports that a NATO E-3 Sentry airborne warning and control system was on station at the time. One thing is clear now, however: that Putin's evil regime is targeting the civilian infrastructure in Ukraine. My right hon. Friend has just described the support we are giving to maintain lighting and heating systems. Will he emphasise once again that we are giving that aid so that the brave Ukrainian people have the lighting, the heating and the food they need, especially as winter approaches?

James Cleverly: My hon. and gallant Friend makes the incredibly important point that the Ukrainians are the ones who are defending themselves. It is the Ukrainian people who are putting their lives at risk on the frontline in the conflict against the Russian invasion, and it is the Ukrainian people, right across Ukraine and, indeed, beyond its borders, whose strength, perseverance and incredible bravery is enabling the pushing back of the Russian military out of eastern and southern Ukraine. We must ensure that we help the Ukrainian people to maintain the morale they need to persevere in the defence of their homeland.

Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con): On Friday night, I and a small group of my friends made the 2,000-mile trip to Ukraine. We crossed the Polish border and the Ukrainian border, then entered Lviv to deliver much-needed humanitarian aid to suffering families. That was not the only precious cargo on board, because we took with us, after 222 days of their living with my

family, the mother and little boy who have been living at home with me in North Norfolk, and reunited them, together, in what were the most remarkable, humbling and emotional scenes I will probably ever see.

Of the aid delivered, the generators that the people of North Norfolk were able to get on to the van were incredibly well received. Those generators are not available in Poland any more, so may we have some sort of national push to try to get generators to the people of Ukraine? To bring it home, Secretary of State, last night the father of the little boy whom my wife and family are looking after spent the night in Lviv after missile strikes with no energy, no water and no heating. This is affecting civilians and people I can now proudly say are part of my family.

James Cleverly: First, I commend my hon. Friend for the generosity he has displayed in hosting a Ukrainian family in wonderful North Norfolk, which is a part of the country I know well. It is a privilege to serve alongside him on these green Benches. I know that a number of Members from all parties have done likewise, and that is to their credit.

My hon. Friend's story is incredibly moving and he is absolutely right that behind the statistics, facts and numbers are people. We have to ensure that, on their behalf, we stick with it and maintain our willingness to do what is right. Even though we in the UK will go through difficult times this winter domestically, our difficulties pale into insignificance compared with the difficulties faced by people right across Ukraine, not just in the east and south where the land conflict is ongoing. We of course have a duty to help and support people who are here in the UK, but while doing so we also have a duty to help and support the brave people of Ukraine as they defend themselves against the brutal, illegal and unjustified invasion of their homeland by Russia.

Social Housing Standards

2.43 pm

The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Michael Gove): Members throughout the House and people across the country will have been horrified to hear about the circumstances surrounding the tragic death of Awaab Ishak. Awaab died in December 2020, just days after his second birthday, following prolonged exposure to mould in his parents' one-bedroom flat in Rochdale. Awaab's parents had repeatedly raised their concerns about the desperate state of their home with their landlord—the local housing association, Rochdale Boroughwide Housing. Awaab's father first articulated his concerns in 2017, and others, including health professionals, also raised the alarm, but the landlord failed to take any kind of meaningful action. Rochdale Boroughwide Housing's repeated failure to heed Awaab's family's pleas to remove the mould in their damp-ridden property was a terrible dereliction of duty.

Worse still, the apparent attempts by Rochdale Boroughwide Housing to attribute the existence of mould to the actions of Awaab's parents was beyond insensitive and deeply unprofessional. As the housing ombudsman has made clear, damp and mould in rented housing is not a lifestyle issue, and we all have a duty to call out any behaviour rooted in ignorance or prejudice. The family's lawyers have made it clear that in their view the inaction of the landlord was rooted in prejudice.

The coroner who investigated Awaab's death, Joanne Kearsley, has performed a vital public service in laying out all the facts behind this tragedy. I wish, on behalf of the House, to record my gratitude to her. As she said, it is scarcely believable that a child could die from mould in 21st century Britain, or that his parents should have to fight tooth and nail, as they did in vain, to save him. I am sure the whole House will join me in paying tribute to Awaab's family for their tireless fight for justice over the past two years. They deserved better and their son deserved better.

As so many have rightly concluded, Awaab's case has thrown into sharp relief the need for renewed action to ensure that every landlord in the country makes certain that their tenants are housed in decent homes and are treated with dignity and fairness. That is why the Government are bringing forward further reforms. Last week, the House debated the Second Reading of the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill. The measures in that Bill were inspired by the experience of tenants that led to the terrible tragedy of the Grenfell fire. The way in which tenants' voices were ignored and their interests neglected in the Grenfell tragedy is a constant spur to action for me in this role.

Before I say more on the substance of the wider reforms, let me first update the House on the immediate steps that my Department has been taking with regard to Awaab's case. First, as the excellent public-service journalism of the *Manchester Evening News* shows, we are aware that Awaab's family was not alone in raising serious issues with the condition of homes managed by the local housing association. I have already been in touch with the chair and the chief executive of Rochdale Boroughwide Housing to demand answers and that they explain to me why a tragedy such as Awaab's case was ever allowed to happen, and to hear what steps they are now undertaking, immediately, to improve the living conditions of the tenants for whom they are responsible.

I have been in touch with the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) and my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson), both of whom are powerful champions for the people of Rochdale. I have discussed with them the finding of suitable accommodation for tenants in Rochdale who are still enduring unacceptable conditions. I also hope to meet Awaab's family, and those who live in the Freehold estate, so that they know that the Government are there to support them.

It is right that the regulator of social housing is considering whether the landlord in this case has systematically failed to meet the standards of service it is required to provide for its tenants. The regulator has my full support for taking whatever action it deems necessary. The coroner has written to me, and I assure the House that I will act immediately on her recommendations.

Let me turn to the broader urgent issues raised by this tragedy. Let me be perfectly clear, as some landlords apparently still need to hear this from this House: every single person in this country, irrespective of where they are from, what they do or how much they earn, deserves to live in a home that is decent, safe and secure. That is the relentless focus of my Department and, I know, of everyone across this House.

Since the publication of our social housing White Paper, we have sought to raise the bar on the quality of social housing, while empowering tenants so that their voices are truly heard. We started by strengthening the housing ombudsman service so that all residents have somewhere to turn when they do not get the answers they need from their landlords. In addition, we have changed the law so that residents can now complain directly to the ombudsman, instead of having to wait eight weeks while their case is handled by a local MP or another "designated person".

One of the principal roles of the housing ombudsman service is to ensure that robust complaint processes are put in place so that problems are resolved as soon as they are flagged. It can order landlords to pay compensation to residents and refer cases to the regulator of social housing, which will in future be able to issue unlimited fines to landlords that it finds to be at fault. Of course, all decisions made by the ombudsman are published so that the whole world can see which landlords are consistently letting tenants down.

It is clear from Awaab's case, which sadly did not go before the ombudsman, that more needs to be done to ensure that this vital service is better promoted, and that it reaches those who really need it. We have already run the nationwide "Make Things Right" campaign to ensure that more social housing residents know how they can make complaints, but we are now planning—I think it is necessary—another targeted multi-year campaign so that everyone living in the social housing sector knows their rights, knows how to sound the alarm when their landlord is failing to make the grade, and knows how to seek redress without delay.

Where some providers have performed poorly in the past, they have now been given ample opportunity to change their ways and to start treating residents with the respect that they deserve. The time for empty promises of improvement is over, and my Department will now name and shame those who have been found by the

regulator to have breached consumer standards, or who have been found by the ombudsman to have committed severe maladministration.

While there is no doubt that this property fell below the standard that we expect all social landlords to meet, Awaab's death makes it painfully clear why we must do everything we can to better protect tenants. Our Social Housing (Regulation) Bill will bring in a rigorous new regime that holds landlords such as these to account for the decency of their homes. As I mentioned, the system has been too reliant on people fighting their own corner and we are determined to change that. The reforms that we are making will help to relieve the burden on tenants with an emboldened and more powerful regulator. The regulator will proactively inspect landlords and, of course, issue the unlimited fines that I have mentioned, and it will be able to intervene in cases where tenants' lives are being put at risk. In the very worst cases, it will have the power to instruct that properties be brought under new management.

Landlords will also be judged against tenant satisfaction measures, which will allow tenants—indeed, all of us—to see transparently which landlords are failing to deliver what residents expect and deserve. It is the universal right of everyone to feel safe where they and their loved ones sleep at night, which is why our levelling up and private rented sector White Papers set out how we will legislate to introduce a new, stronger, legally binding decent homes standard in the private rented sector as well for the first time. We recently consulted on that decent homes standard and we are reviewing the responses so that we can move forward quickly. It is a key plank of our mission to ensure that the number of non-decent homes across all tenures is reduced by 2030, with the biggest improvements occurring in the lowest-performing areas.

The legislation that we are bringing forward is important. We hope that, as a result, no family ever have to suffer in the way that Awaab's family have suffered. We hope that we can end the scandal of residents having to live in shoddy, substandard homes, such as some of those on the Freehold estate. We want to restore the right of everyone in this country, whatever their race or cultural background, to live somewhere warm, decent, safe and secure—a place that they can be proud to call home. I commend this statement to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I call the shadow Secretary of State.

2.52 pm

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and for advance sight of it. I join him in sending our condolences to the family of Awaab Ishak. It is the worst thing that any family could possibly imagine. It is very difficult to come to terms with the fact that, in 21st-century Britain, in one of the wealthiest countries in the world, a family could find their child dying at just two years old through completely and utterly avoidable circumstances that could, would and should have been prevented. I acknowledge that their only ask as a family is that, once and for all, the conditions for those in social housing are improved.

Today has to mark the start of a real step change in our level of urgency to improve the condition of our social housing stock and the rights of people in it. This is

not just about social housing stock, however: as the housing ombudsman made absolutely clear, there are people in every form of tenure who are forced in 21st-century Britain to endure these appalling, unconscionable conditions.

The coroner said that the death of Awaab, who suffered prolonged exposure to mould,

“will and should be a defining moment for the housing sector”,

but it should also be a defining moment for us and a wake-up call to every single Member of the House who has, in whatever limited form and to whatever extent, the power and platform to make sure that this never, ever happens again. It should not take the death of a two-year-old boy in completely avoidable circumstances to get us together and act.

The truth is that although this is the most shocking outcome that anyone could imagine, this is not an unusual set of circumstances to come across the desk of any hon. Member or housing lawyer in the country. Our inboxes and constituency surgeries, in every part of the country, are overflowing with people in this position—people who have sounded the alarm over and over again, but who have simply been rendered invisible by decision makers who do not respond.

I know that the Secretary of State and I are wholly united on this issue and that he is sincere about getting a grip on it and doing something about it. Only a week ago, we stood across from each other at the Dispatch Box and talked about what we could do to strengthen the measures in the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill that is currently before Parliament to ensure that this House delivers the strongest possible legislation. If there is unity, however, there is no excuse for delay. It is time for urgency.

In that spirit, what further steps will the Secretary of State's Department take? There is a systemic issue of housing unfit for human habitation in the social and private rented sectors. Too many families are living in overcrowded, damp, mouldy and squalid conditions, and they are disproportionately likely to be black, Asian and ethnic minority families in poverty. This has not just a heavy social cost; NHS England already spends £1.3 billion a year on treating preventable illnesses caused by cold and damp homes.

The consultation on the decent homes standard closed weeks ago, so can the Secretary of State give a timescale for that being brought into law without delay for the private and social rented sectors? We are 100% committed to decent homes standard 2, so we will work with the Government day and night to ensure that it is tough and fit for the 21st century, and that it is delivered quickly.

New regulation matters but, as the Secretary of State knows, there is a crisis for local authorities up and down the country. It would be wrong not to acknowledge that, for well-intentioned local authorities—the ones that are good landlords and are responsive to their tenants' needs—there is still a huge, gaping hole in their finances. Will he ensure that he sits down and works through those problems with local authorities? Everybody understands that there is a major problem with the public finances, but we have to find creative ways to help local authorities now, including through longer-term funding settlements. Will he particularly ensure that any social rent cap is funded? Otherwise all we do is load more cuts on to local authorities that cannot afford

[Lisa Nandy]

them and ensure that that money is stripped out of our local housing stock at a time when, as he knows, the situation is already unconscionable.

Damp is more likely in homes that are excessively cold and expensive to heat. With energy bills going through the roof, a cold winter will lead to a spike in mould problems, as the Secretary of State will know. What is he doing to bring about the retrofitting and insulation of older social housing stock to make homes cheaper to heat? We have a housing crisis in this country, but we also have a growth crisis. There are a lot of people around the country who could use good jobs bringing those homes up to standard and literally saving lives this winter.

I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State has called in the chief executive of Rochdale Boroughwide Housing to explain himself, but will the Secretary of State commit to a wider investigation of the case and what can be learned, including the housing association's structure and governance and whether the lack of democratic representation on its board played a part in its lack of responsiveness?

I am grateful that the Secretary of State repeatedly acknowledged during his statement that Awaab's family have said that, in their view, it is beyond doubt that racism played a role in their treatment and the handling of their concerns. Beyond an acknowledgement, I would like to see some action to deal with that. Nobody should be subjected to personal and intrusive questions about their private lives, lifestyle and bathing habits in their own home. I was glad that the coroner recognised that Rochdale Boroughwide Housing now knows that that was completely unacceptable, but how on earth was it allowed to conclude that lifestyle and bathing habits contributed to the majority of the mould?

Further to that, an important part of the system is providing legitimate migrants and refugees with safe and secure housing. Will the Secretary of State commit to a wider review of how housing is provided and maintained for refugees in this country? I am convinced that Awaab's family are right that the imbalance of power posed an acute problem for those who are unfamiliar with the system. I want to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd), who is in his place, and to the *Manchester Evening News*. They are a powerful voice for people who do not understand the system. However, there is a problem here, and it needs to be addressed. Will the Secretary of State look at the over-representation of BAME people in poor-quality housing?

Finally—I will come to a close, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I know that there is huge interest in this across the House—we stood in this place five years ago, after the shocking events of Grenfell, and said, “Never again.” Never again has to mean something. It has to mean a legacy for the people who have lost loved ones as a consequence of the shocking imbalance of power in the housing system. Will the Secretary of State commit to working with us in the Opposition to deliver a housing system fit for the 21st century?

Michael Gove: I thank the hon. Lady for the points she made and the questions she asked, and for the very open and constructive approach she is taking to making sure that we can all work together to learn the appropriate lessons from this tragedy.

The hon. Lady is right, of course, that the circumstances were utterly avoidable. She was also right to say that we require a step change in levels of urgency in dealing with these problems. She is right, too, that the problems identified by the coroner and held up to the light exist in every form in tenure across England. Damp and mould are not an unusual set of circumstances, but a problem that afflicts constituents all of us know of and all of us represent, and they should not be a problem with which people have to live. The impact on individuals' health and their quality of life can be profound, and action needs to be taken across the country, by all of us, to ensure that this scandal ends.

The hon. Lady is right to say that poor housing quality, while it exists across England, is particularly concentrated in certain communities, and it disproportionately affects families from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. This is part of a broader pattern of unequal outcomes that we do need to address. It requires sensitivity in handling, but she is also right that it requires urgency and focus on the part of all of us in investigating the factors that lie behind it.

The hon. Lady asked particularly about the decent homes standard and when we will bring forward new regulations in response to the consultation. We hope to do so as early as possible. It may not be until the beginning of the new year, but we will do so, I hope, in a way that ensures we can legislate effectively either in this Session or in the next.

The hon. Lady makes a fair point about local authority funding. Every part of the public sector and public realm faces funding challenges at the moment. I have been talking to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer about this, and he is very sensitive to these concerns. In the autumn statement tomorrow, he will be saying more about what can be done, including with reference to the social rent cap. As we all know, it is important to balance the additional sums that individuals may be required to pay at a time of inflation in order to ensure that housing associations are appropriately funded for the work that they need to do. There is a difficult balance to strike, but I have talked to Kate Henderson and others in the housing association sector, and I believe that the way forward that we have found is one that will be considered to be fair, in admittedly tough circumstances.

The hon. Lady asked about a wider investigation into the governance of Rochdale Boroughwide Housing. I had the opportunity to talk briefly to the chief executive earlier this afternoon. In the course of that conversation, it became even more clear to me that there are systemic problems in the governance and leadership of that organisation. I look forward to working with the hon. Lady and the two Members of Parliament covering the metropolitan borough to address that.

The hon. Lady also made a point about the campaigning work of not just local MPs, but of the *Manchester Evening News*. As I referenced briefly in my statement, I am grateful to the *Manchester Evening News*, which is an exemplar when it comes to a local newspaper that speaks for its communities and campaigns effectively.

The hon. Lady's final point about safe and secure housing for all, including refugees, is one that I absolutely take on board. We do need to ensure that people fleeing persecution and being welcomed into the country know that this country is a safe home for them and that they

have a safe home within this country. I would only say that it is our responsibility and our duty to ensure that every citizen of the United Kingdom believes that everyone in this House is on their side in ensuring that they have somewhere safe, decent and secure to live.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Roughly how many social housing homes are below standard, and what proportion of the stock is that?

Michael Gove: A significant proportion of social housing homes are below standard—we think significantly more than 10%—but the proportion of homes that are below standard in the private rented sector is even higher.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): There is no doubt that the death of Awaab was tragic, but it was also preventable and unforgivable. I endorse the exchange between the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy), in which some very important points were raised. I have limited time today, Madam Deputy Speaker, but perhaps I can make a few points.

At the national level, the Secretary of State rightly says we need the new definition of decent homes. Does that include classifying mould as a category 1 hazard, for example, because that would be an important step in providing protection? Will he also guarantee this important matter? There is a debate about the funding of local authorities, but there needs to be specific recognition that if we are to prevent this kind of tragedy, we must have enforcement and we must have structures that have the resources to enforce, such as local authority housing ombudsmen.

At the local level, the Secretary of State made reference to Rochdale Boroughwide Housing. I have to say that I have very little faith in the senior management of that body. There were so many ways in which this tragedy could have been prevented, so it is unforgivable that it has happened. Exemplary fines will not necessarily do the trick, however, because this simply penalises those who pay rents and penalises the taxpayer. There needs to be some personal responsibility in this, and the capacity for those at a senior level to face the consequences either legally, or in any case of losing their job. I would welcome an investigation into Rochdale Boroughwide Housing, and I hope this can now be done, because there are serious issues. I really do think that the chief executive, and perhaps some of those on other executive bodies, need to question their own role and whether they should be there any longer.

Michael Gove: I am very grateful to the hon. Member for the points he makes. Again, I express my sympathy to his constituents who have had to deal with some of the defects that Rochdale Boroughwide Housing has exhibited for some years now, and I know that he has consistently questioned the service they have received.

On the first point about damp and mould, it is already the case under the legislation introduced by the hon. Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck)—the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018—that damp and mould is a No. 1 concern when it comes to whether a house is fit for human habitation. However, the hon. Member is quite right to say that, when it comes to identifying a category 1 hazard, reviewing that in the context of the decent homes standard is something

we do have to do. I think that, under any circumstance or under any standard, the conditions in which Awaab's family were living were simply not decent and would have failed the decent homes standard, but he is quite right that we need to keep these under constant review.

The hon. Member is also right to stress that, when it comes to appropriate support for people in all types of tenure, we need to make sure that local authorities are appropriately resourced to ensure that they can be the champions of those whom they are elected to represent.

Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): When I think about this case I vacillate between profound sadness and white-hot anger. This is not an isolated incident. Just this week, I was sent photographs of a house in Middleton with its walls caked in black mould and rising damp. That is an RBH property, and my constituent sent me a copy of her doctor's note saying that she and her children are now severely ill because of these conditions. RBH are modern-day slumlords. Can I encourage my right hon. Friend, and I thank him for all his engagement thus far, to take up the suggestion of the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) to conduct a full root-and-branch investigation into the workings of RBH? Does he agree with me that, when the director is claiming £157,000 in earnings, he must bear full responsibility for what has happened?

Michael Gove: Again, I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for his work. I know that he has been extraordinarily diligent in following up the cases of poor housing that have been brought to his attention. He is absolutely right that the leadership of RBH has presided over a terrible situation in his constituency. Action does need to be taken. He is absolutely right that we need to make sure that all of the tools at our disposal are used to investigate what went on and to hold those responsible to account. He is also right to say that individuals who earn well in excess of what our Prime Minister earns and who have responsibility for 12,500 homes should take the consequences of those actions.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I call the Chair of the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): May I associate myself with the aims that the Secretary of State has set out in his statement? I think they will be supported across the House.

I draw the Secretary of State's attention to the Select Committee's report, "The Regulation of Social Housing", published in July—I gently remind him that the Department has not yet replied to it. In the report, we identified some social housing that was unfit for human habitation, and causing the sorts of health problems that tragically have been seen in this case. We identified problems with repair reporting, complaints handling, and a lack of proactive inspection of properties by housing providers and the social housing regulator. We put that in context and said

"some blame must attach to successive Governments for not investing enough in new homes, which has increased the sector's reliance on outdated stock, and for not providing funding specifically for regeneration."

[Mr Clive Betts]

Some of those are not individual repairs; there are failures of whole blocks and whole estates. I say to the Secretary of State: let us share the common objectives, and let us work together to get the money to ensure that those objectives can be realised.

Michael Gove: Of course, when the hon. Gentleman and his Committee published their report, I think I had just beforehand left office, and only relatively recently have I returned to office. But it is a powerful report, and the points he makes are fair and necessary. The concerns he raised about the state of repair and complaints handling have been articulated for many years, and the report brings very much to the front of mind the need to tackle those concerns urgently. His broader point about the need for investment in our housing stock, and our social housing stock overall, is very much a mission of my Department, not least in ensuring that Homes England, and others, can work with registered social landlords to ensure the regeneration of estates—including in Sheffield—that have been neglected for too long.

Angela Richardson (Guildford) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement and strong response, and I join colleagues across the House in our heartbreak for Awaab and his family. Sadly, the conditions that have been brought to light are replicated across the country. Indeed, a good deal of my casework, from when I was elected in December 2019 right through to today, is about poor housing conditions. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that he will take action to improve housing quality for private as well as social tenants?

Michael Gove: Absolutely, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour for raising that issue. Although Guildford is an absolutely beautiful city, there are some parts that she represents where the state of housing, in both the social and private rented sectors, is simply not good enough. We have discussed that in private in the past, and she is right. We will be bringing forward measures to ensure that her constituents get the support they deserve.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I do not doubt the Secretary of State's sincerity, but I suspect from my own caseload that this problem is far more widespread than has hitherto been acknowledged. What guarantee can he give today that there will be concerted action, and that we will not see a flurry of activity from landlords and housing associations, rushing round to properties, slapping on a bit of anti-mould paint, and leaving parents in the same predicament as Awaab's parents, of worrying for their children's future because nothing is really being done to address the problem?

Michael Gove: The hon. Gentleman articulates a fair concern, and it is striking that Awaab's parents were told that paint in itself would be an answer to the mould problem. In some circumstances anti-mould paint can help to alleviate the problem, but it does not tackle it at root. On the broader issue of whether we will see a flurry of performative activity rather than fundamental change, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. That is why the new powers for the regulator are so important, and why it is my commitment to ensure that

we review those powers, review the decent homes standard and, if for any reason there is backsliding, take further action.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on making a statement so quickly after the tragic events that took place. Awaab's death was preventable and a tragedy, but I am afraid that the advice given to his parents is the normal advice given up and down the country when people inspect damp and mould: "It's your lifestyle, not the condition of the building." Will my right hon. Friend look closely at appropriate amendments to the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill, and consider what we can do to strengthen it and ensure that this tragedy leads to a sea change, so that we do not see it repeated time and again up and down the country?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to my hon. Friend—few people in this House have done more to shine a light on poor housing conditions and introduce legislation to improve the conditions of tenants. He is absolutely right: the housing ombudsman made clear in its October 2021 report that damp and mould could never be considered a lifestyle issue. That is both an abdication of responsibility on the part of landlords and, as we have heard, sometimes a mask for prejudice, which we need to call out. He is also right that we need to look at our legislation to ensure that appropriate lessons are learned. I look forward to working with him and other colleagues to ensure that the legislation is fit for purpose in every respect.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): We have a significant lack of social housing, and as we have heard so tragically today, where houses are available the conditions are often inadequate. One elderly couple in my constituency have been dealing with mould for over two years. What support will be given to local councils that want to do the right thing to address the availability and quality of social housing?

Michael Gove: The hon. Lady is right to raise that point, and we will be working with local authorities, registered social landlords and the wider housing sector to ensure that we continue to provide resource for the upgrading of existing stock and the provision of new stock.

I should say—I did not respond fully to the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) earlier—that one other important pressure on registered social landlords is ensuring that we deal with effective energy efficiency and insulation measures. We must make those resources available, even at a time of straitened circumstances.

Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, and I pass on my condolences to the family concerned.

The standard of housing in the social housing sector, run by both housing associations and local authorities, has been shown to suffer from ongoing issues across the UK, including inefficient repairs and maintenance contracts and services. What assessment has the Secretary of State made of whether the regulatory enforcement framework needs improving urgently, including the inspections regime? Does the ombudsman need to be given more resources, so that tenants can expect a full and quick resolution to their complaints?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has campaigned on these questions for some time. He is right: we must ensure that the ombudsman and regulator are appropriately resourced, and we will keep both under review. It may be that we need to provide additional resource to the ombudsman, given that we actively want to promote more tenants using that service in order to secure redress.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I join those paying tribute to the *Manchester Evening News* for its excellent reporting and the campaign it is starting on this matter. The Secretary of State has called this case “unacceptable”, but what is so tragic, as we are hearing across the House, is that the experience of Awaab’s family in having their concerns ignored is shared by so many across the country, including in my constituency. My office receives upwards of 40 cases a year from constituents who are worried sick about persistent mould and damp in their social housing. Many children and babies are living in those damp and mouldy homes, often for years, which affects their health badly. Is the Secretary of State satisfied that there is sufficient investment in enforcement, and sufficient legal help available, to hold housing providers to account?

Michael Gove: The consistent theme from Members across the House is the need to ensure that appropriate resources are there, and one commitment I give to the House is that I will seek to ensure that appropriate resource is in place for the ombudsman, registered social landlords and local authorities. The hon. Lady’s question gives me the opportunity to add that the housing ombudsman’s report, which I mentioned earlier, also contains examples of very good practice among the many excellent RSLs, because as well as focusing on failure, it is also important to look at where good practice exists and ensure that the resource is there to ensure that that becomes more widespread.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his statement. It is shocking that a two-year-old child should lose his life from lung and heart failure due to mould and damp conditions in his flat. Unfortunately, we know that the default position from landlords has often been that that is about lifestyle. Will the Secretary of State send a clear message that that should no longer be the default position when such issues arise? It is clear that this is not just rogue landlords; this goes across the sector. Will he ensure that any measures he brings forward will address the issue across all sectors?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Again, this is a subject that we have discussed outside the House in the past. The existence of damp and mould is a persistent and avoidable issue. It is in no way due to the lifestyle of tenants. As the housing ombudsman’s report makes crystal clear, there should not be any sense of fatalism on the part of registered social landlords or others in dealing with the issue. It is avoidable, it can be dealt with, and it is urgent that we do so.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): According to the English housing survey, 839,000 homes across the country have damp problems, including 409,000 private rented properties and 198,000 social housing properties. However, across the House, we all know that the figures

are far higher. For every constituent who contacts me in Vauxhall or any other Member of the House, there are so many other constituents suffering in silence, not knowing who to turn to, living in poor conditions that are affecting their health. I welcome the Secretary of State saying that resources will be available, but the sad truth is that cuts over the last 12 years to our local councils have borne human consequences. This boy’s sad death should not have happened. Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that the Government have an urgent duty to do better so that more tragedies such as this do not happen?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, who on the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee and elsewhere has been a clear and consistent voice calling for the better treatment of tenants in a variety of different tenures. The cases that she has brought to my attention and others’ make a compelling case for change. She is right that we in government must ensure that we provide an appropriate level of resource. I do believe that ensuring that more people are aware of how to contact the ombudsman and ensuring that the regulator has additional teeth will contribute to change. But, of course, all of us need to ensure that we keep the situation under review. Her question gives me the opportunity again to praise the work of Dan Hewitt of ITN and, of course, Kwajo Tweneboa, the housing campaigner, who have worked with her to highlight the problems that we both want to see resolved.

Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his compassionate and thorough statement. Does he agree that if we are to prevent another death such as Awaab’s and ensure that people have the right to decent, damp-free homes, the responsibility must stop with the chief executives of housing providers? Does he also agree that the only way in which they will remain accountable and responsible for the housing they provide is by ensuring that they can be fined or even face legal cases and that, in acute cases such as this, corporate manslaughter charges may be considered?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to my hon. Friend who, in her previous role as leader of an outstanding local authority, did an enormous amount to champion the rights of tenants. I cannot comment further than I have on this case, but, yes, she is right that all of us have to take responsibility for improving the situation.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): This is an awfully tragic case, but I think we all agree that it is not an isolated one. Numerous constituents of all tenures—council, housing association and private rented—have been told that they have mould in their property because of lifestyle reasons. Will the Secretary of State commit to a timetable to bring forward the work in the Green Paper on the private rented sector and tell us the timescale for it? In that work, will there be a basic standard for ventilation? One of the big problems is that there is no national standard for what we expect of ventilation in properties, and that is causing much of the condensation problem.

Michael Gove: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise the question of ventilation, which was a particular factor that the coroner raised in this tragic case. More

[*Michael Gove*]

broadly, his point about the need to expedite legislation to improve conditions in the private rented sector is right, and we will make an announcement shortly about the timetable for legislation.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's comments, his statement and the compassion with which he is dealing with this very sad case. All the steps being taken on social housing providers and, where appropriate, councils can only be a good thing as a reminder to us all. What does my right hon. Friend think could be done on private rented accommodation? In my constituency quite a large number of people rent from private providers, and they may not be at all aware of what their rights are and what the standards should be.

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. It is important to stress that the overwhelming majority of landlords in the private rented sector provide a high-quality service, care for their tenants and want their properties to be kept up to the highest standards. However, a small minority, which often includes individuals or organisations based overseas who own property here, neglect the appropriate standards to which the property should be kept. The legislation that we will bring forward in due course will help to tackle those abuses.

Helen Morgan (North Shropshire) (LD): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement and send my deepest condolences to Awaab's loved ones. Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that an overall chronic shortage of social housing is contributing to the problem of tenants living in dangerous or unsuitable conditions because there are no other options available? A less serious case, but an example from my constituency, is that of a family of six living in a two-bedroom property, whose son is falling behind at school because he cannot sleep at night. Will the Secretary of State commit to allowing councils and housing associations to keep 100% of the proceeds of homes sold under the right to buy scheme so that, at the very least, they can hope to maintain their current level of social housing stock?

Michael Gove: The hon. Lady makes a fair point about ensuring that we do everything possible to support local authorities to increase social housing stock. Of course, we do need to keep that under review and, again, we will be saying more about that in due course.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): The hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), who is no longer in his place, spoke for all of us when he described how our constituents are often told that they are somehow to blame for damp, condensation and mould. I very much welcome the clear statement the Secretary of State just made that that will no longer be acceptable from any landlord. Given that he has said that, we can tell our tenants that from today. Will he consider putting a time limit on the period in which the housing provider must fix a problem from when it is first raised? I do believe that that would concentrate the mind. In many cases—we will all be familiar with this—the problem goes back and forth and still does not get sorted out.

Michael Gove: I very much take on board the right hon. Gentleman's point. One thing that I will look at and discuss with the regulator and the ombudsman is how we can ensure that there is a best practice timescale for responses to complaints so that we do not have the back and forth that he described.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): The Secretary of State will be aware that the family first raised the issue a year before their little boy died. That, in my view, points to the extreme culpability of the Rochdale Boroughwide housing association. It is my view not that its head should be fined but that, if he had any conscience, he would resign. Tens of thousands of people up and down the country are in properties that are riddled with damp and mould. I have the issue myself in Hackney, and one estate, Evelyn Court, is campaigning to try to get its landlord to do something about it. It is difficult to imagine anything sadder than watching your child literally cough to death because people who were supposed to act did not. The family are of the opinion that they were treated in this way because they were migrants and because they were black. We all know all sorts of tenants have this issue, but does the Secretary of State agree that some of us believe these tenants were treated like this because they were black?

Michael Gove: I am really grateful to the right hon. Lady for raising that question and for the way in which she raised it. It does seem to me, on the basis of the facts as we know them, that this family were victims of prejudice, whether unwitting or otherwise. There are other examples, and there have been other examples, of individuals in both the private rented sector and the social rented sector who have been treated with significantly less respect than they deserve because of attitudes that are rooted in prejudice. We all have a responsibility across this House to call that out when it occurs and to ensure that people, whatever their background, are treated with the dignity they deserve as human beings.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): Let this be the point where no one is ever told again, "Open your windows and the problem will be solved." May I caution the Secretary of State against relying solely on the housing ombudsman as the best mechanism for our constituents to seek redress? RSLs such as Clarion and London and Quadrant have, when doing repairs, left residents in hotels miles away from where they live. Residents are getting heavily into debt and languishing because the RSLs are not doing the repairs properly. Residents do not have the weeks and months it takes to secure redress. The companies will use their insurance policies to cover the cost of doing the repairs on those properties. Will he give tenants a right to access that money, so we can concentrate the minds of those social landlords to treat those people with the dignity they deserve?

Michael Gove: The hon. Lady makes an important point. It is certainly the case that the two RSLs she mentions have failed tenants in the past and she is right to call that out. Her broader point on whether we can give tenants the additional rights she mentions is an interesting one. I commit to working with her to see what more can be done.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement on this awful tragedy and for the way he made it. I hope this will lead to a step change in attitudes and policy towards the housing needs of people across the whole country. I totally agree with him when he says that everyone should have a decent, safe, secure, dry, warm place to live in—absolutely right. It is not happening in my constituency, or in many others, where I come across people living in overcrowded accommodation with damp and all the other issues that go with it. In the now very large private rented sector, tenants are often afraid to complain—they fear eviction if they complain—they have no certainty of a long-term residence. We need tough legislation on the private rented sector, we need more council housing built and we need an attitude from public health inspectors that goes down like a tonne of bricks on any landlord, whoever they are, who fails in their duties to maintain a safe, dry, warm and clean environment.

Michael Gove: The right hon. Gentleman and I have disagreed on many things in this House, but I have to say that I agree with every single word he just said.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): Our thoughts are absolutely with the family. May I draw the Secretary of State's attention to social housing providers? In my constituency, one has raised concerns about the 14% rise in maintenance costs in the last year, a cost that has not been recognised in the Government's consultation on rent caps. I think he might have alluded to some future compromise, but could he give us some assurance that the Government will consider the rise in maintenance costs at this time when they are looking at future rents?

Michael Gove: The hon. Lady makes an important point. We have a number of very different things that are operating in tension and that we need to review. First, we need to ensure, at a time of rising prices everywhere, that tenants in social housing are not faced with increases in rents that further add to the difficulties they face. At the same time, however, registered social landlords and housing associations need money to provide new stock, to pay for repairs when materials are costing more, and to undertake some of the work on insulation and energy efficiency alluded to earlier, as well as, in some cases, the building safety work required in the wake of Grenfell. I appreciate the pressures under which they are operating and my commitment is to work with them constructively to try to ensure we can support them.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): Like every other Member here, I get weekly concerns from constituents about mould in properties. Sometimes we are able to help them and we get there. It takes a long time and unfortunately problems often come back. Sometimes people come to see me who I helped when I was a councillor almost a decade ago and the problems have re-emerged, so there is something far deeper going on here—it is not just about trying to put these things right. The issue is across the whole sector. Every housing association in my constituency has these problems. There are issues of capacity, funding and accountability. I do not think these associations are accountable to the communities they represent. Can the Secretary of State say something about what he can do about that?

Michael Gove: The hon. Member raises at least three very important questions. First, in fairness to everyone, many RSLs have inherited housing stock—particularly that built in the '60s and '70s—that was simply not fit for purpose when it was constructed and is well beyond its natural life span as anything approaching decent accommodation. He is absolutely right that they have inherited significant problems. Secondly, we need to make sure that housing associations and RSLs are more accountable generally. One thing that our reforms seek to do is to ensure that the tenant voice is louder and more clearly heard. However, there can be an open debate into the future about how we improve stock overall and ensure better democratic accountability.

Mrs Paulette Hamilton (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): The death of Awaab Ishak was a tragedy that shone a light on the issues in the sector. A family in my constituency contacted me as they had been living in temporary accommodation for more than four years. The property was absolutely full of mould; when it was inspected, it was so bad that there were mushrooms growing in the bathroom. It was ridiculous. The Government's consultation on the decent homes standard has closed. Will the Secretary of State commit to bringing in new legally enforceable standards to ensure that everyone has a decent place to live? How will that be monitored?

Michael Gove: I know that the hon. Lady, with her background as an NHS professional, will have come across the consequences of poor housing throughout a lifetime dedicated to public service. She is right: we need to make sure that there is effective monitoring of improvements by RSLs. That is what the new regulator is supposed to ensure and achieve. If, for any reason, we need to provide it with more teeth or do more, I look forward to working with her in that regard.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): Last month, a 52-year-old gentleman contacted me, crying down the phone. He said that, in his previous accommodation, he had developed breathing problems due to the damp, rot and mould in that home, that there was no heating in his present home and that he was worried and scared. What will the Secretary of State's Department do to invest in social housing, enforce capacity and provide legal aid to help to end this scandal once and for all?

Michael Gove: I am very sorry to hear about that individual case. I would be grateful if the hon. Lady let me and my office know about that and the landlord responsible, and we will seek to follow it up. On her broader point, I hope that the regulator and the ombudsman together can help to ensure that individuals like her constituent have their concerns addressed. However, if more needs to be done, my Department will do what we can to review that.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): When the Government backed my Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018, I knew that the law would not be enough. That will prove to be the case again. We have heard about enforcement against social landlords and against private landlords—who are twice as bad—as well as commissioned temporary accommodation and exempt accommodation, which is often the worst. We know that we need more enforcement capacity. Will the Minister and the Government commission a study of

[Ms Karen Buck]

local authorities' enforcement capacity—particularly the use of environmental health officers—to enable councils to identify the problems in accommodation? Will he also commission a study of the use of the legal powers already available to local authorities, which varies so much between providers? Will that inform the urgent introduction of further legislation to protect renters?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. The Bill that she introduced became an Act in 2018, and it is landmark legislation. She is right to say, as she warned at the time, that legislation on its own is not enough and enforcement is required. The number of people who have used her legislation for the purpose for which it was intended has been fewer than any of us would have wanted, given the scale of the problem. I commit to looking at the recommendations that she just made to see whether that is genuinely the best way, and I hope that we can come to an appropriate conclusion to ensure that appropriate enforcement is in place.

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): Like many hon. Members, I find that by far the biggest issue that constituents raise with me is housing, including the appalling standards that we have all seen in social housing and, critically, in the private rented sector. I would like to press the Secretary of State a bit more on what his plans are for the private rented sector. Leicester City Council, like many councils, is introducing a licensing scheme in parts of the city to crack down on rogue landlords and improve standards. We know what the problems are: we have to find the landlords in the first place, and if we can find them, we do not have the powers we need to make changes. Promises are given, but it all takes too long. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) said, we need timescales. May I press the Secretary of State on what he will do on those issues specifically: finding the landlords, having the right powers and implementing those powers swiftly?

Michael Gove: The hon. Lady raises a number of important issues. First, local authorities such as Leicester can use selective licensing, which can be a powerful tool. Local authority leaders were recently in front of the Select Committee to discuss the appropriateness of using selective licensing; some regard it as a useful tool and others do not, but I believe it has an important role to play.

The hon. Lady's second point is about tracking down the ultimate owner, which is a big problem. On coming into the Department, I was surprised by the way in which ultimate owners of property hide behind myriad opaque structures. Through the Land Registry and elsewhere, we need to find means of determining the ultimate beneficial owners of property so that we can take appropriate enforcement action. I look forward to working with the hon. Lady on the issue.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Ind): The Government spend more on housing benefit and its equivalents than on policing and transport combined. How much of that £20 billion of public money is paying for substandard, mould-ridden private rented accommodation? Will the Secretary of State accept the invitation from the housing ombudsman to extend its remit to the private rented sector?

Michael Gove: We know that there are at least 2.3 million homes that fail the decent homes standard, broadly. We know that a higher proportion of homes fail it in the private rented sector than in the social rented sector. I am always open to all proposals that can ensure that tenants live in decent homes, irrespective of tenure. I will consider that proposal.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) and others have mentioned supported exempt accommodation, and on Friday the House will debate the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Bill, which was introduced by the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman). I am afraid that I am no stranger to deaths because of poor housing. In Birmingham, to the best of my knowledge, there have been three or four deaths—some violent, some because of the terrible conditions for people living in dreadful and unregulated supported exempt accommodation. Will the Secretary of State agree to put some regulation in place? Will he follow every recommendation of the Select Committee's report on the matter? The taxpayer is currently spending billions, but people are being put in danger.

Michael Gove: The hon. Lady makes an important point; I am grateful for her support for my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) and his legislation. There is a big problem in supported housing. As she knows, additional funds are provided to landlords to ensure that they provide the additional support required by individuals who are living with a variety of challenges. There is a subset of landlords who pocket the cash in those circumstances and then leave vulnerable individuals in conditions that put them at risk and lead to problems for their neighbours. We need to deal with this scam; legislation is part of that, although not all of it. I look forward to working with her to tackle it.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): While we are waiting for the improvements that the Secretary of State has promised in the regulation and resourcing of social landlords, many tenants are relying on legal aid solicitors and law centres to pursue disrepair claims. Thanks to legal aid cuts, they are already a vanishing part of the legal system, but from next year, housing claims will be subject to fixed recoverable costs, which will make it unaffordable for small firms and not-for-profits to take on housing cases. Will the Secretary of State talk to his colleagues in the Ministry of Justice about how representation can be maintained for victims of the neglect, incompetence and discrimination so tragically highlighted in Awaab's case?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that case. The housing and planning Minister, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer), is a former Justice Minister; I know that she and the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Felicity Buchan), appreciate the importance of the issue. I hope that we will be able to make progress.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): This must be a moment of epiphany. The scale of the problem—damp, cold, overcrowded housing or no housing at all for my constituents and constituents across the country—

needs to be addressed by an action plan from every housing provider with a timeline for when the necessary reparation will be made, but there also needs to be a deep dive into the skills available to perform this reparation, because that too is a challenge.

Michael Gove: The hon. Lady has made an important point, which gives me the opportunity to say two things. First, we do need professionalism within the sector overall, and that is one of the matters that will be considered in the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill. Secondly, as the hon. Lady rightly said and as so many other Members have pointed out, this individual tragedy is reflective of a broader set of problems in the housing sector. Those problems, as we have discussed, have been exacerbated by the nature of the housing stock that we have in this country—its age and its condition—but that is no excuse for not taking action.

I think—and I hope this reflects the mood of the House—that we have reached a point at which we all recognise that, thanks to this tragedy and thanks to the campaigning of Members on both sides of the House, as well as the campaigning of individuals outside such as Kwajo Tweneboa, Daniel Hewitt and Vicky Spratt, we now know that we need to tackle these questions with a greater degree of urgency than ever before.

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab): I send my deepest condolences to Awaab's family. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd), who has been campaigning on the issue of decent homes for many years and is a powerful voice for his constituents.

I want to raise an issue raised earlier by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). Awaab's family believe that racism played a significant part in the way they were treated and the way their complaint was handled. May I ask the Secretary of State whether he is taking that point seriously, and whether he will commit himself to an investigation?

Michael Gove: As I mentioned briefly earlier, it does seem to me on the basis of the facts as they stand—and this has certainly been articulated very effectively by

Awaab's family's solicitor—that the family were on the receiving end of prejudice. Whether it was unwitting or not, I cannot judge. Linked to that, as the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington mentioned, there is a significant problem with people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds not being treated, as they should be, with respect, and we do need to take that issue seriously. I am reassured that those who lead the social housing sector completely understand the need for the highest professional standards in this area.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement, and for responding to questions for over an hour.

BILLS PRESENTED

PLANNING APPLICATION FEES BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Daisy Cooper, supported by Helen Morgan, presented a Bill to amend the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to enable local authorities [in England] to determine the fees to be paid in respect of applications and deemed applications for planning permission; to require local authorities to set the scale of fees with a view to ensuring that the costs of determining applications can be wholly funded by application fees; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the first time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March 2023, and to be printed (Bill 193).

TRADE (AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND) (PARLIAMENTARY APPROVAL) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sarah Green presented a Bill to provide for the implementation of the United Kingdom's free trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand to be subject to approval by resolution by each House of Parliament; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the first time; to be read a Second time on Friday 25 November, and to be printed (Bill 194).

Points of Order

3.48 pm

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance on ensuring that the Home Office provides a high-quality and timely service to MPs.

Since 1 January my office has been approached for help with more than 260 cases of asylum and immigration, all requiring updates from the Home Office. My office established a system of monthly calls with the Home Office, which in fact has been running at about every six weeks. Moreover, four of the 10 consultations scheduled this year have been cancelled. Yesterday I was informed that today's call had been cancelled because of staff members being "out of office". No revised date was offered, and I was advised that the next call would take place as agreed on 21 December. That is five weeks from now, and it means that there will have been three months between consultations.

These calls are crucial, as constituents find the prolonged waits distressing. When we do receive updates, they are often of a very poor quality, stating only that the claim is in progress and there is no timeframe for a decision, or that people will be contacted in due course. The members of the Hull Seahawks ice hockey club are currently waiting for an update on a visa for one of their players; they have been waiting for more than two months, and are now halfway through the season without a much-needed player. That is one of the cases that my office was going to raise with the Home Office in the call today.

MPs have been offered an unacceptably poor service by the Home Office, and I hope, Mr Deputy Speaker, that you can use your power and influence to put pressure on the Prime Minister to improve it.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order and also for giving me notice of it. She raises a serious issue that affects how all of us can assist our constituents, and the service she describes from the Home Office is not acceptable. Ministers on the Treasury Bench will have heard her comments and I expect them to be conveyed to the Home Office. I expect the Home Office to address the issues that she has raised urgently, and if improvements are not made, I know that the Speaker will be sympathetic to attempts by the hon. Lady to pursue the matter, perhaps in an Adjournment debate or through an urgent question.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. We are about to debate the National Security Bill. In the Second Reading debate, the Chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee, the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), asked the then Minister, the right hon. Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds), for a commitment that there would be a Committee of the whole House to discuss a number of important matters in the Bill. The Minister responded by saying:

"I hear the request from my right hon. Friend...I can assure him that I have heard colleagues—him and others—on the importance of having time for scrutiny."—[*Official Report*, 6 June 2022; Vol. 715, c. 639.]

Since then, 130 or so amendments and new clauses have been tabled in the last week, more than half from the Government, and we have 100 or so to debate today.

There will be barely two hours before we are required to vote, and then presumably a near non-existent Third Reading. May I ask whether you have had any information from the Leader of the House about the intention of the Government to find more time to debate this matter, or indeed to have the important parts of this Bill debated fully on the Floor of the House?

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. May I raise one specific issue that is directly linked with this? I discovered one day ago—overnight, almost—that the Government had tabled amendment 60, which will add certain offences to the list of offences that are not eligible for statutory defence for victims of modern-day slavery. Whether or not this amendment improves the Bill, the truth is that we have had no chance to scrutinise it at all, and it will be done today and gone. My concern is that this is a delicate area, often dealing with people who have very great problems, and I simply want to ask you, Mr Deputy Speaker, whether it is feasible for us to raise a complaint that this is becoming an abuse of the House.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. In addition, it is notable that a large chunk of the Bill has been added. It is an important chunk of the Bill, which I know that the Minister for Security, the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), supported because he was on the Foreign Affairs Committee when we called for the registration of foreign agents. That has now been put in the Bill, but it was added only in Committee and not given much time to be debated there. We have not had a full opportunity to analyse the clauses that have been added. We have significant numbers of Government amendments today and we are not even going to have two hours in which to debate them. Surely it would be possible for the Minister to stand up now and say, "This is national security and it is a matter that we need to get right. We cannot just expect another place to consider these matters. We are going to do our job of scrutiny properly and we will allow additional time to debate them on another day."

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am not making any comment about the current Minister, but during the Committee stage, we had four separate Ministers handling the Bill. This made scrutiny very difficult because Ministers were coming and going so fast that they could not have even read the Bill between when they arrived and when they left. That has been a cause of significant frustration for members of the Committee, and now to have only two hours makes a mockery of the idea that we are scrutinising this important legislation.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I would like to thank all four hon. Members for their points of order. They will know that the Chair has limited powers in this regard, but I have every sympathy with the points of order that have just been raised. Perhaps those on the Treasury Bench will have heard this and will pass it on to the Leader of the House. Also, when we get on to the Bill, maybe the Minister himself will comment, as he is the appropriate person to do so. I am extremely grateful for all four points of order.

Teenagers (Safety and Wellbeing)

Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)

3.54 pm

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to place a duty on the Secretary of State to promote the safety and wellbeing of teenagers; to make provision to prevent crime against teenagers; and for connected purposes.

There is nothing more important than ensuring that our young people have the best opportunities to thrive and that all are able to access such opportunities. Every instance where we fail to do this, we let those young people down and often start a spiral of wasted potential and greater societal need down the road.

Recent reports warn that social care, education, family support and children's mental health services are not working for thousands of vulnerable teenagers, diminishing their life chances, putting some teenagers at risk of grooming, exploitation and serious violence, and costing taxpayers billions. For the young people we fail the most, the implications are stark.

Government statistics reveal that, in 2021-22, more than 16,000 cases of child sexual exploitation were identified in social care assessments, as were 11,600 cases involving gangs and more than 10,000 cases of child criminal exploitation. Sadly, these numbers are likely to be the tip of the iceberg, because those involved in gang activity and criminal exploitation are disproportionately young, vulnerable and, crucially, unknown to services. This leads to estimates that as many as 200,000 children in England aged 11 to 17 could be vulnerable to serious violence.

Let us be clear that the blame for this lies at the feet of those cowards who seek to exploit children for their own individual gain, but the responsibility for tackling and preventing it is with us in this place, with our devoted Assemblies, with our elected Mayors and combined authorities and with our town halls. We must collectively find the answer.

There is significant concern that the pressures on overstretched services and on the public purse due to a lack of early intervention and a combination of the pandemic and the cost of living crisis are increasing the risks to teenagers. It has been reported that many of these problems have become more extreme since the pandemic, including the ages of those running gangs becoming even younger. This creates a great challenge for the system, one mirrored in slavery cases more broadly, where the boundary between the exploiter and the exploited is blurred and, in many cases, exists in the same person.

We must recognise that what we are talking about in many cases is slavery. The Government were right to introduce anti-slavery legislation, but we must make sure it keeps pace with the challenges we face. According to the Children's Society, 22,000 children have entered the national referral mechanism since the Modern Slavery Act 2015 was introduced. That is a staggering scale, but it has led to just 186 prosecutions where children were the victims, and only half of those led to a conviction.

This is part of an overwhelming body of evidence, including the final report of the Commission on Young Lives, published earlier this month and from which I drew earlier in my speech. Just last Friday, the National Audit Office added the stark findings that the number of nine to 17-year-olds in care has jumped by more than a quarter since 2014, that there has been a 142% increase in referrals to secondary mental health services over the last five years and that 81% of children who are cautioned or sentenced have been persistently absent from school. We know what creates vulnerability but, at the moment, we are not doing enough to tackle that vulnerability.

The impact on young people is not only borne out by the crime statistics. It also affects how safe our young people feel, and not feeling safe has an impact on them and the decisions they make. Girlguiding does the largest survey of girls and young women, and the most recent iteration of its annual girls' attitudes survey found that more than half of 11 to 21-year-old girls and young women do not feel safe when they are outside on their own, that nearly one in five does not feel safe at school, and that more than a quarter do not feel safe online.

The Government-funded organisation that identifies what works in tackling violence, the Youth Endowment Fund, published its first annual report on children, violence and vulnerability this week, and it showed that 39% of 13 to 17-year-olds have been a victim or a witness of violence, increasing to 46% of those in receipt of free school meals and to 60% of those with a social worker. We are failing our young people if we allow such a situation to persist unchecked. Behind each of those statistics is a young person, their family, their hopes and dreams, and a huge societal failing.

Unfortunately, the Government's response on the safety and wellbeing of teenagers is often unfocused and lacks co-ordination. No Department has a lead responsibility for promoting the safety and wellbeing of teenagers, and although several Departments have welcome funded programmes of activity that relate to teenagers, they are not co-ordinated and do not tackle the needs of vulnerable teenagers in a holistic and systemic way. This lack of focus and co-ordination nationally is reflected locally, with many teenagers falling through the gaps between school, children's services, the NHS and the police. We know that there is a paucity of preventive help in most communities, meaning that teenagers will often need to fall into crisis before they can access help.

So the system is not working as it ought to, it needs fixing and this Bill is an attempt to kick-start that process. A Bill such as this could do that in four areas: by identifying a lead Department for vulnerable teenagers with clear accountability; by placing a duty on the Secretary of State to promote the safety of teenagers across government; by placing a duty on the Secretary of State to prevent crime against teenagers; and by placing a duty to promote wellbeing. The Bill would therefore ensure that there is clear responsibility and accountability in government for the welfare, safety and wellbeing of teenagers, rather than the unco-ordinated approach that has characterised the response so far. This need for national-level strategic intervention is called for by the National Audit Office and the Children's Society. It really ought to be a fundamental requirement of government, but it currently is not. So let us put that right and ensure that, in future, essential action is being taken.

[Alex Norris]

I am pleased to say that this Bill has the support of the former Children's Commissioner for England, Anne Longfield. Anne is a relentless campaigner for young people and I know she is widely respected across this House. She is chairing the Commission on Young Lives, which is seeking to find solutions for our system to protect and support young people at risk of violence, exploitation and crime, and it has been a privilege to work with her closely on this. I urge the Government to take heed of the provisions in this Bill and the spirit in which I raise them today. When the system is not working, we must fix it and deliver better outcomes for our young people. I believe we can achieve that with this Bill and finally bring to our public policy a clear, laser-like focus on the safety of teenagers and the prevention of crime against them.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Alex Norris, Karen Bradley, Ms Lyn Brown, Vicky Foxcroft, Sarah Owen, Lloyd Russell-Moyle, Jim Shannon, Cat Smith and Nadia Whittome present the Bill.

Alex Norris accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the first time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 January 2023, and to be printed (Bill 192).

National Security Bill

Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee

[Relevant Document: Fifth Report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, Legislative Scrutiny: National Security Bill, HC 297.]

New Clause 9

USE OF REASONABLE FORCE

- “(1) A power conferred on a constable by virtue of this Part—
- (a) is additional to powers which the constable has at common law or by virtue of any other enactment, and
 - (b) is not to be taken as affecting those powers.

(2) A constable may if necessary use reasonable force for the purpose of exercising a power conferred on the constable by virtue of this Part.”—(Tom Tugendhat.)

This new clause confers on a constable the power to use reasonable force when exercising a power conferred on the constable by virtue of Part 1.

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.3 pm

The Minister for Security (Tom Tugendhat): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 1—*Offence of failing to declare participation in arrangement required to be registered.*—

“(1) A person who carries out an activity, or arranges for an activity to be carried out, in the United Kingdom pursuant to—

- (a) a foreign activity arrangement required to be registered under section 61(1), or
- (b) a foreign influence arrangement required to be registered under section 64(1)

must declare that they are party to the arrangement, when making a communication to those in section 65(2)(a)(i) to (vi).

(2) A person who breaches the requirement in subsection (1) commits an offence.”

This new clause makes it an offence for a person to engage in activity pursuant to a foreign activity or foreign influence arrangement which is required to be registered, if the person does not declare that they are party to the arrangement when communicating with those in section 65(2)(a)(i) to (vi).

New clause 2—*ffence of carrying out activities under a foreign activity arrangements: Disqualification from Parliament*—

“(1) A person who is a Member of the House of Commons or the House of Lords commits an offence if—

- (a) the person carries out an activity, or arranges for an activity to be carried out, in the United Kingdom pursuant to a foreign activity arrangement, and
- (b) the persons knows, or ought reasonably to know, that they are acting under the direction of a specified person.

(2) A person who is found guilty of an offence under subsection (1), and is a Member of the House of Commons, is disqualified from membership of the House of Commons.

(3) A person who is found guilty of an offence under subsection (1), and is a Member of the House of Lords, is disqualified from sitting or voting in the House of Lords, and sitting or voting in a committee of the House of Lords or a joint committee of both Houses.

(4) In this section, “foreign activity arrangement” has the same meaning as in section 61(2).”

This new clause would automatically disbar Members of the House of Commons and Lords who are found guilty of engaging in an activity pursuant to a foreign activity arrangement, where the person knows, or ought reasonably to know, that they are acting under the direction of a specified person.

New clause 3—Reviews of Parts 1, 4 and 5—

“(1) The operation of Parts 1, 4 and 5 of this Act must be reviewed by a person, or people, appointed by the Secretary of State.

(2) The operation of Part 4 must be reviewed by the person appointed by the Secretary of State under section 36(1) of the Terrorism Act 2006.

(3) The operation of Parts 1 and 5 must be reviewed by either—

(a) the person appointed by the Secretary of State under section 36(1) of the Terrorism Act 2006, or

(b) a different person appointed by the Secretary of State.

(4) Reviews under this section must be carried out in respect of—

(a) the 12-month period beginning with the day on which any section in this Part comes into force, and

(b) each subsequent 12-month period.

(5) Each review under subsection (1) must be completed as soon as reasonably practicable after the period to which it relates.

(6) The person or people mentioned in subsections (2) and (3) must send to the Secretary of State a report on the outcome of each review carried out under subsection (1) as soon as reasonably practicable after completion of the review.

(7) On receiving a report under subsection (6), the Secretary of State must lay a copy of it before Parliament.

(8) Section 36(6) of the Terrorism Act 2006 shall be read such that the “expenses” and “allowances” mentioned therein may include the discharge by the person or people of their functions under this section.”

New clause 4—Reporting on disinformation originating from foreign powers—

“(1) The Secretary of State must appoint a person or body to review the extent of disinformation originating from foreign powers which presents a threat, or potential threat, to national security.

(2) A review under subsection (1) must include an assessment of the extent of foreign interference in elections.

(3) A review under subsection (1) may include—

(a) examining the number and scale of offences committed, and estimating the number and scale of instances where an offence is suspected to have been committed, under—

(i) section 13, where Condition C is met, and

(ii) section 14,

and,

(b) any other matters the person or body considers relevant to the matters mentioned in subsections (1) and (2).

(4) The person or body appointed under subsection (1) may be the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, or another person or body the Secretary of State considers appropriate.

(5) A review must be carried out under this section in respect of—

(a) the 12-month period beginning with the day on which section 13 comes into force, and

(b) each subsequent 12-month period.

(6) Each review under this section must be completed as soon as reasonably practicable after the period to which it relates.

(7) The person or body must send to the Secretary of State a report on the outcome of each review carried out under this section as soon as reasonably practicable after completion of the review.

(8) On receiving a report under subsection (7), the Secretary of State must lay a copy of it before Parliament.

(9) The Secretary of State may pay to the person or body—

(a) expenses incurred in carrying out the functions of the reviewer under this section, and

(b) such allowances as the Secretary of State determines, except where financial provision is already made to the person or body for the discharge of the person or body’s functions, of which this section may form part.”

New clause 5—Proceedings relating to safety or interests of the United Kingdom—

“(1) This section applies where a court is considering proceedings under Part 1 of this Act, where the proceedings involve the safety or interests of the United Kingdom.

(2) In proceedings to which this section applies, the court must take account of how the interests of the Secretary of State or of the Government of the United Kingdom may differ from the interests of the United Kingdom, in order to satisfy itself that the interests of the United Kingdom have been appropriately identified and considered.”

New clause 6—Ministerial conduct—

“(1) This section applies in relation to any Minister of the Crown who engages with, or intends to engage with, or ought reasonably to know that they are about to engage with, a person who is a part of a foreign intelligence service.

(2) A Minister of the Crown may only engage with such a person if either of the following conditions are met—

(a) a senior civil servant is formally present at or party to the engagement, and a formal record of the engagement has been made by the senior civil servant; or

(b) a senior civil servant is not formally present at or party to the engagement, and a formal record of the engagement has not been made by a senior civil servant, but the written consent of the Prime Minister has been sought by the Minister of the Crown, and has been granted and formally recorded in writing.

(3) In this section “engagement” includes meeting in person or via electronic means, and corresponding in writing or via electronic means.”

New clause 7—Requirement to inform public of prohibited places—

“The Secretary of State must by regulations make provision so as to ensure that the public are given sufficient notice—

(a) that a location is a prohibited place within the meaning of section 7;

(b) of the circumstances in which an offence may be committed under sections 4 to 6 in respect of that prohibited place.”

This new clause would place an obligation on the Secretary of State to make regulations providing for the public to be given notice of prohibited places and the conduct which would amount to a criminal offence in relation to them.

New clause 11—Home Office review of the Tier 1 (Investor) visa scheme—

“Within two weeks of the passage of this Act, the Secretary of State must publish any findings of the Home Office review of the Tier 1 (Investor) visa scheme which relate to foreign influence activity.”

New clause 12—Report on actions taken in response to the ISC report on Russia—

“Within six months of the passage of this Act, the Secretary of State must lay before Parliament a report on the effect of the action taken by the Government in response to the recommendations of the report of the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament on Russia (HC 632 of Session 2019–21).”

New clause 13—Ministerial appointments: official advice—

“(1) The Cabinet Secretary must publish a memorandum in respect of any ministerial appointments made by the Prime Minister, where advice or concerns were communicated to the Prime Minister by civil servants that the appointment may be counter to the safety or interests of the United Kingdom.

(2) A memorandum under this section must set out that advice or concerns were communicated to the Prime Minister by civil servants, and in respect of which ministerial appointments.

(3) A memorandum under this section may not include details of the advice or concerns, where the Cabinet Secretary considers that inclusion of those details may be prejudicial to the safety or interests of the United Kingdom.”

New clause 14—Report requirement: Protecting democratic institutions and processes—

“(1) The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament a report, as soon as practicable after the end of—

(a) the period of 12 months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed, and

(b) every subsequent 12-month period,

on his assessment of the impact sections 13 and 14 of this Act have had on protecting the integrity of the UK’s democratic processes.

(2) In this section “democratic processes” includes local democracy.”

Amendment 116, in clause 1, page 1, line 10, after “safety or” insert “critical”.

This amendment seeks to clarify the tests to be met before the offence of obtaining or disclosing protected information is committed.

Amendment 17, page 1, line 15, after “article” insert “with a Government Security Classification of Secret or Top Secret”.

This amendment would confine the offence of obtaining or disclosing protected information to information that has been classified as secret or top secret (rather than to all information access to which is restricted in any way).

Amendment 18, in clause 2, page 2, line 18, at end insert “(ca) the person’s conduct is prejudicial to the safety or interests of the United Kingdom, and”.

This amendment would narrow the scope of the offence of obtaining or disclosing trade secrets so that it applies only to trade secrets that would prejudice the safety or interests of the UK.

Amendment 117, page 3, line 1, after “national” insert “, a UK resident, or a person in the employment of a UK person as defined in paragraphs (b) or (c)”.

Government amendments 40 to 42.

Amendment 19, in clause 3, page 3, line 32, after “Kingdom” insert “which are prejudicial to the safety or interests of the United Kingdom”.

This amendment would narrow the scope of the offence of assisting a foreign intelligence service in respect of activities within the UK so that it applies only to assistance that would prejudice the safety or interests of the UK (rather than to assistance of any kind).

Government amendment 43.

Amendment 119, page 4, line 7, at end insert—

“(aa) with the knowledge and consent of the UK security and intelligence services,”.

This amendment would clarify that activities undertaken with the knowledge and consent of the UK security and intelligence services would not constitute a criminal offence under this clause alone.

Amendment 120, in clause 4, page 5, line 17, at end insert—

“(7) No offence is committed under (1) if the conduct is for the purposes of protest, unless the conduct is prejudicial to the safety of the United Kingdom.”.

This amendment would restrict the circumstances in which access to a prohibited place for the purposes of protest would amount to an offence under this clause.

Amendment 20, in clause 5, page 5, line 25, at end insert—

“(ba) the conduct is prejudicial to the safety or interests of the United Kingdom,”.

This amendment would confine the offence of unauthorised entry etc to a prohibited place so that it applies only to entry etc that is prejudicial to the safety or interests of the UK.

Amendment 133, page 5, line 33, leave out “includes” and insert “may, depending on the circumstances, include”.

This amendment would mean taking a photograph or other recording of a prohibited place was not automatically a criminal offence of inspecting that place, but would depend on the circumstances.

Amendment 21, in clause 6, page 6, line 17, leave out paragraph (c).

This amendment would remove the power of the police to order a person to leave an area “adjacent to” a prohibited place.

Amendment 22, page 6, line 28, after “(2)” insert “, (a)”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 23.

Amendment 23, page 6, line 30, after “Kingdom” insert “, and (b) without prior authorisation by an officer of at least the rank of Inspector, unless obtaining that authorisation is not reasonably practicable”.

This amendment would impose a requirement that a police officer obtains authorisation from a more senior officer before exercising powers under clause 6.

Amendment 24, page 6, line 32 at end insert “which was necessary to protect the safety or interests of the United Kingdom and proportionate to that aim.”

This amendment would narrow the offence of failing to comply with an order made by a police constable in relation to a prohibited place so that it applies only to an order that was necessary and proportionate to protecting the safety or interests of the UK.

Amendment 25, in clause 7, page 6, line 37, after “means” insert “a place, entry to which could pose a risk to the safety or interests of the United Kingdom, and which is”

This amendment would narrow the definition of prohibited place so that it applies only to locations relevant to the safety and interests of the United Kingdom (rather than any Ministry of Defence land).

Government amendments 44 and 45.

Amendment 121, in clause 8, page 8, line 21, leave out “or interests”.

This amendment would restrict the power to designate additional prohibited places by regulation to where it was necessary to protect the safety of the United Kingdom.

Amendment 26, in clause 11, page 10, line 8, leave out paragraph (c).

Government amendments 46 and 47.

Amendment 14, page 20, line 35, leave out clause 27

Government amendments 48 and 49.

Amendment 124, in clause 28, page 21, line 23, at end insert—

“(2A) However, the conduct in question, or a course of conduct of which it forms part, is not to be treated as carried out for or on behalf of a foreign power if financial or other assistance of a foreign power under (2)(c) is provided otherwise than specifically for the conduct or course of conduct.”

This amendment ensures that organisations that receive funding from foreign powers are not guilty of offences under this act if that funding was not for the conduct or course of conduct that would otherwise amount to the offence.

Amendment 30, in clause 30, page 22, line 40, leave out paragraph (c).

This amendment would narrow the definition of foreign power threat activity to remove giving support and assistance (including that unrelated to espionage activity) to a person known or believed to be involved in offences under the Bill (but would retain conduct which facilitates or is intended to facilitate such offending).

Government amendment 50.

Amendment 118, in clause 31, page 23, line 25, at end insert—

““critical interests of the United Kingdom” include security and intelligence, defence, international relations, law and order, public health and economic interests;”.

This amendment seeks to clarify the tests to be met before the offence of obtaining or disclosing protected information is committed.

Amendment 125, in clause 37, page 26, line 25, leave out “reasonably believes” and insert “believes on the balance of probabilities”.

This amendment would apply the usual civil standard of proof in relation to decision to impose Prevention and Investigation Measures.

Amendment 126, in clause 38, page 27, line 35, leave out “four” and insert “two”.

This amendment would mean the Secretary of State could seek to extend a part 2 notice on two occasions rather than four.

Amendment 31, in clause 43, page 30, line 21, leave out from beginning to “before” in line 22 and insert “The chief officer of the appropriate police force must confirm to the Secretary of State that the condition in subsection (2) is satisfied before”.

This amendment, together with amendments 16 to 18, would require the Secretary of State to receive confirmation from the police that prosecution is not realistic before imposing a PIM, rather than requiring only a consultation on the subject.

Amendment 33, page 30, line 28, leave out “The matter is whether there is” and insert “The condition is that there is not”.

Amendment 34, page 31, line 14, leave out “responding to consultation” and insert “providing confirmation”.

Amendment 32, page 31, line 26, leave out “(1) or”.

Amendment 35, in clause 53, page 38, line 13, leave out “this Part” and insert “Part 1 and Part 2”.

This amendment would extend the review function of the Independent Reviewer to cover Part 1 of the Bill in addition to Part 2.

Amendment 3, in clause 58, page 41, line 8, at end insert—

“(2) Within three months of the passing of this Act, the Secretary of State must publish a statement setting out how the Secretary of State intends to exercise the power under this section. The statement must include a list of illustrative examples of the kinds of contracts or other arrangements this power relates to.”

Government amendments 61 and 62.

Amendment 130, in clause 61, page 43, line 19, after “P” insert “, whether directly or through intermediaries”.

This amendment would make clear that those making a foreign activity arrangement via intermediaries, would be required to register the arrangement.

Government motion to transfer subsection (2) of clause 61.

Government amendments 63 to 65.

Government motion to divide clause 61.

Government amendments 66 to 74.

Government motion to transfer subsection (2) of clause 64.

Government amendments 75 to 83.

Government motion to divide clause 64.

Government amendments 84 to 94.

Amendment 15, in clause 68, page 48, line 20, leave out paragraph (b).

Amendment 16, page 48, line 25, leave out paragraph (b).

Government amendments 95 to 101.

Amendment 131, in clause 70, page 51, line 10, at end insert—

“(3A) The information required of the person to whom an information notice is given must be limited to information the Secretary of State deems reasonably necessary to ensure the person is complying with the requirements of this Part.”

This amendment would place restrictions on the type of information the Secretary of State can require under clause 70.

Government amendments 102 to 108.

Amendment 1, in clause 75, page 53, line 39, at end insert—

“(h) an offence under section [Offence of failing to declare participation in arrangement required to be registered] committed in relation to a foreign activity arrangement required to be registered under section 61(1).”.

This amendment is consequential on NC1.

Government amendment 109.

Amendment 2, page 54, line 23, at end insert—

“(h) an offence under section [Offence of failing to declare participation in arrangement required to be registered] committed in relation to a foreign influence arrangement required to be registered under section 64(1).”.

This amendment is consequential on NC1.

Government amendments 110 to 112.

Amendment 8, Page 56, line 4, leave out Clause 79.

Amendment 9, Page 56, line 26, leave out Clause 80.

Amendment 36, in clause 80, page 56, line 31, at end insert—

“(ba) the court is satisfied that any damages awarded to the claimant in those proceedings are likely to be used for the purposes of terrorism,”.

This amendment would remove the duty on the court to consider reducing damages in clause 58, unless the court considered the damages were likely to be used for the purposes of terrorism.

Government amendments 51 to 53.

Amendment 37, page 57, line 18, at end insert “or which it would award under section 8 of that Act had the claim been brought under it.”.

This amendment would prevent the reduction of damages in claims that could have been brought as a human rights claim under the HRA 1998 but were in fact brought on other grounds.

Amendment 10, page 57, line 30, leave out clause 81.

Amendment 11, page 58, line 5, leave out clause 82.

Amendment 12, Page 59, line 10, leave out clause 83.

Amendment 38, Page 59, line 14, leave out clause 84.

This amendment, together with Amendment 39, would remove the proposed limits on access to legal aid for persons with a conviction for a terrorism offence and the consequential power to make information requests related to those limits.

Amendment 5, in clause 84, page 59, line 29, leave out “F” and insert “G”.

Amendment 6, page 60, line 11, at end insert—

“(7A) Condition G is met where the offender is seeking legal aid for the purposes of—

- (a) pursuing a civil order, where the purpose of the order is to protect a victim of domestic abuse, or
- (b) participating in family court proceedings, and where the offender is a victim of domestic abuse.”.

Amendment 7, page 61, line 6, at end insert—

““domestic abuse” has the same meaning as in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021;”

Amendment 39, page 61, line 15, leave out clause 85.

See explanatory statement for Amendment 38.

Government amendment 113.

Government new schedule 1—*Control of a person by a foreign power.*

Government new schedule 2—*Exemptions.*

Amendment 128, schedule 3, page 88, line 31, leave out sub-paragraph (4).

This amendment would prevent a disclosure order from having effect where disclosure is protected by an enactment.

Amendment 129, schedule 4, page 94, line 29, leave out sub-sub-paragraph (b), and insert—

- “(b) there are reasonable grounds for believing that information which may be provided in compliance with a requirement imposed under the order is likely to be of substantial value, whether by itself or with other information, to the investigation; and
- (c) there are reasonable grounds for believing that it is in the public interest for the information to be provided, having regard to the benefit likely to accrue to the investigation if the information is obtained.”

This amendment would require the court to be satisfied of the same tests for customer information notices as set out in relation to disclosure orders in Schedule 3.

Government amendment 54.

Amendment 4, schedule 6, page 100, line 19, at end insert—

“(1A) A place designated by the Secretary of State under sub-paragraph (1) must be subject to an independent inspection by—

- (a) Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary, or
- (b) a different person or body appointed by the Secretary of State.”.

Government amendment 55.

Amendment 27, page 104, line 12, leave out sub-paragraphs (4) and (5).

This amendment would prevent it being permissible to delay informing a named person of an individual’s detention under clause 21, or that individual consulting a solicitor, for the purposes of asset recovery.

Amendment 123, page 112, line 13, leave out from “if” to the end of line 20, and insert “the person has previously been convicted of an offence under this Act.”

This amendment would restrict the circumstances in which fingerprints and samples from someone detained under clause 25 could be retained indefinitely, instead of the usual 3 years under paragraph 20(5) of Schedule 2.

Government amendments 56 and 57.

Amendment 28, page 124, line 13, leave out sub-sub-paragraphs (b) and (c).

This amendment would prevent it being permissible to postpone reviews of detention without warrant on the basis that the review officer is unavailable or, for any other reason, the review is not practicable.

Amendment 127, schedule 7, page 144, line 17, leave out paragraph 12.

This amendment would remove the power for the Secretary of State to impose participation in polygraph sessions as part of provisions in relation to Prevention and Investigation Measures.

Government amendments 58 and 59.

Amendment 13, page 175, line 1, leave out Schedule 13.

Amendment 132, schedule 13, page 176, line 29, leave out “there is a real risk that”.

This amendment would ensure the court was satisfied on the balance of probabilities that damages were to be used for terrorism purposes before frozen funds could be forfeited entirely.

Government amendment 60.

Tom Tugendhat: It is a pleasure to stand before the House today to introduce not just new clause 9, but many other new clauses that I and many others in this House have argued for at different times and in different places.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Plus a few others.

Tom Tugendhat: Plus a few others. So it is a great pleasure to be here today.

May I also place on record my enormous thanks to two right hon. Members—the hon. Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) will smile as I say this—who have done so much to get us to this position today? I refer to my right hon. Friends the Members for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds) and for Stevenage (Stephen McPartland), who have been extremely generous with their time and thoughts, including in private with me as well, in making sure that I am able to answer as many of her questions as I can, although somehow she has exceeded even their magisterial intellect. I am grateful that they have got us to this place, because this Bill is essential for the future defence of our nation.

The reason for that is because, of course, the world has changed. The reality is that national security in this country has changed and evolved in recent years, and the Darwinian challenge between the hunter and the hunted has led us to a position where we need to update not just our techniques, which can be done in private, but sadly our laws, which rightly must be debated in public.

I think we all agree with the core aims of the Bill. The first is to give our law enforcement and intelligence agencies the tools they need to tackle harmful activities in the United Kingdom carried out by, or on behalf of, foreign powers. However, to do that we also need to increase the transparency around those who seek to influence the politics and institutions of the United Kingdom through the foreign influence registration scheme. That is a very welcome addition. I know that many Members here, including those who have been on the Foreign Affairs Committee for the past five years, have called for it at various different points. The Bill has, at its heart, the protection of the national security of this great country that we all serve.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab) *rose*—

Tom Tugendhat: On that, I will give way—not for the last time, I am sure—to the right hon. Member.

Mr Kevan Jones: The Minister talks about Darwinian change, but evolution takes a long time. Many things in the Bill have been kicking around for at least six or seven years, and that includes the issue around the foreign influence registration scheme, which was only put in the Bill at Committee stage after it was omitted on Second Reading; even now, there are amendments to it. Is the Minister satisfied that the Bill—in terms of the major changes that it will achieve—will fulfil its purpose and that it has been properly scrutinised in this House?

Tom Tugendhat: What I am so pleased about with this Bill is that it introduces so many ideas that the right hon. Gentleman and I have discussed in private over many years when I was in a similar position to him—scrutinising a Government. The Bill introduces some of those ideas that, yes, he is right to say, seem to have been introduced quickly, but the reality, as he knows very well, is that they have been discussed slowly. Many aspects of the Bill not only date six or seven years into the past, but update aspects that date a lot further back. Sadly, some of our national security legislation is better placed to hunt those who would send secret notes on pigeons back to Germany than to hunt those sending secret messages through the internet. This is updating quite a lot of laws that date all the way back to the first world war. I am very glad that we are doing it, and I am very glad that the right hon. Gentleman's scrutiny in the Bill Committee has been so rigorous and so onerous.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): My right hon. Friend is right that this is an important step. In particular, he is right about the foreign influence registration scheme, which has long been called for, including by the Intelligence and Security Committee, of which I am a member. He will also know that, because we have yet to discuss that in any detail, there may be confusion about the primary and secondary tiers—in other words, those things that are designated as being of more profound importance than these other things. Would it be helpful if he were to write to the ISC, setting out how he thinks they would work in practice, given that we understand that the secondary tier will be introduced by secondary legislation?

Tom Tugendhat: My right hon. Friend is right. I would be very happy to write to him. I can summarise it now by saying that the primary tier is that connected to political activity. Anybody from any foreign country who wishes to influence this House, this Parliament, any Members here, or indeed any political outcome, would be looking at the primary tier. That is the basic level, and it involves a registration on a website so that we can all know who has taken payment for what—which piper has been paid and by whom.

The enhanced registration is different and requires registration for a wider range of activities, but those depend on the specific foreign power and, indeed, the entity or operation within it. That is a different matter, and that will be down to the Secretary of State looking at what is reasonably necessary in order to protect the safety and interests of the United Kingdom—that is the enhanced tier, as we are calling it. That is the summary, but I will be happy to write to the ISC.

Chris Bryant: The Minister said that once somebody has registered on a website, we will all be able to see it. That may be true if we knew that that was where we had to look to check whether somebody coming in through the door, sending us a letter or inviting us to dinner as an MP was actually somebody who was working for a foreign power. Would it not be far more sensible, once somebody has registered, to require them to declare to any Minister, MP or Member of the House of Lords that that is what they were doing, so that there is a degree of protection for this House?

Tom Tugendhat: The hon. Member makes a very good point: there are many areas in which the individual concerned should certainly be doing the responsible thing and advertising it. The basis of this has to be a balance, so requiring people to register is, I think, a very good start. We need to take forward some of the recommendations that the hon. Member has made and the thoughts he has expressed, because he is absolutely right that transparency in all things is important.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): The Minister has accurately described what the two different tiers of the FIRS scheme will do, but it is difficult to understand why the registration of harmful activity outside of political influencing, such as covertly acting as an intelligence officer, only applies to a foreign power that is set out in secondary legislation. Surely, if that activity is wrong, it is wrong whether the country is on an as-yet-undefined list or not.

Tom Tugendhat: I think the right hon. Member will find that espionage is illegal in the United Kingdom, whoever is carrying it out.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

Tom Tugendhat: I will.

Dr Lewis: The Minister is very forbearing, and I am glad of the opportunity to warmly congratulate him on his appointment and thank him for the positive way in which he has been reaching out to the ISC.

On the question of the second tier, there appears to be some sort of discrimination between countries that are friendly and those that are hostile, and—unless I misunderstand the Bill—only the hostile ones are going to appear in the secondary designation. If that is the case, could it not lead to some anomalous situations when diplomatic relations improve with a country, so we take it off the second tier, or they worsen and we put it on? There is bound to be a time lag in that sort of thing, so how practical is the second tier scheme as it is currently constituted?

Tom Tugendhat: My right hon. Friend makes a valid point. The challenge that we have, as he knows very well, is how we balance the responsibility to inform and how wide we go. I have spoken about this issue with my right hon. Friend in the past, and his judgment on this is something I have always valued, so it has always been very important to me that we share a view on it. However, I think we all agree that where a foreign power is seeking to influence our political life in the broadest sense, we should know about it, whoever is exercising that influence.

[Tom Tugendhat]

I take my right hon. Friend's point about enhanced registration. Sadly, there is inherently a delay between the way that life changes and the response of Government—that is the reality of existence—but it is important for us to recognise that some countries and entities do require enhanced awareness. That is why it is important for us to have an extra tier.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): Will the Minister give way on that point?

Tom Tugendhat: This will be the last time I give way for now.

Maria Eagle: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. He has talked about the challenges and the enhanced part of the scheme. Will it not be a challenge to use the scheme in practice, because he has to put the country concerned into secondary legislation? Is that not going to be diplomatically very difficult to do? Is the reality not that the complex way in which the Government have set out the scheme, with little scrutiny possible from either this Chamber or Committees, means that in practice it is not going to be used at all?

Tom Tugendhat: I think the hon. Lady knows me well enough to know that, having been sanctioned by three countries now, it is unlikely that I will be reticent in identifying those that I think are threats to the United Kingdom.

Chris Bryant: The right hon. Gentleman might not be in the job.

Tom Tugendhat: I am very confident that others will also be bold on His Majesty's behalf. Whoever is fortunate enough to be representing His Majesty in the Home Office will be able to conduct those offices in the good fashion that people expect. [Interruption.] I will move on.

The core of the Bill is, of course, national security and our intelligence services, building on the work they have done to enable us to grow in confidence and prosperity. They have provided the security apparatus that allows freedom beneath and around it. That is an extraordinary luxury and a blessing that this country has been able to enjoy for many years and generations because of the courage and intellect of so many people. They require tools to conduct those tasks, and I am delighted that the Bill will sharpen some of those tools.

4.15 pm

I am very glad that the twofold nature of the foreign influence registration scheme has now been set out—we are introducing something that other countries introduced a number of years ago—and that we are ensuring that we keep our politics and those who influence our country open and transparent, not silenced, so that we know who is actually conducting influence operations in our country and trying to shape our public debate. It is important that we support those measures. I am very glad that members of the Bill Committee, many of whom are here on both sides of the House, spoke out in favour of many aspects of the measures, and have supported the Government with new ideas and different ways of thinking, so that we have been able to listen and adapt.

As Members will know, I have listened to every view that has been raised across the House, and I am very pleased to say that we have come, I think, to a Bill that works. We have a Bill that can be sent and introduced to the other place, ready to then deliver for our agencies and those who keep us safe.

Mr Kevan Jones: As my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) said, we had four Ministers in the Bill Committee. Yes, the Minister has listened, but nothing in the Bill has changed. It is still a mess, and that goes back to the fundamental point about not including the Security Service Act 1989 in the reform that is needed. Let me tell the Minister now: the lack of scrutiny in this House means that the Bill will be absolutely torn to shreds in the other place.

Tom Tugendhat: The right hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to hear that we disagree on that element, but it has been a great pleasure to work on the Bill with him and with many others in the Chamber, and to hear their comments and criticisms. There are many other supplementary areas that I would like to work on in different places at different times, but the Bill answers the essential need that we have now, which is to update our national security legislation to keep the country safe and defend our people, and to ensure that those who have the courage, integrity and wisdom to keep us all safe have the tools at their disposal to do so.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. We have already had four points of order, and we have limited time, so I ask Members to please be mindful of the length of their contributions so that we can get as many people in as we possibly can.

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): It is a pleasure to be back in the Chamber at the Report stage of this hugely important piece of legislation. Bill Committee colleagues will join me in saying that it was not straightforward, for all the reasons that were highlighted in the multiple points of order. The Committee had no less than four Ministers and three Government Whips, and was forced to adjourn twice. Since Second Reading, the Bill has been the responsibility of three different Home Secretaries in—remarkably—the Governments of three different Prime Ministers.

We got off to a shaky start on the first day of the Bill Committee when the Whip, the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann), who I am pleased has joined us this afternoon, was asked to act up as a Minister only minutes before the start. On one day, the Committee had to be adjourned because the second Minister was missing in action—the circumstances are still a mystery to this day. It was something of a relief, then, when the current Minister took office and we could turn to the serious detail of scrutinising and delivering long overdue and incredibly necessary national security legislation.

As we have said before, many of the new measures in the Bill have been born out of recommendations in the Intelligence and Security Committee's 2020 Russia report and in the Law Commission's "Protection of Official Data" report. With those solid foundations, we have been keen to work with Government to move the legislation forward and close the gaps in our defences. That could not be more timely in the light of stark warnings given

by the director general of MI5 today, including about the fact that there have been at least 10 attempts to kidnap or even kill UK-based critics of the Iranian regime since January of this year.

That is not to say that we do not have some outstanding concerns about the detail of the provisions. In speaking to all the amendments grouped with new clause 9, I turn first to amendment 14, which was tabled by the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) and my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis). I will spend some time discussing the detail of this amendment, because it is so important.

The original clause 23—now clause 27—was a big focus for hon. Members on both sides of the House on Second Reading. Crucially, it did not have the support of Opposition members of the Intelligence and Security Committee, which has statutory responsibility for oversight of the UK intelligence community. We will always look to work with the intelligence services to find solutions to any barriers they face in undertaking their invaluable work to keep the UK safe. As things stand, however, we have been unable to get an operational understanding of why the clause is necessary.

The security services have told me directly why they believe that they need clause 27. They say that schedule 4 to the Serious Crime Act 2007 allows for a risk of liability to individuals conducting their proper functions on behalf of the UK intelligence community, and that an offence can arise when support—for example, intelligence shared in good faith—later makes a small or indirect contribution to unlawful activity by an international partner. The security services are keen to convey that their caution in this regard is having an operational impact, which requires resolution. We are sympathetic to that view; we recognise that for perhaps quite junior members of staff to face that burden of potential liability when carrying out their proper functions under instruction does not feel quite right. However, we have sought throughout the process to find a way through that does not involve what feels like gold-plating of exemptions for the security services, which could erode entirely appropriate safeguards and due diligence when considering the risks and consequences of sharing information with partners.

As the Minister knows, there is a reasonableness defence under section 50 of the Serious Crime Act, which recognises that there may be occasions when it can be shown that an individual's actions were justified in the circumstances. Of course, a prosecution would also have to be deemed to be in the public interest. On further probing of these defences, it seems that it is not the case that the reasonableness defence is not strong enough; rather, it is untested, as no such case has been brought. We do not believe that the fact that an apparently robust defence is untested makes a strong enough case for the proposals in clause 27. We hope that properly authorised activity to protect national security should and would be interpreted as reasonable.

We have sought legal advice, including from a King's counsel who undertakes a great deal of work in the Investigatory Powers Tribunal, and engaged with a range of stakeholders who feel genuinely involved in this space. Given that we already have section 7 of the Intelligence Services Act 1994, which allows the Secretary of State to give immunity from civil or criminal liability for pre-authorised crimes abroad, why do we need the changes

proposed in clause 27? Crucially, the existing scheme requires the UK intelligence community to secure permission in advance from the Secretary of State, requiring the Secretary of State's personal approval, with safeguards in the decision-making process and oversight by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner, who is a senior judge. None of those safeguards are present in clause 27; it simply removes the relevant criminal liability. There would be no need to go to a Minister for approval; there would be no warrant for the Investigatory Powers Commissioner to consider.

Thirdly—the Minister and I have debated this—the Bill as drafted diminishes the role of a Minister in decision-making and accountability structures. Ministers will no longer need to make the difficult judgement, reviewed by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner, of whether to grant an authorisation under section 7 of the Intelligence Services Act. The Government have been keen to stress their commitment to the Fulford principles—“The Principles relating to the detention and interviewing of detainees overseas and the passing and receipt of intelligence relating to detainees”, making it clear that:

“The UK Government does not participate in, solicit, encourage or condone unlawful killing, the use of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment...or extraordinary rendition. In no circumstance will UK personnel ever take action amounting to torture, unlawful killing, extraordinary rendition, or CIDT.”

However, those commitments are not on the face of the Bill.

With the understanding that there will be operational elements to these provisions, the details of which have not been and cannot be shared, we have pushed for engagement with the ISC, which is entirely the right place for those operational examples to be considered further. Were ISC members to be convinced of the case for clause 27, we might be in a different place. On that basis, we cannot support clause 27 and will vote for it to be deleted by amendment 14.

On a similar point, although we welcome much of the Bill, it is right that any provisions that include new and substantial powers are constantly evaluated for their efficacy and proportionality. Clause 53 recognises that.

Sir John Hayes: Efficacy and proportionality are the twin guarantees that underpin all security legislation and activity, as the hon. Lady is aware, but if anything, clause 13, for example, should go further than it currently does. She will know that that clause is built on the idea of intention—that people must intend to do harm—but people should know that they are likely to do harm if they act recklessly, and the Bill could be expanded in that direction. There is an unholy trinity of anarchists, liberals and Bolsheviks who oppose all legislation of this kind, but if anything, this legislation should be warmly welcomed and go further than it does.

Holly Lynch: I am grateful for the intervention. The points that I am about to make about the value and role of an independent reviewer of this legislation relate to how, if some of the thresholds are not in the right place, such a reviewer can not only be both a check and a balance on the powers but make recommendations for going further in the legislation if we find that there is an operational case for doing so. That is the sensible and constructive point that the right hon. Gentleman knows I am making.

[Holly Lynch]

Clause 53 recognises the need for evaluation but deems only part 2 of the Bill to be necessary for review by an independent reviewer and fails to be explicit about who that independent reviewer will be. The Minister has been unable to confirm who will perform this oversight function, which we believe is integral to finding the appropriate balance of powers and freedoms. The scrutiny of terrorism legislation provided by Jonathan Hall KC has been invaluable. The independent reviewer of terrorism legislation function has identified weaknesses in terrorism legislation and highlighted areas where stronger safeguards are needed, as well as providing crucial checks and balances on the powers.

When he gave evidence to the Bill Committee, I asked Jonathan Hall whether there is a logic to his office taking on the additional responsibilities and whether he had the capacity to undertake that work. He said:

“My answer is that I think it actually is quite a good fit for the reviewer’s job, and I think it probably is right that the person who does the independent review of terrorism legislation should also do the state threats legislation.”—[*Official Report, National Security Public Bill Committee*, 7 July 2022; c. 6, Q4.].

With the highest regard for Jonathan Hall, we recognise the merit in adding to his remit the responsibilities created by clause 53. We can see the benefit of a coherent, joined-up approach to assessing both counter-terrorism and state threat legislation.

That said, were the Minister to make a case for the creation of a brand-new position, exclusively for the independent review of laws concerning state threats, we would certainly be open to that. We are, though, now reaching the Bill’s final Commons stages, and we are very much overdue an agreement that the role will begin immediately once the Bill is enacted, clarity on who will undertake the work, and a commitment that all the new provisions in the Bill will be considered in an annual review. Successive Ministers have understood the point and committed to sorting the situation out, but here we are with no progress and nothing to show for it on the face of the Bill, so we are keen to push new clause 3 to a vote.

In Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) made a powerful case for the provisions in amendment 6, which sits alongside paving amendments 5 and 7. We made clear our concerns about part 4 of the Bill in the Committee. The restrictions on access to civil legal aid stand to do more harm than good if we do not recognise the problems in such an approach.

Let us consider the types of civil cases that legal aid might be needed for. People find themselves in civil and family court proceedings and in need of legal aid support for a multitude of reasons, including housing issues, debt problems and domestic abuse. For example, a victim of domestic abuse might need legal aid to help her to seek an injunction against her abuser. Non-molestation orders protect a victim or their child from being harmed or threatened by their abuser, while occupation orders decide who can live in a family home or enter the surrounding area. Such injunctions protect victims and children in particular. They save women’s lives. They are legal measures that protect women from violence.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley made the powerful point in Committee, based on her years of working in the sector, that it is easy to say that someone who has engaged in that type of criminality is not deserving of legal aid, but what if a woman’s abuser is a terrorist? The nature of terrorist offenders means that that is too often the case.

4.30 pm

Mr Kevan Jones: My hon. Friend is right that we discussed the issue in detail in Committee. Clearly, the only reason is seen to be that someone has been involved in terrorism. Does she agree, however, that there are many other people, such as rapists, paedophiles and murderers, of whom we also have a low opinion? The logical conclusion is surely that, if we restrict it in one area, we should restrict it for everyone.

Holly Lynch: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for making that powerful point. He is absolutely right that there is a distinct lack of consistency. If we are singling out specific criminal offences that we do not like, there is more that we could do to ensure that there is some consistency in that approach. There will be vulnerable people here who we want to check are not falling through the gaps, which would make the situation worse for us all.

What if a woman’s abuser is a terrorist? As I said, the nature of terrorist offenders means that that is often the case. For some of the lower-level offences covered by clauses 84 to 85—for example, that someone made a phone call on behalf of an abuser—it is easy for somebody to say, “I wouldn’t do that, because I’m not a terrorist,” but we all might if we were living in a household where we were terrorised. The danger is that more women in such cases will end up stuck with a terrorist making them be a terrorist, rather than being able to escape them. That is why we feel strongly that the Government should adopt amendment 6.

On some other changes that we would like to see, we have tabled new clauses 5 and 6. They were drafted in the wake of the revelations that the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), when he was the Foreign Secretary, met former KGB officer Alexander Lebedev without officials or security at the height of the Salisbury poisoning case in 2018. That was immediately after the then Foreign Secretary had attended a meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers at NATO headquarters in Brussels to discuss the collective response to Russia’s use of Novichok on UK soil. We still have a series of questions about that encounter, not least who his guest was at that party and why we have not taken steps to sanction Alexander Lebedev, given the assessment of our Five Eyes partner Canada, which has sanctioned him.

Having made the case in Committee for new clauses 5 and 6, which both seek to put safeguards in place to prevent that type of security breach ever happening again, the Minister was keen to stress that he was not going to seek to defend the Administration of the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip, as if that time had passed and there was no need for any further changes to the law in this regard. When that exchange happened on the Tuesday, little did the Minister or I know that by the Thursday, remarkably, the right hon. Gentleman would be launching his campaign to come

back as Prime Minister. None of us could have foreseen that, which is one more reason why I stress that the clauses would complement the Bill.

I appreciate that new clause 8, tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), has been deemed to be out of scope of today's debate, but I remind the Minister of the remarks of the then Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel), on Second Reading:

"We are not shy of the issue and are certainly not ignoring it, but it is important that we focus on ensuring that individuals can make disclosures safely, which means protecting them through safeguards and proper routes. That work is still under way, and we need to go through it in the right way."—[*Official Report*, 6 June 2022; Vol. 715, c. 571.]

We understand that the Home Office has engaged with trusted partners on what options look like in this space. Once again, we are all waiting for further detail on that front.

I now turn to the plethora of Government amendments. Frankly, late in the day additions to the Bill have plagued its scrutiny and Report stage is no different, as many right hon. and hon. Members have already said. I am pleased that the Government heard our concerns about places of detention and have clarified that only places "owned or controlled by a police force"

can be used as places of detention, which ensures that they will be subject to proper inspection regimes. We are satisfied that the Government have listened, so our amendment 4 is no longer necessary; Government amendment 54 brings those places within the scope of an existing inspection regime.

As the Minister knows, there are still outstanding concerns about the broad nature of clauses 79 to 83 in part 4. We welcome Government amendment 51, however, which seeks to tighten the definition of those in scope of clauses 79 to 83 to those involved in "terrorist wrongdoing", but that will warrant further exploration in the other place.

On Government amendment 60, like a number of modern slavery charities—the point has already been made by the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith)—we are really concerned about the lateness of this addition to the Bill and the scrutiny that has been avoided by adding it to the Bill at the final Commons stages. Justice and Care, which does outstanding work in placing victim navigators within police forces up and down the country, was keen to stress that there has not been any consultation with modern slavery charities concerned that they, like us, have had insufficient time to fully consider the possible impact on modern slavery victims. I could have asked the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner for their views, except there isn't one. The Government have failed to appoint a new commissioner since Dame Sara left office in April, so I take this opportunity to suggest that the Government address that now as an urgent priority. I have to ask the Minister to outline the rationale for this move, and I want to be clear just how unhappy we are with this provision at such a late stage.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), who is so often my partner in crime fighting, for his amendments. I know he has a great deal of understanding in this area that has shaped the detail of his amendments, so I hope the Government are reflecting carefully on those.

Once again, we have sought at every stage and with every Minister to engage on the Bill constructively. We know that our police forces and security services need the provisions in the Bill to be able to keep us safe from the hostile state threats that are increasingly testing the UK's resilience. I hope the Minister, who to his credit had to pick up the Bill in the final stages of the Bill Committee, hears our outstanding concerns today, recognises the spirit in which we strive to find solutions and continues to work with us towards a robust and proportionate Bill we can all have confidence in.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): I welcome the Minister to his post. He is very much a round peg in a round hole—despite my historic critique of the Home Office, that is meant as a compliment. I thank him for seeing me and my colleague, the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis), on the amendment the other day. He will be unsurprised that he did not persuade me, but I thank him for the time in any event. In view of the short time, I will focus mostly on amendment 14, which I hope we will press to a vote. It is in my name and that of the hon. and gallant Member for Bromley—not Bromley, but Barnsley Central; not quite Bromley. That amendment strikes out clause 27.

A decade and a half ago, the British public were shocked to hear stories of British complicity in American and other countries' acts of kidnap, rendition, torture and assassination, typically but not always by drone strikes, with the collateral damage that that entailed. Collateral damage in this context is a euphemism for the deaths of innocent women and children who happen to be standing near the original target. I use this stark language to make plain the potential consequences of what might seem like bland legalistic language in the Bill.

The legal basis of those actions—I almost said atrocities, but of those actions—was the Intelligence Services Act 1994, when we first recognised the operation of the Secret Intelligence Service. Most notably, it inserted the melodramatically named "007 clause"—section 7—which empowered Ministers to authorise criminal behaviour overseas. I was one of the Ministers who took that Bill through the House. We Ministers were briefed very firmly that, in practice, that section would authorise bugging, burglary and blackmail—the normal behaviour of intelligence agencies seeking to penetrate enemy states and organisations—not kidnap, not torture and most certainly not a licence to kill.

We the Ministers on that Bill gave our word to the House that that was what it was for, but a decade later section 7 was used to authorise the enabling of rendition, torture and quite possibly assassination as well. We know the names of several victims of UK complicity: Binyam Mohamed, Abdel Hakim Belhaj, Fatima Boudchar, his wife, and Rangzieb Ahmed, to name just a few.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): It is worth reflecting and placing back on the record that we know the names of Belhaj and Boudchar only because somebody happened to find the papers unattended after the fall of Gaddafi. That was the only way that the truth about their cases came into the public domain.

Mr Davis: The right hon. Gentleman is right, and it is also true that we found out about Binyam Mohamed only because of extended legal cases in the courts,

[Mr David Davis]

which were resisted by the agencies at every turn. We know about Rangzieb Ahmed only because I got access to the in-camera papers. So this is a general problem and I will come back to that. A most recent example is Jagtar Singh Johal, who alleges that he was tortured by Indian authorities and was detained, we believe, as a result of British intelligence. Again, we know about that only because we could spot the case inside one of the commissioner's reports. Accordingly, exactly because of that, this is literally the tip of the iceberg.

The Intelligence and Security Committee report on detainee mistreatment found 232 cases where UK personnel “continued to supply questions or intelligence”

to other intelligence services, after they

“knew or suspected that the detainee had been or was being mistreated.”

As I said, I have seen in-camera evidence that showed quite how deliberate some of those decisions were—absolutely in the knowledge that they would be used in the process of torture. That was done rather more broadly, even when the intelligence services did not know at all where the detainee was being held, or even whether they were being held legally or not. Those are the consequences of vague legislation that awarded too much power to the authorities.

We might therefore expect clause 27 to tighten up over-loose legislation to make Ministers, officials and agents more conscious of their responsibilities, not less. Instead, it does the exact opposite. Clause 27 would provide an exemption to schedule 4 of the Serious Crime Act 2007. Schedule 4 sets out the circumstances in which assisting and encouraging a crime that occurs overseas is still a criminal offence. Clause 27 means that it would no longer be an offence to assist a crime overseas where someone's behaviour is necessary for

“the proper exercise of any function of the Security Service, Secret Intelligence Service or GCHQ or...the armed forces.”

In plain English, that would effectively insulate Ministers and officials from responsibility for assisting or encouraging heinous overseas crimes.

To see the potential impact of that, consider the case of Abdel Hakim Belhaj. Mr Belhaj, a Libyan dissident living in exile, was detained and subsequently tortured in both Thailand and Libya. It later emerged that UK information sharing had contributed to his detention and rendition. After years of litigation and wrangling, the Prime Minister wrote a letter of apology to Mr Belhaj, and the Government admitted responsibility for the role that UK intelligence played in his rendition. That was a civil rather than a criminal case, but if officials are certain that they will not face any criminal liability for assisting torture and other serious crimes abroad, reckless information sharing of the kind seen in Mr Belhaj's case will occur more frequently and with more impunity.

I understand that one reason for the change in the clause is apparently to allow the easier transfer of bulk data. That is an especially risky activity to which to give legal cover. The transfer of bulk data is a euphemism for saying that we give the Americans—principally—so much data that we do not have time to check it all. That is it in a nutshell. As Edward Snowden revealed, that has historically amounted to unimaginably vast quantities of data, of course about suspects, but also about innocent

people. Because of the high level of secrecy that applies to current bulk data issues, I have no current UK example to hand, but I can exemplify this by outlining the behaviour of our closest ally, and the principal recipient of bulk data, the United States.

The greatly respected President of the USA, Mr Barack Obama, used to go to the White House Situation Room on a Tuesday once a month to authorise a kill list—20 people who were going to be assassinated by the United States and who were perceived to be its enemies; typically, al-Qaeda officials and the like. President Obama talked proudly of how the best technology—artificial intelligence, algorithms and, crucially, bulk data—was being used to identify targets.

However, that comes with enormous risks, most plainly shown by the case of Ahmad Zaidan, who was selected for targeting by the US National Security Agency based on algorithms using bulk data. Fortunately, he was not assassinated. I say “fortunately” because there had been analysis of his telephone contacts and he had talked to Osama bin Laden and all the al-Qaeda high command, but, before the drone strike was organised, it was suddenly realised that he was the Pakistan office head of Al Jazeera. The analysis had thrown up an innocent man who could have been assassinated.

That is why we must be careful about what is handed over without knowledge of the bulk data. If we give greater legal cover to officials sending bulk data to other countries, cases of bulk data being used in the commission of serious crimes abroad—even against innocent people—will happen more frequently.

4.45 pm

The powers given by the so-called “007 clause” are already too loose. Further loosening of the powers of the security and intelligence services could lead to further mistakes of execution and policy. Even slight carve-outs could lead to major problems. Under clause 27, the intelligence services or armed forces would be exempted if they are carrying out their proper function, but it is not clear what that will mean in practice. I have probably been one of the major critics in this House of torture and rendition, but I never believed that our officials were motivated by anything other than patriotic duty. I knew a large number of them, including the Ministers and senior officials involved, and they were not psychopaths. They thought that they were protecting our country and our national security. They thought that they were carrying out their proper function. However, intending to do good does not make evil right, and that is what happened. It has undermined both the liberty and the honour of our nation. In the week after Remembrance Sunday, we should remember that.

In the law, there is already a defence of acting reasonably. There is no obvious reason to go further than that. The dangers of doing so are stark; I hope that I have exemplified them. Instead, clause 27 creates an unnecessary carve-out for officials and Ministers. How can we reasonably criticise Saudi Arabia or Russia when they carry out foreign assassinations if they can point to our creating a law that allows us to do the same? For that reason, and that reason alone, I stress that I want the House to strike down the clause.

We are short on time, so I will talk only to amendment 12, which would take out clause 83. That clause will allow the courts to reduce damages paid to people who have

suffered as a result of a crime—maybe torture—carried out by us. Again, it is, along with all the reductions of damages proposals, unnecessary. I will give not my view but that of the Government's own independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, Jonathan Hall KC. First, he said that, given the existing legislation, why do we need anything else? Secondly, he said that the new provisions “introduce a lower threshold than under the 2001 Act”

and that the lower threshold for final deprivation of property is “novel”—by that, he means that it is dangerous. Finally, he said that the courts will already give “appropriate respect” to the views of the Government, so why do we need to go further?

Much of the Bill is important and necessary, but it is incredibly important that we learn from our own history, and in the last 20 years that history has been tragic. We should learn not to repeat that tragedy.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I will now announce the results of the ballot held today for the election of the Chairs of the Education Committee and the Transport Committee. Due to the compressed time in this Report stage, I will not take any points of order until just before the Adjournment at the end of business today. I hope everybody will be happy with that.

In the Education Committee Chair election, 452 votes were cast, one of which was invalid. The counting went to two rounds. There were 436 active votes in the second round, excluding those ballot papers whose preferences had been exhausted. The quota to be reached was therefore 219 votes. Mr Robin Walker was elected Chair with 228 votes.

In the Transport Committee Chair election, 448 votes were cast, none of which were invalid. The counting went to five rounds. There were 369 active votes in the final round, excluding those ballot papers whose preferences had been exhausted. The quota to be reached was therefore 185 votes. Iain Stewart was elected Chair with 192 votes.

Both Chairs will take up their posts immediately. I congratulate Mr Robin Walker and Iain Stewart on their election. The results of both counts under the alternative vote system will be made available as soon as possible in the Vote Office and published on the internet. Congratulations once again.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis). He has our full support, both in relation to amendment 14 and to what he said about clause 83.

A Bill of this nature is absolutely necessary and overdue, but I share the concerns of colleagues about the amount of time provided for debate and scrutiny. So short of time do we appear to be that the Minister, much as I respect and like him, did not actually even seem to speak about any of the amendments he has tabled today, including Government amendment 60, which is, frankly, absolutely outrageous, but I will come on to that shortly. It is essential, yes, that we update our espionage laws, but it is also essential that we update them correctly. If we do not do it correctly then: first, we risk severely criminalising behaviour that was not

intended to be criminalised; secondly, we leave loopholes to be exploited by those who mean us harm; and thirdly, we confer powers way beyond what is reasonable or required. Our amendments seek to address all three dangers.

First, we have concerns about behaviour that should not be caught in the provisions. We have concerns about the impact of the legislation on protesters, journalists, non-governmental organisations, whistleblowers, those acting in the public interest and, now, victims of trafficking. In some cases, that is because of how some of the specific offences have been framed. For example, by catching someone who might

“approach or be in the vicinity of”

a prohibited place, clause 4 risks seriously criminalising protesters at Faslane for example, assuming the Government still consider nuclear weapons as essential to the

“safety or interests of the United Kingdom”.

Similarly, the National Union of Journalists is concerned that clause 5 risks a chilling effect on its photographers by criminalising any photo of a prohibited place as “inspecting” it. We tabled amendment 120 to protect protesters who are simply in the vicinity of a prohibited place, and amendment 133 to ensure that taking a photograph of a prohibited place is not automatically considered an inspection of it and therefore an offence.

Other groups risk being caught in the Bill, because some of the overarching terms and the framework for deciding when there is foreign influence is perhaps not as tightly drafted as it should be. For example, the very important notion of the

“interests of the United Kingdom”

is central to quite a few offences, yet that is a nebulous concept and appears to be whatever the Government of the day choose it to be. Depending on which day of the week it is and which Prime Minister is in office, fracking might be something the Government think is in the

“interests of the United Kingdom”.

That is an unsatisfactory way to describe a criminal offence, so we have offered a way to try to fix it. Amendments 116 and 118 list specific critical interests, above day-to-day political agendas of the Government, which need protecting. The Minister complained in Committee that the list was not long enough, so we added the ones he complained were missing. It is important to say again that the reason why we included those particular interests is that we are mirroring a scheme under the Official Secrets Act 1989, where specific interests requiring protection are set out: security and intelligence, defence, international relations and crime. The key point is that

“interests of the United Kingdom”

is too broad and too wishy-washy.

We also have concerns about the “foreign power condition”, which is pivotal to deciding whether behaviour is caught by some of the new offences. In particular, as we have heard, there are many NGOs and other institutions with financial links to other Governments. That is why we tabled what is now amendment 124 in Committee to propose that the condition is made out only where the finance was specifically for the act that will be criminalised. However, we welcome Government amendments 48 and 49, which aim to address a similar problem.

[Stuart C. McDonald]

Ultimately, like others, I think that the best answer to all these questions is not to make various tweaks here and there. If anything, our scrutiny of the Bill has convinced us more than ever of the need for an overarching public interest defence. We share the regret that we will not have that chance today.

Finally on this group of amendments, we also need to worry about trafficking victims who could be prosecuted as spies or foreign agents. I agree that it is outrageous for the Government to have introduced amendment 60 less than one week before the final stages of the Bill without explanation or evidence. Frankly, I dread the modern slavery legislation that seems to be coming down the track if this is a foretaste of it. People trafficked, enslaved and coerced into activities under this Bill, such as photographing a prohibited site or stealing information, could be punished as though they are guilty of espionage.

I alerted various trafficking charities and experts to the amendment on Monday. They were all completely and utterly unaware of it and certainly had not been consulted on it, despite some of those organisations being on Home Office working groups and the like. They have a million questions to ask about it. Frankly, I am so irritated about how the amendment has been sprung on us that I am absolutely determined that we have the chance to vote on it this evening.

Turning to the loopholes for those who would seek to harm us, I will mention a couple of amendments. On clause 2, on the theft of intellectual property and so on, we queried why that should be an offence only outside the UK in very limited circumstances, even though UK trade secrets were being protected and stolen under the offence. We tabled amendment 117 to ensure that there is also an offence not just when a UK citizen is a victim, but when a UK resident or person in the employment of a UK person is. Government amendment 40 addresses that point insofar as people who live in the UK, but it does not cover employees.

Most significantly, we worry about the rules on registration in relation to the foreign influence registration scheme. If a specified Government seek to direct activities directly in the UK, the operation of the foreign activity regime seems clear. However, it is hard to imagine that that is how things will generally operate. Surely intermediaries will be used much more often. If that intermediary is in the UK, again, the scheme should work, but what if the intermediary is still in a specified country? In theory, it seems as though the intermediary will be under an obligation to register the agreement, but that will not happen. Meanwhile, those doing the activities in the UK seem to have no obligation to register anything, as they have no direct agreement with the specified Government. That seems a possibly significant loophole, so we tabled amendment 130 to flag up the issue of how we deal with intermediaries.

Thirdly and lastly, let me turn to amendments that seem to grant excessive powers to the Government. Amendment 121 places restrictions on the additional sites that the Home Secretary can deem to be prohibited. Prohibited places have always previously related to security, so we think that new sites should also relate to security and that the nebulous concept of “interest” should not be enough to justify allowing a Home Secretary to add extensively to that list.

Clause 70, which is part of the registration scheme, creates ludicrously broadly drafted powers for the Secretary of State to ask for pretty much any information that she wants from any body or organisation that is or should be registering a scheme. That will be a huge number of bodies. However, if we look at clause 70, we see that there is no limit on the type of information that can be requested or the purpose of the request. There is no means to challenge or appeal against a notice. In Committee, the Minister said that the clause’s purpose was to allow the Home Secretary to seek such information as is necessary to make sure that people comply with the registration requirement. None of that is in the Bill, however, so amendment 131 would put that restriction in it. It is the bare minimum protection that we require.

The major overreach has been described by the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden: clause 27’s carve-out for the security services in relation to the Serious Crime Act. I echo what the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch), said. We approached this with an open mind. Officials and staff have been successful in persuading us of the need for many parts of the Bill, but not here. As was remarked on Second Reading, other protections are in place. I have not heard any suggestion that members of the Intelligence and Security Committee have been persuaded by the services, so we, too, remain concerned that the proposal provides an enormous and unwarranted protection from prosecution, even where Ministers or officials provide information that leads to torture overseas.

The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden has also addressed the powers provided to courts in relation to the award of damages, which rather stink of Ministry of Justice virtue signalling and politics. There are already powers to deal with those dangers, as the Minister sort of accepted today in his letter to members of the Bill Committee. Amendment 132, which is directly informed by the comments of Jonathan Hall KC, the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, would at least mean that there has to be proof on the balance of probabilities before damages can be permanently confiscated—a modest proposal, and one that the right hon. Member has advocated. We are also sympathetic to the right hon. Member’s amendments to take the relevant provisions out altogether.

The Bill’s legal aid provisions are, frankly, utterly farcical. It is the criminal justice system that should be used to punish people, not the civil justice system. Our amendments 125 to 127 would clip the wings of the state threat prevention and investigation measures by ensuring that the normal civil test applies before they can be imposed, by reducing the number of times they can be extended, and by taking out provision for polygraph testing.

5 pm

The powers to retain samples obtained after arrest under clause 25 indefinitely, rather than within the usual three-year limit, are too wide. If someone has had even a youth caution for something totally unrelated, their samples can be kept on file forever, unlike most other people’s. Amendment 123 would restrict indefinite retention to those who have previous convictions under the Bill.

In conclusion, we need some of the Bill’s provisions, but in too many ways it goes too far, and it certainly goes too fast. Our amendments seek to remedy that.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. As hon. Members can see, there is quite a bit of interest in the debate. I am introducing an initial six-minute speaking limit, which I am sure will be reduced to accommodate everybody.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I am grateful, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will not take that long.

Before I speak to the amendments in my name and those of other hon. Members, which are quite narrow, I want to address Government amendment 60, which I am quite surprised to find in the Bill. Peculiarly, it sets out a series of offences to which it is no longer a defence to claim modern slavery. I am surprised that many of them are not already captured elsewhere. Some of them are very general, such as “entering a prohibited place” and “foreign interference: general”. I always get worried when I see the Government tabling amendments that say things like “in general”, because it really means that they want to do something else that we do not know about. I accept that the amendment will make it into the Bill today, but I want to see what comes back from the other place once the Lords have managed to probe it and find out about it. I would be grateful if the Minister explained why the Government suddenly needed to put it in the Bill.

My amendments would strike out subsections (1)(b) and (2)(b) of clause 68. The Government seem almost to have cut and pasted some of the US legislation and possibly the Australian legislation. I know that the exemption for legal services appears in that legislation, but I am concerned. My amendment is a tightening-up exercise. I really wonder why we think it necessary to provide such a general exemption for legal services. I am sorry if there are practising lawyers present in the House, but if I know anything at all about how lawyers work, they will find ways to exercise the process of lobbying on behalf of organisations and individuals with no right to be here. They will not call it lobbying; they will find some term that is covered by “legal services” and then get on with it. That will also be a way of getting around the Crown prerogative.

I would be grateful if the Minister looks at the issue carefully and understands that there is a problem. I have talked to a lot of lawyers, and most of them believe that the exemption for legal services is not necessary. There is no reason why they should be exempted; the rules should apply directly to them. Either the definition of what constitutes legal services needs to be tightened up very carefully, or the exemptions should be struck out as the amendments require. I would like some indication from the Minister at the Dispatch Box that the Government will look seriously at the matter in the Lords and act on it. An exemption for legal services is unnecessary and will lead to lobbying by the back door; I am sure that all sorts of terms will be found that are covered by “legal services”.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. After the next speaker, the speaking time limit will be five minutes. I call Dan Jarvis.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) and everyone else who has spoken, and a particular pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis). I agreed with all the points that he made. He has done the House a great service in explaining the context of the amendment that we tabled, and I am very grateful for it.

I say that mindful of the fact that we live in a world that continues to create new threats to our safety and way of life from a wide range of hostile states and actors. While their methods and origins vary, their intent is clear: to undermine our national security. Like others—like everyone who is in the Chamber at the moment, I am sure—I personally take these issues very seriously, and I also appreciate the complexities of the issues that we are debating today. None of this is easy, and I know very well the challenges that our security and intelligence services face every single day. I also know very well that our response to terrorism must always be unequivocal, but must always be legal.

I do not doubt the intentions that underpin the Bill. I have known the Minister for a long time, and I absolutely believe that he wants to do the right thing. This is the prism through which I view the Bill: I view it as someone who cares deeply for our country and wants to scrutinise the Bill in order to make it better, and to make our country both stronger and safer. It was in precisely that spirit that I tabled amendment 14, along with the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden, with whom I have worked for some time on these issues.

I acknowledge that the Government’s intent in tabling clause 27—as I understand it—is to protect UK personnel in the intelligence services and the armed forces if they are found, in the course of their duties, to have committed a crime. However, I consider that the scope of the clause is too wide, and I fear that it would instead end up protecting Ministers and senior officials. As we heard earlier from the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden, section 7 of the Intelligence Services Act already allows Ministers and senior officials to authorise some potentially unlawful activities, carried out by UK personnel overseas in the course of their duties. Clause 27, however, would provide protection for Ministers and senior officials who “encourage or assist crimes overseas”, such as giving a tip-off that leads to someone’s torture, as opposed to the direct commission of the crime itself. In that sense, it is, as drafted, unlikely to help UK personnel overseas who receive separate legal protections under the Intelligence Services Act. To that end, it is only right for the decision to prosecute, or not, to rest with the Director of Public Prosecutions, and not to be legislated away.

If clause 27 remains in the Bill, it will mean there is little chance of seeking justice in a criminal court for any crimes and human rights abuses abroad that have been enabled by UK Ministers and senior officials. The reality is that this will send a message that the UK Government are above the law, with near-guaranteed immunity for human rights abuses overseas. Clause 27 will undermine the UK’s position as a leader in promoting human rights, and prevent criminal sanctions against those who have enabled torture.

[*Dan Jarvis*]

When providing evidence to the Intelligence and Security Committee in 2018, a senior security services official apparently described existing protections as “belt and braces”. Clause 27 would add a suit of armour, shielding the Government further from what I consider to be entirely legitimate scrutiny and accountability. It is using a sledgehammer to crack a nut, and that is not how we should be doing things. Stronger national security should not mean weaker human rights.

I oppose clause 27 because I believe that the Government’s intentions do not align with its consequences. I ask the Minister to listen carefully—as I am sure he will—to the concerns that are being raised this afternoon and have been raised with him previously, and to work with us to ensure that the Bill is improved and our country is kept safe, while also ensuring that human rights are protected. That is all I ask.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I have miscalculated—this is one of the reasons I was never made a Treasury Minister—and I want to give the Minister an opportunity to respond at the end. Sir Robert Buckland, you can have five minutes, but then we will go to four minutes.

Sir Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will not be able to emulate the admirable record of my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Sir Charles Walker), but I will do my best to be as succinct as possible. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis), who is right when he says that we have to strike a balance here: we need to protect our way of life but not protect ourselves out of the very values that we seek to defend—or, in other words, diminish the very rights that we want to protect. That is at the heart of all the national security legislation that I and others in this House have dealt with over the years. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Security for our conversations about these issues.

I cannot conceal my disappointment at the non-selection of new clause 8, in the name of the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), which was signed by me and others. It is inevitable that this issue will be revisited in the other place. There are two issues that arise from it that are of general application to the Bill and to the future reform of the Official Secrets Act, which has to come. The first is the potential creation of a public interest defence, which in my view is an essential substitute to the rather random guessing game that we have at the moment, with jury trials—however well directed the juries might be—ending up with verdicts that, to many of us, seem perverse.

The second relates to the recommendation to create a statutory commission to allow people to raise their concerns—to whistleblow, if you like—through an approved process. The Law Commission’s report of September 2020 made those very clear and cogent recommendations and I commend them strongly to my right hon. Friend the Minister. I think they go hand in hand. The time is here for the Government to start addressing these issues

and to adopt those recommendations. To quote my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne in another context: if not now, when?

Mr Kevan Jones: There are many things in the Bill that I support, but I think it is a missed opportunity. It has been a messy process in Committee, as has been said, as a result of the number of Ministers we have had dealing with it, the late inclusion of things like the foreign agents registration scheme and the completely missed opportunity to reform the Official Secrets Act 1989. The new Minister is very good, but he is a bit like a friendly old bank manager: he listens to you, he agrees with you and he is sympathetic, but you do not get the loan at the end of the day. The point is, however, that this Bill will be changed radically in the other place, because we have not had the proper amount of time to do it.

I want to refer to clause 27, which has been spoken to by the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) and my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis). I was on the Intelligence and Security Committee when we were discussing detention and rendition, and some of the things that went on then did not make for pretty reading. We do not want to go back to those days. Things were changed in the consolidated guidance and the principles were brought forward. One of the sops for the Committee—a phrase that everyone kept using—was that there could be a chilling effect on the security services. Everyone kept asking what the chilling effect would be.

A commitment was given to allow the ISC to have classified information on this, and the Chairman of the ISC wanted that before today because it would have given us an opportunity to say whether we were satisfied. Unfortunately, that was turned down, but we have had the initial information and I and other members of the Committee are not yet satisfied that there is justification for this. We have asked for more information, which we are going to receive, but it would have been handy to have it before today. Unless there is good cause, frankly I think it will be interesting to see how this can be justified.

Referring to something that the right hon. and learned Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland) said, I am disappointed that my new clause 8 was not selected. This is one of those things in the Bill that will come back. The equivalent new clause was selected in Committee only because the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (James Gray) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali) in the Chair agreed to it, so I was not surprised that the Clerks knocked it out of selection, but it will not go away. My fear is that a great opportunity to modernise our national security landscape is being completely missed. I do not think we will see a Bill on public interest or reforming the 1989 Act, but it desperately needs to be done.

5.15 pm

The way in which the foreign agents registration scheme was introduced in Committee was completely unacceptable. Not only are the Government trying to reinvent the wheel; they are trying to invent a new device. Part 2 will never be used, in my opinion, because it would create so much diplomatic fallout.

Finally, we need transparency on the public register. I have had representations from universities, including the Russell Group, that are concerned about how this provision fits with other Bills currently going through the House, such as the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill. This is a minefield. It is overcomplicated, and it could be a lot simpler and a lot more belt and braces. Although I welcome what is happening, this Bill will be very different when it comes out of the Lords. We have missed an opportunity, and it is the Government's fault. When this Bill is enacted, we must not think that things cannot change any more, because there are other things that need to happen.

Sir Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con): In view of the time, I will only briefly say something about three areas of the Bill. First, amendment 14, in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) seeks to remove clause 27, which excludes liability for assisting an offence overseas if the relevant behaviour is necessary for the proper function of the intelligence agencies or the armed forces. The key question being: how is that materially different from the defence to encouraging or assisting crime in section 50 of the Serious Crime Act 2007 of acting reasonably?

I am a member of the Intelligence and Security Committee, as is the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones). As he said, we are due to receive further evidence on clause 27 and we are, therefore, not yet in a position to provide a view on it. It is probably right that I reserve my final judgment until I have considered that further evidence but, speaking personally, I am not persuaded that, within the parameters of the reassurance and protection it is reasonable to offer those acting on behalf of the intelligence agencies or the armed forces, clause 27 achieves anything that the current section 50 defence does not. The Minister will have to explain the difference between acting reasonably and acting in the proper exercise of a function, as this clause requires.

Mr David Davis: My right hon. and learned Friend will remember that, when the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Act 2021 was first brought before the House, the International Criminal Court told the Government, "If you go too far with this and nobody can be prosecuted, we will prosecute." Is there not the same risk with clause 27?

Sir Jeremy Wright: I hope my right hon. Friend is wrong, but the Government have to consider it for exactly those reasons. It would be not only wrong but profoundly embarrassing if the United Kingdom were to find itself in that position.

I hope the Minister can clearly explain the difference I outlined, because the only difference I can see is that it could be argued that "acting reasonably" may be applicable to more circumstances and, therefore, offer arguably broader protection than "acting in the proper exercise of a function." We have heard it argued that the current defence is not sufficiently legally certain but, from experience, legal certainty is an elusive quarry. The concept of reasonableness is very familiar to the courts in a variety of contexts. Anyone looking for absolute certainty in every case will not find it, because all cases are different and must be considered on their merits.

The second area I want to mention is amendments 8 to 12, in my right hon. Friend's name, dealing with the potential reduction of damages in national security proceedings where a successful claimant has committed wrongdoing related to terrorism. It is worth noting in passing that such wrongdoing is not limited to convictions for criminal offences, and we need to understand from the Minister what level of wrongdoing in this context would suffice to put someone's damages in jeopardy.

The operative measure is clause 58(3), which says "the court must decide whether, in light of its consideration of the national security factors, it is appropriate for it to reduce the amount of damages".

So we need to know what "appropriate" means—or should mean. Surely it should mean appropriate in all the circumstances of the case and in the interests of justice overall—it would be helpful if the Minister could confirm that—and that there is no presumption in favour of reduction, nor is there an instruction to reduce damages where the factors set out are present. That is how I understand the clause, but I would be grateful if he could confirm it.

Lastly, I wish to discuss amendment 38, which would remove clause 84 and stands in the name of the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry). That clause provides that, save for in very limited circumstances, civil legal aid would not be available in any case where it otherwise would be to those previously convicted of terrorism offences. My concern is that this is a very significant shift in the principles applicable to legal aid. At the moment, we award legal aid on the basis of the merits of the case and the financial circumstances of the individual applying, never before doing so on the basis of their previous character. This change would be very significant and it would need significant discussion, which, by definition, given the clock in front of me, it is not going to get today.

We need to be clear about what we would be saying if we made that change. We would be saying that whatever happens to that individual—however blatantly their rights may be infringed, in cases wholly unrelated to their previous conduct—the state will not assist them to defend their rights as it otherwise would, because of a previous criminal conviction. I am not sure that would be right and I am not sure that if it is, it makes any sense to specify only terrorism offences, rather than any other serious criminal offending. But whether it is right or wrong, we need to discuss it properly and not have it tacked on to this Bill, which is about something completely different, with very limited time to discuss it.

Mr Carmichael: It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Sir Jeremy Wright), who did the House a great service in bringing to us in four minutes what could have been the subject matter of a whole afternoon's debate in itself, thus highlighting the total inadequacy of today's proceedings for proper scrutiny of this Bill. I fear it will be filleted when it goes to the other place, and it deserves to be.

I added my name to new clause 8, but it is not available to debate and discuss. So much of what is in the Bill risks offering protection to people who do the wrong thing in the service of our country, while those who seek to expose that wrongdoing are to be left

[Mr Carmichael]

completely unprotected. Others have said it before, and I say it again now: this was the perfect opportunity to provide protection of that sort. If not now, when are going to see it?

It is a matter of significant regret that in an area of public policy where there is a substantial and natural consensus across the political parties, we have come to this stage in the proceedings of the Bill with so much division and disagreement, albeit a disagreement between those on the Treasury Bench and the Government Back Benches, not just between the parties. I do not think anybody in this House would not want to promote the security of our nation, and we all understand the complex and difficult situations in which pursuing that work often places people.

We also know, because it is human nature as much as anything else, that in these difficult and complex situations it is often possible to persuade oneself of just about anything. When that happens, it is necessary that somebody, somewhere, can be held accountable for it, because we are a country that believes, still, in the rule of law, and these things matter. That is why my colleagues on the Liberal Democrat Benches and I are so concerned about the content of clause 27 and clauses 79 to 83.

As I mentioned in my intervention on the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), the cases about which we know and are rightly shocked, we know about only because these matters came into the public domain by mere happenstance. It is eminently possible that the circumstances of Belhaj and Boudchar would not be known to us today but for the fact somebody who happened to be walking around Gaddafi's palace during the fall of his Government found the papers that revealed the extent to which rights had been deliberately traduced. It is surely wrong that there should be protection for people who behave far outside British standards, notwithstanding Government policy and indeed the law.

The same is true in relation to clauses 79 to 83, which remain the subject of massive controversy. I am certain that they will be revisited, hopefully with more detail and vigour than we have been able to give them today, because they do not belong in a Bill of this sort. I hope that, when the Bill eventually comes back to this House, it comes back without them.

Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) and to see so many members of the Bill Committee in the House on Report. It was a very constructive Committee, and I am pleased that we are all still vaguely getting on.

As the Minister said in his opening remarks, a number of clauses in the Bill update espionage legislation that goes back to world war one. Obviously we do not have time to go through all of them, but after putting the Bill into context, I will spend some time talking about clauses 13, 14, 20 and 21. The context is important. In my lifetime, and since the end of the cold war, we have lived through an era of what could be considered unprecedented global peace. In many ways, in the '90s, we took our eye off the ball. Once the Berlin wall came down, we took our eye off the ball on state-based threats. When things got hot in 2001, after 9/11, our

national security legislation and our activity were focused much more on counter-terrorism, so now is the time to update our espionage legislation to counter state-based threats as well as counter-terrorist threats.

It is clear that state-based threats have not gone away. There are more Russian spies in London now than there ever were at the height of the cold war.

Mr Kevan Jones: How do you know that?

Ben Everitt: Because I have read it. [*Interruption.*] I will give sources to the House of Commons Library if I have to.

Those hostile threats are a real and present danger. Russia in particular is a danger. We know that the Skripal poisonings were the work of the GRU. We know that Russia continues to implement a range of hybrid techniques that undermine what it sees as its adversaries—to make it clear, that includes us. The use of disinformation, particularly through bot accounts on Twitter, has been used to foster division and political instability in countries.

The head of MI5 has declared that China, not Russia, is the biggest long-term threat to Britain's national security. It is said that if Russia is a tropical storm, then China is climate change. This new threat requires new measures to protect us. We need to create new offences to tackle state-based sabotage. I refer to clause 13, in particular. I would argue to my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes), who is not in his place, that we do go far enough.

Part 2 of the Bill covers prevention and investigation measures, which update our legislation to mirror the counter-terrorism legislation that we learned so hard in the noughties. In many ways, that reflects the new foreign intelligence threat that we face, which is much more like the threat of terrorism from the past 20 years. Espionage has never been the gentleman's game that is portrayed in books and films, but now, in particular, we face some pretty gruesome threats. Clause 21, on arrest and detention, is also incredibly necessary in this day and age.

In summary, I support the Bill. We must bring our espionage laws up to date and into the 21st century.

5.30 pm

Chris Bryant: I, too, support the Bill, but I think part 3 is a complete mess. I do not think it will survive long in the House of Lords—I hope they do a proper job of scrutinising it, because we are certainly not able to do a proper job of scrutiny this afternoon. The Minister is a lovely chap, but if he were on the Back Benches, he would be saying exactly what I am saying now. We know that Ministers do that, because only days ago, the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), the former Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, told the whole House that the one thing he had been proclaiming to the world—that the UK deals with Australia and New Zealand were wonderful—was not what he really believed.

Of course, we need to tackle political interference by hostile states in the United Kingdom. Some of us have been arguing that point for a very long time, which is one of the reasons why I would like to see the tier 1 visa report published—I see the Minister nodding, so let us

hope that he will have produced it by the end of the week. Secondly, I would like us to have the full Russia report, so that we know exactly what the Government knew about interference in British politics.

Some interference is overt, but much of it is covert, as the hon. Member for Milton Keynes North (Ben Everitt) has just referred to. Some of it comes not from embassies, but from all sorts of different people who approach MPs and Ministers and seek to influence the British political system. Some of it is online targeting through bots and trolls, which may be done from St Petersburg, Tehran or wherever, but some of it happens on our own streets. Sometimes, it happens in Parliament through all-party parliamentary groups that receive support, whether secretariat or financial, that comes directly or indirectly from a foreign power. We need to be careful about that. We on the Standards Committee have had direct advice from Parliament's director of security that this is the Achilles heel of the British political system at the moment.

MPs and peers, of course, do not have the resources to be able to personally check whether the person who is coming through the door has legitimate bona fides; we simply do not have that intelligence resource. That is why one of the amendments I have tabled seeks to establish that, once somebody has registered that they are working for a foreign power, they should declare that when they come to see a Member of Parliament or Government Minister. In Parliament, we do not just register: we declare. That is a simple thing and I am bewildered that the Government are not prepared to accept it.

My new clause 2 would, very simply, make it a new criminal offence for an MP or peer to work for a foreign power that has been specified by the Government to be a danger to the country. Why would anybody vote against such a measure? I have no understanding of why the Government would oppose it. Without my new clause, the Government might decide that, for instance, Iran or Belarus was to be one of the countries on the list and introduce that by regulation, but an MP or Member of the House of Lords would be free to work for that foreign power—all they would have to do is register the fact that they are doing so. I am sorry, but I think that should be a criminal offence. People have talked too easily of treachery and traitors in the political domain over the last few years, but this is an open door to treachery and treason, and I think we should close it.

Antony Higginbotham (Burnley) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate and to follow the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant). I agree with everything that my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Ben Everitt) has said. I am incredibly supportive of the Bill overall, but I do have questions that it would be helpful to get clarity on in this debate, or—what I think is more likely—when the Bill goes to the other place. I say that because the questions and issues we want clarity on are so substantial that we cannot do them justice in the limited time we have today.

For me, those issues revolve around the foreign influence registration scheme and the exemptions to that scheme. I am mindful that the scheme was introduced into the legislation after we had taken evidence in Committee, so we did not get the chance to question some of the experts on what it would look like. I will address my

remarks to clause 68 and Government new schedule 2, and to amendments 15 and 16, which stand in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith). I am particularly concerned about the legal services exemption. I do not understand why such a broad exemption is required. As my right hon. Friend said, it might be that we are just copying the US legislation, but we need a level of explanation. Removing the legal exemption is not about restricting access to legal services—we still fundamentally believe in natural justice and the rule of law—but we need transparency to prevent exactly the kind of lobbying that we have spoken about. I know that we are unlikely to vote on the amendments today, but we need that kind of transparency.

If we are trying to copy or mirror some of what the US has done, I would question the lack of any kind of exemption for academia, which the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) spoke about. I have spoken to Universities UK, which is concerned about the enhanced tier proposed in FIRS and the impact it could have on UK R&D and on our competitiveness. The US registration scheme clearly has an exemption for

“religious, scholastic, academic, or scientific pursuits”

provided that no political activities are included.

I am saying not that there should be an exemption for academic services but that we in this House need to debate properly what exemptions, if any, should apply to the scheme. Should there be an exemption for legal services? Should there be an exemption for academic work? I do not think we have the opportunity to consider that properly today, but I look forward to following the debate in the other place. I ask the Minister to think about some of those exemptions and, if we are to proceed with them, to give a proper explanation to the House about why they might be necessary.

Stewart Hosie: The Minister said in relation to the foreign influence registration scheme that other countries have had similar provisions for some years, and of course, that is absolutely true. It is also true that the ISC is very much in favour of introducing a foreign influence registration scheme. We are concerned, however, that the scheme as proposed is more complex than the ones in the US and Australia but that it simultaneously does not go far enough, which is a problem.

Unlike the US and Australian schemes, the proposal is for the one here to be two-tiered. I welcome Government amendments 63 to 94 to restructure clauses 61 and 64, which at least makes some of this a little more comprehensible. However, that still leaves us with a primary tier that will capture all arrangements and activity undertaken on behalf of any foreign power for the purpose of influencing a political event or decision—that is welcome at face value—and a secondary tier designed to capture all other activity beyond political influence, including, for example, acting as a foreign intelligence officer. For arrangements or activity to require registration, however, they have to be undertaken on behalf of a country set out in secondary legislation, so the provision does not necessarily apply automatically to every country.

As I said earlier, it is difficult to understand why acting covertly as an intelligence officer outwith the political influencing sphere, for example, applies only where the foreign power is set out in secondary legislation.

[*Stewart Hosie*]

It is perfectly possible that intelligence operations will be undertaken by countries that are not named in the regulations and so will not require registration. That is self-evidently an omission and a weakness. Requiring all countries to register such activity would be a stronger deterrent.

As the scheme does not yet name a particular country that may be registered under the second tier, it is not clear which countries the Government intend to name when the Bill becomes law. It is also not clear what criteria will be used when deciding which countries to add to the list. Furthermore, as has been pointed out, these things can take some time. I do not know how swiftly the Government might react to add a new country threat, and I am certainly not at all convinced that when that threat is lifted, the Government will act swiftly to remove a country from the list in the secondary tier.

This is a bit of a dog's dinner. The real risk is that the secondary tier, which could be valuable tool and which I want to see work, might end up not being used. As the Security Minister recognised in Committee, use of the enhanced registration requirement will be "limited". We do not want this to be limited; we want it to be comprehensive, to be able to capture the majority of the risks. It would surely be far more effective to have one tier which applies to all countries and a broad range of covert activity.

John McDonnell: For the record and as a message to the other House, I wish to say that I believe that the Government forcing through such a serious Bill in so limited a period of time today is a matter of contempt of this House and the parliamentary process.

I rise to speak because over a decade ago I gave an undertaking to one of my constituents that I would seek to ensure that no other person would go through what he had gone through. It worries me that sometimes this House's collective memory is lost, so it is worth reminding people of what was happening in that period. There was a culture of unaccountability—almost of impunity—among some of our services, and the way they liaised with other nation states and their intelligence services resulted in the torture of our constituents.

My constituent was a young Asian doctor, who had just finished his training. He went on an altruistic, charitable expedition to Pakistan to work in hospitals there. He was picked up and for six weeks he was tortured. At the end of each torture session, which consisted of thorough beatings, he was interrogated by what could only be MI6. It was clear to us. I saw Ministers; alongside the Ministers were civil servants, and alongside them were, I believe, intelligence officers. I got the same response as has been given today, with the same phrasing: "We do not condone or support or participate in torture." Well, they did on that occasion, and scarred my constituent for life. Even though he is now a successful consultant, he lives in fear still.

What was happening is that decisions were taken here about the arrest of my constituent and the questions that would be put to him at the end of the torture, as though at the end of the exercise we could have clean hands. It was unacceptable. I support amendment 14 because I fear that, if we try to lift some of the protections that our constituents have, we will recreate that culture

of unaccountability and impunity and others will suffer like my constituent suffered. That is why it is important not to lessen the accountability of decision makers at every level, whether they are on the frontline or in ministerial offices here.

My second point can be stated briefly. I am the secretary of the National Union of Journalists parliamentary group. What this Bill has successfully done—I have never seen it before—is unite the Society of Editors with the NUJ and various campaigning bodies. They say the provisions will

"strip away longstanding safeguards that are in place to prevent the wrongful access of journalistic material and are a risk to sources and investigative journalism more widely."

They also say the legislation may "criminalise" some investigative journalism and "chill" whistleblowing.

It is not right to criticise Mr Speaker's selection of amendments, but we were hoping that an amendment that was in order would be crafted at this stage to provide at least some protection—the public interest protection. That is why I support amendment 3, tabled by the Labour Front-Bench team. If the other place does not insert a public interest protection, a review of the legislation at an early stage will be critical and may result in such a provision. I congratulate the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) and the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) for the litany of amendments they have tabled trying to ensure at least some protection in the detail of the legislation for journalists, whistleblowers and others. I regret that it looks as though their amendments will not be made today.

5.45 pm

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I was here to speak to new clause 7 and amendments 17 to 28 and 30 to 39, but there is not enough time for me to do so. That is most regrettable, given the importance of the Bill.

I am here not in my personal capacity but as Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights. Our duty is to scrutinise legislation to check its human rights compliance, and we have done that. I remind Members that the Joint Committee is a cross-party Committee with half its members from the House of Commons and half from the House of Lords. That is just as well, because it will be in the House of Lords that our amendments get the attention that I believe they deserve. Although I am not really a fan of the House of Lords as an unelected Chamber, I am very much a fan of second Chambers. Nevertheless, it is regrettable that such a small amount of time has been afforded to us today to debate this important Bill, which we believe has significant human rights implications. Given the short time available to me, I shall make some general comments; as I say, I hope that our detailed amendments will get the attention they deserve in the House of Lords.

We broadly welcome the attempt to modernise espionage offences, but we have some concerns about the Bill's provisions. The Bill is a step forward and many of its provisions are broadly in line with the recommendations of the Law Commission's recent review, but there are risks that some of the provisions are drawn far too widely and could criminalise behaviour that does not constitute a threat to national security. We think that

other provisions would interfere unnecessarily and disproportionately with rights to freedom of expression and association and the right to protest, and that they may regrettably have a disproportionate impact on certain communities in the United Kingdom, particularly if new police powers are not exercised with restraint.

The provisions on prevention and investigation measures, which were not included in the Law Commission's review, also engage the right to a fair trial, the right to liberty and security and the right to a private and family life in a way that gives the Joint Committee cause for concern. We are also very concerned about the restrictions on the grant of legal aid and on the awarding of damages to those who have been involved in terrorism. They risk impeding access to basic rights and legal protections, as other Members have elaborated on. We have therefore suggested that the Bill be amended in a number of ways but, as I say, there is not sufficient time for me to address any of the amendments in any meaningful way.

Let me say one other thing before I sit down. The Bill does not address issues relating to the unauthorised disclosure of information—sometimes known as leaks—despite it being a significant part of the Law Commission's review. The commission set out clearly the ways in which the existing law engages and potentially breaches the UK's human rights commitments under the European convention on human rights, and suggested ways in which law might be changed to overcome such issues. Although the Joint Committee appreciates that this is in many ways a complex and controversial area of law, we hope that that is not going to result in inaction, and encourage the Government to consult on legislative provisions as soon as possible.

We believe that reform of the Official Secrets Act 1989 is needed to ensure adequate respect for free speech. That is why I added my name to new clause 8, tabled by the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), which I very much regret we are not able to debate today. Put shortly, we need a public interest defence in this country.

Tom Tugendhat: This has been a very full discussion involving many people. Although I sympathise with those who have quite rightly made the point that we could always have more time for these debates, the truth is that we had a lot of time in the Bill Committee and we are going to have to do much more work on this subject as its various elements evolve with the technology and the challenge. The truth is that if we had had this debate five, 10 or 15 years ago, we would have been debating different subjects, different nations and different elements of technology that have evolved into the threat that we sadly face today. Although I recognise that many hon. Members have understandably raised the number of hours and days that we have had today and in the past few weeks, the Government have listened and adapted the Bill to many aspects that have been raised in different ways.

Chris Bryant: One thing that the Government have certainly had plenty of time to get ready is the tier 1 visa report, as promised by five Home Secretaries. When will the Minister publish it?

Tom Tugendhat: It will not surprise the hon. Gentleman to know that one of the first things I did on arrival at the Home Office was to ask for it to be prepared for publication. I will come back to him with it, I hope, urgently—I will let him know.

Many different points have been raised. I pay enormous tribute to my many right hon. and hon. Friends who have spoken and to those who have approached the Bill with the diligence and seriousness that the subject demands, particularly the hon. Members for Halifax (Holly Lynch) and for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald), who have been extremely supportive critics and have been challenging in the right spirit. I am glad to say that those discussions have resulted in most of the Bill going through in the way that was intended, and that those challenges and changes have improved it.

I accept that there are some differences of opinion. On areas such as the Serious Crime Act and the changes to statutory requirements, I believe that the Government are right because the exercise of the functions of an officer of the state are exactly what should be the limiting functions of their powers. That is why this reform makes sense, although my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Sir Jeremy Wright) raised some important points and challenges that we will have to look at.

My right hon. and learned Friend also asked about damages and whether they followed in the way that he described, and I agree that they do. The point is that we should neither make it harder or more applicable to have damages, nor prevent it where judges seek the discretion to do so. Where they have that discretion, they may continue to do it, but we are asking them to look and consider the situation in which those damages arose to make sure that they are truly applicable. It is merely a review policy, rather than a block. That is an important element of the Bill; judges may already have that power but this measure merely puts it on the statute book.

Much of the debate has focused on whistleblowers and the public interest defence, and the way in which various people could argue that they are acting in the interests of the wider polity in raising different objections. This is a hugely important area and I understand that many hon. Members have raised different points. The head of MI5, the heads of various agencies and many others who have engaged on it have been absolutely clear on this point, however, because we need to make sure that we are not introducing any defence that forces the Government to reveal the damage that has been done in order to provide a defence.

The reality is that forcing the publication of damages may indeed be further damaging to the initial offence. That is why although I take the point about the public interest defence, which is a wider question for the whole of Government and the whole country, and I take the point about whistleblowers, which is again a wider question and not specific to the Bill, I am afraid that I hold with the head of MI5 and others who have been extremely clear on this point.

Mr Kevan Jones: With the greatest respect, that is a weak argument, because there can always be closed hearings on national security grounds. I say to the Minister that this issue will not go away—the courts are deciding it anyway. I would sooner state a protection in law than leave it to the whims of a jury, which is what we have now.

Tom Tugendhat: I have a great trust in our jury system, and I know the right hon. Member does, too.

Mr Jones: I haven't actually.

Tom Tugendhat: Oh, he does not. I do have trust in our jury system and I do have trust in the Great British people to make decisions appropriately. One of the decisions sometimes made by juries is to strike out a case because they disagree with it. I am afraid that is simply one of those—

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): The public interest defence has been mentioned on several occasions throughout this debate. Notwithstanding the strictures of national security and of this Bill, it is important that people have a reliable route that they can take when they want to expose wrongdoing. Does my right hon. Friend consider that an office of the whistleblower might be such a route? I know the public interest defence is very likely to come forward again.

Tom Tugendhat: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that. It is not specific to this Bill, but it is something that many of us have been considering for a while. I certainly agree that wider consideration is important in ensuring that those who have legitimate grievances and objections to what they may have been asked to do have a valid route for raising such questions.

I will go through a few of the other points very quickly. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) and my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Antony Higginbotham) raised the point about legal services, and they were absolutely right to do so. Let me be quite clear that this is about privileged legal co-operation. Therefore, that privilege should be exempt—it should absolutely be exempt—so that those who have access to legal rights should be able to exercise them without the state's intervention. That is essential to the rule of law and, indeed, to the protection of human rights in our country.

I should also make it quite clear that the Government have heard very clearly the points made about civil legal aid. These will be receiving very serious consideration in the coming days, and I look forward to updating the House in due course on where that goes to.

I briefly thank for their insights my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland) and my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Ben Everitt) on the Government side, and of course my very dear friend, the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis). Although we disagree, again, he remains a very close friend, and I look forward to discussing more of these issues with him in the future. I shall leave it at that.

Question put and agreed to.

New clause 9 accordingly read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 3

REVIEWS OF PARTS 1, 4 AND 5

(1) The operation of Parts 1, 4 and 5 of this Act must be reviewed by a person, or people, appointed by the Secretary of State.

(2) The operation of Part 4 must be reviewed by the person appointed by the Secretary of State under section 36(1) of the Terrorism Act 2006.

(3) The operation of Parts 1 and 5 must be reviewed by either—

(a) the person appointed by the Secretary of State under section 36(1) of the Terrorism Act 2006, or

(b) a different person appointed by the Secretary of State.

(4) Reviews under this section must be carried out in respect of—

(a) the 12-month period beginning with the day on which any section in this Part comes into force, and

(b) each subsequent 12-month period.

(5) Each review under subsection (1) must be completed as soon as reasonably practicable after the period to which it relates.

(6) The person or people mentioned in subsections (2) and (3) must send to the Secretary of State a report on the outcome of each review carried out under subsection (1) as soon as reasonably practicable after completion of the review.

(7) On receiving a report under subsection (6), the Secretary of State must lay a copy of it before Parliament.

(8) Section 36(6) of the Terrorism Act 2006 shall be read such that the “expenses” and “allowances” mentioned therein may include the discharge by the person or people of their functions under this section.’—(*Holly Lynch.*)

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 211, Noes 283.

Division No. 89]

[5.57 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)

Anderson, Fleur

Antoniazzi, Tonia

Ashworth, rh Jonathan

Bardell, Hannah

Barker, Paula

Beckett, rh Margaret

Benn, rh Hilary

Betts, Mr Clive

Black, Mhairi

Blackford, rh Ian

Blackman, Kirsty

Blake, Olivia

Blomfield, Paul

Bonnar, Steven

Brennan, Kevin

Brock, Deidre

Brown, Alan

Brown, rh Mr Nicholas

Bryant, Chris

Burgon, Richard

Byrne, rh Liam

Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Richard Thomson*)

Campbell, rh Sir Alan

Carden, Dan

Chamberlain, Wendy

Champion, Sarah

Chapman, Douglas

Charalambous, Bambos

Cherry, Joanna

Cooper, Daisy

Cooper, rh Yvette

Corbyn, rh Jeremy

Cowan, Ronnie

Coyle, Neil

Crawley, Angela

Creasy, Stella

Cryer, John

Cummins, Judith

Cunningham, Alex

Daby, Janet

David, Wayne

Davies, Geraint

Davies-Jones, Alex

Davis, rh Mr David

De Cordova, Marsha

Debbonaire, Thangam

Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh

Docherty-Hughes, Martin

Dodds, Anneliese

Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Richard Thomson*)

Dowd, Peter

Duffield, Rosie

Eagle, Maria

Eastwood, Colum

Edwards, Jonathan

Efford, Clive

Elliott, Julie

Elmore, Chris

Eshalomi, Florence

Esterson, Bill

Evans, Chris

Farron, Tim

Farry, Stephen

Fellows, Marion

Ferrier, Margaret

Flynn, Stephen

Foord, Richard

Fovargue, Yvonne

Foxcroft, Vicky

Foy, Mary Kelly

Furniss, Gill

Gardiner, Barry

Gibson, Patricia

Gill, Preet Kaur

Glendon, Mary
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Hayes, Helen
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart
 Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMorrin, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen

Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Richard Thomson*)
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pollard, Luke
 Qaisar, Ms Anum
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Stephens, Chris
 Streeting, Wes
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:

Liz Twist and
 Christian Wakeford

Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Sir Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carter, Andy
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, rh Michelle

NOES

Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, Sir James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, rh Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Girvan, Paul
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, rh James
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid

Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Knight, Julian
 Kniveton, Kate
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Largan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cheryl
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Paisley, Ian
 Pawsey, Mark

Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Tuss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Julie Marson and
 Scott Mann

Tellers for the Noes:

Question accordingly negated.

6.10 pm

Proceedings interrupted (Programme Order, 6 June).

The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83E).

Clause 2

OBTAINING OR DISCLOSING TRADE SECRETS

Amendment made: 40, page 3, line 1, at end insert—

“(aa) an individual who lives in the United Kingdom;”—
 (*Tom Tugendhat.*)

This amendment extends the definition of “UK person” to include a person who lives in the UK.

Clause 3

ASSISTING A FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE SERVICE

Amendments made: 41, page 3, line 24, leave out “of a kind”.

This amendment and Amendment 42 narrow the circumstances in which an offence is committed under clause 3(2).

Amendment 42, page 3, line 27, leave out “the conduct is of that kind” and insert

“it is reasonably possible their conduct may materially assist a foreign intelligence service in carrying out UK-related activities”.

This amendment and Amendment 41 narrow the circumstances in which an offence is committed under clause 3(2).

*Amendment 43, page 4, line 7, at end insert “which is not a legal obligation under private law”.—(*Tom Tugendhat.*)*

This amendment prevents the exemption in clause 3(7) from applying where a person is acting in compliance with a private law obligation (e.g. a contract).

Clause 7

MEANING OF “PROHIBITED PLACE”

Amendments made: 44, page 7, line 10, leave out “place” and insert “land or building”.

This amendment substitutes a reference in the definition of “prohibited place” to a “place” with a reference to “land or building”.

*Amendment 45, page 7, line 41, leave out second “land” and insert “any land or building”.—(*Tom Tugendhat.*)*

This amendment provides that “Crown land” includes a reference to any land or building in which there is a Crown interest or a Duchy interest.

Clause 13

FOREIGN INTERFERENCE: GENERAL

Amendment made: 46, page 12, line 3, leave out “England and Wales” and insert

“any part of the United Kingdom”.—(*Tom Tugendhat.*)

This amendment amends clause 13(4) to catch offences outside the UK that would constitute an offence in any part of the UK, not just in England and Wales.

Clause 15**OBTAINING ETC MATERIAL BENEFITS FROM
A FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE SERVICE**

Amendment made: 47, page 14, line 30, at end insert
“which is not a legal obligation under private law”.—(*Tom Tugendhat.*)
*This amendment prevents the exemption in clause 15(8) from
applying where a person is acting in compliance with a private law
obligation (e.g. a contract).*

Clause 27**OFFENCES UNDER PART 2 OF THE
SERIOUS CRIME ACT 2007**

Amendment proposed: 14, page 20, line 35, leave out
clause 27.—(*Mr Davis.*)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 212, Noes 283.

Division No. 90]**[6.11 pm****AYES**

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy
vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-
Addy*)
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, rh Jonathan
Bardell, Hannah
Barker, Paula
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, rh Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blake, Olivia
Blomfield, Paul
Bonnar, Steven
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Richard
Byrne, rh Liam
Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote
cast by Richard Thomson*)
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Crawley, Angela
Creasy, Stella
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Davies-Jones, Alex

Davis, rh Mr David
De Cordova, Marsha
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast
by Richard Thomson*)
Dowd, Peter
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Maria
Eastwood, Colum
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farron, Tim
Farry, Stephen
Fellows, Marion
Ferrier, Margaret
Flynn, Stephen
Foord, Richard
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Furniss, Gill
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glindon, Mary
Grant, Peter
Green, Sarah
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Dame Nia
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
Hardy, Emma
Hayes, Helen
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon

Hopkins, Rachel
Hosie, rh Stewart
Howarth, rh Sir George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Sarah
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Lake, Ben
Lavery, Ian
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewis, Clive
Linden, David
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
MacAskill, Kenny
MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Maskell, Rachael
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McLaughlin, Anne
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Monaghan, Carol
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Newlands, Gavin
Nichols, Charlotte
Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote
cast by Richard Thomson*)
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan

Olney, Sarah
Onwurah, Chi
Oppong-Asare, Abena
Osamor, Kate
Osborne, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owatemi, Taiwo
Owen, Sarah
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pollard, Luke
Qaisar, Ms Anum
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, rh Angela
Reed, Steve
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, Rachel
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Alyn
Smith, Cat
Smith, Nick
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Stephens, Chris
Streetering, Wes
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thomson, Richard
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Vaz, rh Valerie
Webbe, Claudia
West, Catherine
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Whitley, Mick
Whittome, Nadia
Wilson, Munira
Winter, Beth
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Liz Twist and
Christian Wakeford

NOES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Anderson, Lee

Anderson, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, rh Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan

Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Sir Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carter, Andy
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, rh Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, Sir James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke

Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, rh Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, rh James
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Knight, Julian
 Kniveton, Kate
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John

Largan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Paisley, Ian
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penrose, John
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola

Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:

Julie Marson and
 Scott Mann

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 28

THE FOREIGN POWER CONDITION

Amendments made: 48, page 21, line 20, leave out
 “the financial or other assistance of”

and insert

“financial or other assistance provided by”.

This amendment and Amendment 49 clarify that for the foreign power condition to be satisfied in relation to a person's conduct by virtue of financial or other assistance, there must be a link between the conduct and the financial or other assistance.

Amendment 49, page 21, line 21, after “power” insert “for that purpose”.—(*Tom Tugendhat.*)

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 48.

Clause 30

FOREIGN POWER THREAT ACTIVITY AND INVOLVEMENT IN THAT ACTIVITY

Amendment made: 50, page 23, line 12, at end insert—

“(vii) section 15(1) (obtaining material benefits from a foreign intelligence service);”.—(*Tom Tugendhat.*)

This amendment amends the definition of foreign power threat activity to include the offence in section 15(1), which was added to the Bill at committee.

Clause 61

REQUIREMENT TO REGISTER FOREIGN ACTIVITY ARRANGEMENTS

Amendments made: 61, page 43, line 15, leave out from beginning to “must” and insert

“Where P makes a foreign activity arrangement, P”.

This amendment clarifies that only P is required to register a foreign activity arrangement.

Amendment 62, page 43, line 18, leave out “with” and insert

“between a person (“P”) and”.—(*Tom Tugendhat.*)

This amendment clarifies the meaning of “foreign activity arrangement”.

Ordered,

That subsection (2) of Clause 61 be transferred to the end of line 14 on page 43.—(*Tom Tugendhat.*)

This amendment moves the definition of “foreign activity arrangement” to the beginning of clause 61.

Amendments made: 63, page 43, line 30, leave out subsections (5) and (6) and insert—

“(5) Schedule (Control of a person by a foreign power) makes provision about when a person is controlled by a foreign power.”

This amendment makes provision introducing Schedule (Control of a person by a foreign power).

Amendment 64, page 44, line 16, leave out subsection (8).

This amendment is consequential on NS2 and Amendment 94.

Amendment 65, page 44, line 18, leave out “subsection (1)” and insert “section 61(1)”.—(*Tom Tugendhat.*)

This amendment is consequential on the motion to divide clause 61.

Ordered,

That Clause 61 be divided into two clauses, the first (*Requirement to register foreign activity arrangements*) consisting of subsections (1), (2), and (10) and the second (*Meaning of “specified person”*) consisting of subsections (3) to (5), (7) and (9).—(*Tom Tugendhat.*)

This amendment moves the provisions about specified persons to a separate clause.

Clause 62

OFFENCE OF CARRYING OUT ACTIVITIES UNDER AN UNREGISTERED FOREIGN ACTIVITY ARRANGEMENT

Amendments made: 66, page 44, line 28, after “person” insert

“(whether P or another person)”.

This amendment makes clear that an offence under clause 62 may be committed by persons other than the person who entered into the foreign activity arrangement.

Amendment 67, page 44, line 34, at end insert—

“(1A) “P” has the same meaning as in section 61.”

This amendment defines the reference to P inserted by Amendment 66.

Amendment 68, page 44, line 35, leave out subsection (2).—(*Tom Tugendhat.*)

This amendment is consequential on NS2 and Amendment 94.

Clause 63

REQUIREMENT TO REGISTER ACTIVITIES OF SPECIFIED PERSONS

Amendments made: 69, page 44, line 37, after “person” insert

“who is not a foreign power”.

This amendment provides that subsection (1) does not apply to a specified person who is a foreign power. It is related to Amendment 71.

Amendment 70, page 44, line 38, leave out “activities are registered” and insert

“specified person has registered the activities”.

This amendment clarifies that it is the specified person that is required to register the activities with the Secretary of State.

Amendment 71, page 44, line 39, leave out subsections (2) and (3) and insert—

“(2) A person who holds office in or under, or is an employee or other member of staff of, a specified person who is not a foreign power, must not carry out activities in the United Kingdom in that capacity unless the specified person has registered the activities with the Secretary of State.

(3) A person who holds office in or under, or is an employee or other member of staff of, a specified person who is a foreign power must not carry out activities in the United Kingdom in that capacity if or to the extent that—

(a) the person makes a misrepresentation about their activities or the capacity in which they act (whether generally or to a particular person), and

(b) the specified person has not registered the person's activities with the Secretary of State.

(4) A misrepresentation is a representation that a reasonable person would consider to be false or misleading in a material way.

(5) A misrepresentation may be made by making a statement or by any other kind of conduct (including an omission), and may be express or implied.

(6) A misrepresentation may in particular include—

(a) a misrepresentation as to the person's identity or purpose;

(b) presenting information in a way which amounts to a misrepresentation, even if some or all of the information is true.

(7) A person who breaches a prohibition in subsection (1) or (2) commits an offence if the person knows, or ought reasonably to know, that the activities in question are not registered with the Secretary of State.

- (8) A person who breaches a prohibition in subsection (3) commits an offence if the person knows, or ought reasonably to know, that paragraph (a) or (b) of that subsection applies.”—(*Tom Tugendhat.*)

This amendment makes provision about the circumstances in which office holders and employees of specified persons are prohibited from carrying out unregistered activities.

Clause 64

REQUIREMENT TO REGISTER FOREIGN INFLUENCE ARRANGEMENTS

Amendments made: 72, page 45, line 8, leave out

“A person who makes a foreign influence arrangement” and insert

“Where P makes a foreign influence arrangement, P”

This amendment clarifies that only P is required to register a foreign influence arrangement.

Amendment 73, page 45, line 10, leave out “the person” and insert “P”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 72.

Amendment 74, page 45, line 11, leave out “with” and insert

“between a person (“P”) and”.—(*Tom Tugendhat.*)

This amendment clarifies the meaning of “foreign influence arrangement”.

Ordered,

That subsection (2) of clause 64 be transferred to the end of line 7 on page 45.—(*Tom Tugendhat.*)

This amendment moves the definition of “foreign influence arrangement” to the beginning of clause 64.

Amendments made: 75, page 45, line 12, leave out “the person” and insert “P”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 74.

Amendment 76, page 45, line 21, leave out

“is a United Kingdom national”

and insert

“qualifies as an overseas elector under section 1A of the Representation of the People Act 1985”.

This amendment and Amendment 83 provide that an overseas unincorporated association formed entirely of overseas electors is not a foreign principal.

Amendment 77, page 45, line 29, leave out subsection (5).

This amendment is consequential on NS2 and Amendment 94.

Amendment 78, page 45, line 30, leave out subsection (6).

This amendment is consequential on NS2 and Amendment 94.

Amendment 79, page 46, line 7, leave out paragraph (a).

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 80.

Amendment 80, page 46, line 9, after “countries” insert

“and is governed by international law”.

This amendment clarifies the meaning of “international organisation”.

Amendment 81, page 46, leave out lines 13 to 17.

This amendment is consequential on NS2 and Amendment 94.

Amendment 82, page 46, leave out line 18.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 76.

Amendment 83, page 46, line 20, at end insert—

“(11) At any time before section 14 of the Elections Act 2022 comes into force, the reference in subsection (3)(c) to section 1A of the Representation of the People Act 1985 is to be read as a reference to section 1(2) of that Act.”—(*Tom Tugendhat.*)

See Amendment 76.

Ordered,

That clause 64 be divided into two clauses, the first (*Requirement to register foreign influence arrangements*) consisting of subsections (1), (2), (7) and (8) and the second (*Meaning of “foreign principal”*) consisting of subsections (3), (4) and (9) to (11).—(*Tom Tugendhat.*)

This amendment moves the definition of foreign principal to a separate clause.

Clause 65

MEANING OF “POLITICAL INFLUENCE ACTIVITY”

Amendments made: 84, page 47, line 22, at end insert “and a junior Minister”.

This amendment includes junior Ministers within the definition of “Northern Ireland Minister”.

Amendment 85, page 47, line 25, after “Service” insert

“or of the Northern Ireland Senior Civil Service”.

This amendment clarifies the persons included within the meaning of “senior official”.

Amendment 86, page 47, line 31, at end insert “, or

(b) a person appointed to a position in the Northern Ireland Civil Service by a Northern Ireland Minister and whose appointment to that position meets the conditions set out in section 1(3) and (4) of the Civil Service (Special Advisers) Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 (c. 8 (N.I.)).”—(*Tom Tugendhat.*)

This amendment includes special advisers in the Northern Ireland Civil Service within the definition of “special adviser”.

Clause 66

OFFENCE OF CARRYING OUT POLITICAL INFLUENCE ACTIVITIES PURSUANT TO UNREGISTERED FOREIGN INFLUENCE ARRANGEMENT

Amendments made: 87, page 47, line 39, after “person” insert

“(whether P or another person)”.

This amendment makes clear that an offence under clause 66 may be committed by persons other than the person who entered into the foreign activity arrangement.

Amendment 88, page 47, line 40, after “activity” insert

“, or arranges for a political influence activity to be carried out,”.

This amendment adds to clause 66(1)(a) the case where a person arranges for a political influence activity to be carried out pursuant to a foreign influence arrangement.

Amendment 89, page 48, line 1, at end insert—

“(1A) “P” has the same meaning as in section 64.”

This amendment defines the reference to P inserted by Amendment 87.

*Amendment 90, page 48, line 2, leave out subsection (2).—(*Tom Tugendhat.*)*

This amendment is consequential on NS2 and Amendment 94.

Clause 67

REQUIREMENT TO REGISTER POLITICAL INFLUENCE ACTIVITIES OF FOREIGN PRINCIPALS

Amendments made: 91, page 48, line 7, after “principal” insert

“who is not a foreign power”.

This amendment provides that subsection (1) does not apply to a foreign principal who is a foreign power. It is related to Amendment 93.

Amendment 92, page 48, line 8, leave out “activities are registered” and insert

“foreign principal has registered the activities”.

This amendment clarifies that it is the foreign principal that is required to register the activities with the Secretary of State.

Amendment 93, page 48, line 10, leave out subsections (2) and (3) and insert—

- “(2) A person who holds office in or under, or is an employee or other member of staff of, a foreign principal who is not a foreign power must not carry out political influence activities in the United Kingdom in that capacity unless the foreign principal has registered the activities with the Secretary of State.
- (3) A person who holds office in or under, or is an employee or other member of staff of, a foreign principal who is a foreign power must not carry out political influence activities in the United Kingdom in that capacity if or to the extent that—
- (a) the person makes a misrepresentation about their activities or the capacity in which they act (whether generally or to a particular person), and
- (b) the foreign principal has not registered the person’s activities with the Secretary of State.
- (4) A misrepresentation is a representation that a reasonable person would consider to be false or misleading in a material way.
- (5) A misrepresentation may be made by making a statement or by any other kind of conduct (including an omission), and may be express or implied.
- (6) A misrepresentation may in particular include—
- (a) a misrepresentation as to the person’s identity or purpose;
- (b) presenting information in a way which amounts to a misrepresentation, even if some or all of the information is true.
- (7) A person who breaches a prohibition in subsection (1) or (2) commits an offence if the person knows, or ought reasonably to know, that the activities in question are not registered with the Secretary of State.
- (8) A person who breaches a prohibition in subsection (3) commits an offence if the person knows, or ought reasonably to know, that paragraph (a) or (b) of that subsection applies.”—(Tom Tugendhat.)

This amendment makes provision about the circumstances in which office holders and employees of foreign principals are prohibited from carrying out unregistered activities.

Clause 68

GENERAL EXEMPTIONS

Amendment made: 94, page 48, line 18, leave out subsections (1) to (10) and insert—

- “(1) Schedule (Exemptions) makes provision in relation to exemptions.”—(Tom Tugendhat.)

This amendment and NS2 sets out the exemptions to certain requirements, prohibitions and offences set out in Part 3.

Clause 69

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Amendment made: 95, page 50, line 29, leave out “misleading, false or deceptive” and insert “false, inaccurate or misleading”.—(Tom Tugendhat.)

This amendment corrects the test in clause 69(6) in relation to where a person commits an offence for failing to update the Secretary of State of any material changes to registered information.

Clause 70

INFORMATION NOTICES

Amendments made: 96, page 50, line 35, leave out “who is” and insert

“the Secretary of State reasonably believes to be”.

This amendment provides that an information notice may be given to a person whom the Secretary of State reasonably believes to be a party to an unregistered foreign activity arrangement.

Amendment 97, page 50, line 37, at end insert—

- “(ca) a person the Secretary of State reasonably believes to be carrying out activities registered under that section;”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 70.

Amendment 98, page 50, line 39, leave out “the” and insert “a”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 71.

Amendment 99, page 51, line 4, leave out “who is” and insert

“the Secretary of State reasonably believes to be”.

This amendment provides that an information notice may be given to a person whom the Secretary of State reasonably believes to be a party to an unregistered foreign influence arrangement.

Amendment 100, page 51, line 6, at end insert—

- “(ca) a person the Secretary of State reasonably believes to be carrying out activities registered under that section;”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 92.

Amendment 101, page 51, line 8, leave out “the” and insert “a”.—(Tom Tugendhat.)

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 93.

Clause 73

OFFENCE OF CARRYING OUT ACTIVITIES UNDER ARRANGEMENTS TAINTED BY FALSE INFORMATION

Amendments made: 102, page 52, line 27, after “activity” insert

“, or arranges for an activity to be carried out;”.

This amendment adds to clause 73(1)(a) the case where a person arranges for an activity to be carried out pursuant to a foreign activity arrangement.

Amendment 103, page 52, line 37, after “activity” insert

“, or arranges for a political influence activity to be carried out”.

This amendment adds to clause 73(2)(a) the case where a person arranges for a political influence activity to be carried out pursuant to a foreign influence arrangement.

Amendment 104, page 52, line 38, leave out “political” and insert “foreign”.

This amendment corrects a reference to a foreign influence arrangement.

Amendment 105, page 53, line 3, leave out subsections (3) and (4).—(Tom Tugendhat.)

This amendment is consequential on NS2 and Amendment 94.

Clause 74

PUBLICATION AND COPYING OF INFORMATION

Amendments made: 106, page 53, line 10, leave out “this Part” and insert “section 69 or 70”.

This amendment clarifies the information which may be published.

Amendment 107, page 53, line 11, leave out “this Part” and insert “either of those sections”.—(Tom Tugendhat.)

This amendment clarifies the information which may be copied.

Clause 75

OFFENCES: PENALTIES

Amendments made: 108, page 53, line 32, leave out “63(3)” and insert “63(7)” or (8).”

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 71.

Amendment 109, page 54, line 16, leave out “67(3)” and insert “67(7) or (8)”.—(Tom Tugendhat.)

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 93.

Clause 78

INTERPRETATION

Amendments made: 110, page 55, leave out line 28.

This amendment is consequential on NS2 and Amendment 94.

Amendment 111, page 55, line 35, at end insert—

“(2A) For the purposes of this Part references to an “arrangement” do not include an arrangement between a person (“P”) and—

- (a) a person who holds office in or under, or is an employee or other member of staff of, P (acting in that capacity), or
- (b) a person the Secretary of State reasonably considers to be exercising functions on behalf of P as if the person were within paragraph (a).”

This amendment provides that an arrangement between a specified person or a foreign principal and its employee or office holder is not an arrangement for the purposes of Part 3.

Amendment 112, page 55, line 36, leave out subsection (3).—(Tom Tugendhat.)

This amendment is consequential on NS2 and Amendment 94.

Clause 80DUTY TO CONSIDER REDUCTION IN DAMAGES
PAYABLE BY THE CROWN

Amendments made: 51, page 56, line 37, after “consider” insert “the national security factors.”

(2A) The national security factors are—

- (a) whether the claimant has committed wrongdoing involving—
 - (i) the commission of a terrorism offence, or
 - (ii) other involvement in terrorism-related activity, (“terrorist wrongdoing”), and
- (b) if the claimant has committed terrorist wrongdoing—
 - (i) the extent of that wrongdoing, and
 - (ii) the matters mentioned in subsection (2B).

(2B) The matters are”.

This amendment ensures that the national security factors the amendment moves to new subsection (2A)(b) and (2B) are only considered if the claimant has committed terrorist wrongdoing.

Amendment 52, page 56, line 39, leave out paragraph (a).

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 51.

Amendment 53, page 57, line 2, leave out “conduct of the claimant” and insert “the claimant’s terrorist wrongdoing”.—(Tom Tugendhat.)

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 51.

Clause 89

REGULATIONS

Amendment made: 113, page 64, line 5, at end insert—

“(g) regulations under paragraph 15 of Schedule (Control of a person by a foreign power).”—(Tom Tugendhat.)

This amendment provides that regulations under paragraph 15 of Schedule (Control of a person by a foreign power) are to be made using the affirmative resolution procedure.

New Schedule 1

CONTROL OF A PERSON BY A FOREIGN POWER

PART 1

CONDITIONS FOR CONTROL

1(1) A person is controlled by a foreign power if one or more of the following conditions are met.

(2) Condition 1 is that the foreign power has the right to direct or control, or actually directs or controls, the person’s activities (in whole or in part).

(3) Condition 2 is that the foreign power holds, directly or indirectly, more than 25% of the shares in the person.

(4) Condition 3 is that the foreign power holds, directly or indirectly, more than 25% of the voting rights in the person.

(5) Condition 4 is that the foreign power holds the right, directly or indirectly, to appoint or remove an officer of the person.

(6) Condition 5 is that—

(a) the trustees of a trust, or the members of a partnership, unincorporated association or other entity, that is not a legal person under the law by which it is governed meet one or more of conditions 1 to 4 (in their capacity as such) in relation to the person, and

(b) the foreign power has the right to direct or control, or actually directs or controls, the activities of that trust or entity (in whole or in part).

2 In this Schedule “officer”—

(a) in relation to a body corporate, means a director, member of the committee of management, chief executive, manager, secretary or other similar officer of the body, or a person purporting to act in any such capacity;

(b) in relation to a partnership, means a partner or person purporting to act as a partner;

(c) in relation to an unincorporated association other than a partnership, means a person who is concerned in the management or control of the association or purports to act in the capacity of a person so concerned.

PART 2*Interpretation of Part 1**Interpretation*

3 This Part makes provision about the interpretation of Part 1.

Joint interests

4 If a foreign power holds a share or right jointly with another person (whether or not a foreign power), each of those persons is to be taken to hold that share or right.

Joint arrangements

5(1) If shares or rights held by a foreign power and shares or rights held by another person (whether or not a foreign power) are the subject of a joint arrangement between those persons, each of those persons is to be taken to hold the combined shares or rights of both persons.

(2) A “joint arrangement” is an arrangement between the holders of shares (or rights) that they will exercise all or substantially all the rights conferred by their respective shares (or rights) jointly in a way that is pre-determined by the arrangement.

(3) For the meaning of “arrangement”, see paragraph 12.

Calculating shareholdings

6(1) In relation to a person that has a share capital, a reference to holding more than 25% of the shares in that person is to holding shares comprised in the issued share capital of that person of a nominal value exceeding (in aggregate) 25% of that share capital.

(2) In relation to a person that does not have a share capital—

- (a) a reference to holding shares in that person is to holding a right to share in the capital or, as the case may be, profits of that person;
- (b) a reference to holding more than 25% of the shares in that person is to holding a right or rights to share in more than 25% of the capital or, as the case may be, profits of that person.

Voting rights

7(1) A reference to the voting rights in a person is to the rights conferred on shareholders in respect of their shares (or, in the case of a person not having a share capital, on members) to vote at general meetings of the person on all or substantially all matters.

(2) In relation to a person that does not have general meetings at which matters are decided by the exercise of voting rights—

- (a) a reference to exercising voting rights in the person is to be read as a reference to exercising rights in relation to the person that are equivalent to those of a person entitled to exercise voting rights in a company;
- (b) a reference to exercising more than 25% of the voting rights in the person is to be read as a reference to exercising the rights under the constitution of the person to block changes to the overall policy of the person or to the terms of its constitution.

8 In applying this Schedule, the voting rights in a person are to be reduced by any rights held by that person.

Shares or rights held “indirectly”

9(1) A foreign power holds a share “indirectly” if the foreign power has a majority stake in a person and that person—

- (a) holds the share in question, or
- (b) is part of a chain of persons—
 - (i) each of which (other than the last) has a majority stake in the person immediately below it in the chain, and
 - (ii) the last of which holds the share.

(2) A foreign power holds a right “indirectly” if the foreign power has a majority stake in a person and that person—

- (a) holds that right, or
- (b) is part of a chain of persons—
 - (i) each of which (other than the last) has a majority stake in the person immediately below it in the chain, and
 - (ii) the last of which holds that right.

(3) For the purposes of sub-paragraphs (1) and (2), a foreign power has a “majority stake” in a person if—

- (a) the foreign power holds a majority of the voting rights in the person,
- (b) the foreign power is a member of the person and has the right to appoint or remove an officer of the person,
- (c) the foreign power is a member of the person and controls alone, or pursuant to an agreement with other shareholders or members, a majority of the voting rights in the person, or
- (d) the foreign power has the right to exercise, or actually exercises, dominant influence or control over the person.

Shares held by nominees

10 A share held by a person as a nominee for another is to be treated as held by the other (and not by the nominee).

Rights treated as held by person who controls their exercise

11(1) Where a person controls a right, the right is to be treated as held by that person (and not by the person who in fact holds the right, unless that person also controls it).

(2) A person “controls” a right if, by virtue of any arrangement between that person and others, the right is exercisable only—

- (a) by that person,
- (b) in accordance with that person’s directions or instructions, or
- (c) with that person’s consent or concurrence.

12(1) For the purposes of this Schedule, “arrangement” includes—

- (a) any scheme, agreement or understanding, whether or not it is legally enforceable, and
- (b) any convention, custom or practice of any kind.

(2) But something does not count as an arrangement unless there is at least some degree of stability about it (whether by its nature or terms, the time it has been in existence or otherwise).

Rights exercisable only in certain circumstances etc

13(1) Rights that are exercisable only in certain circumstances are to be taken into account only—

- (a) where the circumstances have arisen, and for so long as they continue to obtain, or
- (b) when the circumstances are within the control of the person having the rights.

(2) But rights that are exercisable by an administrator or by creditors while a person is in relevant insolvency proceedings are not to be taken into account even while the person is in those proceedings.

(3) “Relevant insolvency proceedings” means—

- (a) administration within the meaning of the Insolvency Act 1986,
- (b) administration within the meaning of the Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (S.I. 1989/2405 (N.I. 19)), or
- (c) proceedings under the insolvency law of another country or territory during which a person’s assets and affairs are subject to the control or supervision of a third party or creditor.

(4) Rights that are normally exercisable but are temporarily incapable of exercise are to continue to be taken into account.

Rights attached to shares held by way of security

14 Rights attached to shares held by way of security provided by a person are to be treated for the purposes of this Schedule as held by that person—

- (a) where apart from the right to exercise them for the purpose of preserving the value of the security, or of realising it, the rights are exercisable only in accordance with that person’s instructions, and
- (b) where the shares are held in connection with the granting of loans as part of normal business activities and apart from the right to exercise them for the purpose of preserving the value of the security, or of realising it, the rights are exercisable only in that person’s interests.

PART 3

POWER TO AMEND THRESHOLDS ETC

15(1) The Secretary of State may by regulations amend this Schedule for a permitted purpose.

(2) The permitted purposes are—

- (a) to replace any or all references in this Schedule to a percentage figure with references to some other (larger or smaller) percentage figure;

- (b) to change or supplement Part 1 of this Schedule so as to include circumstances (for example, circumstances involving more complex structures) that give a foreign power a level of control over a person broadly similar to the level of control given by the conditions in paragraph 1;
- (c) in consequence of any provision made by virtue of paragraph (b), to change or supplement Part 2 of this Schedule so that circumstances specified in that Part in which a person is to be regarded as holding an interest in another person correspond to any of the conditions in paragraph 1, or would do so but for the extent of the interest.”—(*Tom Tugendhat.*)

This new Schedule makes provision about when a person is controlled by a foreign power.

Brought up, and added to the Bill.

New Schedule 2

EXEMPTIONS

UK arrangements and agreements

1(1) Sections 61(1) and 64(1) (requirements to register foreign activity arrangements and foreign influence arrangements) do not apply to arrangements that are UK arrangements.

(2) The following provisions do not apply to activities carried out in accordance with a UK arrangement or a UK agreement—

- (a) section 63(1) to (3) (specified persons etc must not carry out unregistered activities);
- (b) section 67(1) to (3) (foreign principals etc must not carry out unregistered political influence activities).

(3) A “UK arrangement” or “UK agreement” is an arrangement or agreement to which—

- (a) the United Kingdom is a party, or
- (b) any person acting for or on behalf of, or holding office under, the Crown is (in that capacity) a party.

Foreign powers

2 The following provisions do not apply to a foreign power—

- (a) section 61(1) (requirement to register foreign activity arrangements);
- (b) section 62(1) (offence of carrying out activities under unregistered foreign activity arrangement);
- (c) section 64(1) (requirement to register foreign influence arrangements);
- (d) section 66(1) (offence of carrying out activities under unregistered foreign influence arrangement);
- (e) section 73(1) and (2) (offences of carrying out activities tainted by false information).

Diplomatic missions etc

3(1) Section 61(1) (requirement to register foreign activity arrangements) does not apply to the extent that the foreign activity arrangement relates to the provision of goods or services which are reasonably necessary to support the efficient functioning of—

- (a) a diplomatic mission,
- (b) a consular post, or
- (c) the permanent mission to a UK-based international organisation of a country which is a member of the organisation,

(for example, the provision of catering or maintenance services).

(2) Sections 61(1) and 64(1) (requirements to register foreign activity arrangements and foreign influence arrangements) do not apply where P (within the meaning of those sections)—

- (a) is a member of the family of a principal person forming part of the principal person’s household, and
- (b) makes the arrangement pursuant to an activity carried out by the principal person in that capacity.

(3) “Principal person” means a person who is a member of staff of—

- (a) a diplomatic mission,
- (b) a consular post, or
- (c) the permanent mission to a UK-based international organisation of a country which is a member of the organisation.

(4) The members of the family of a principal person forming part of the principal person’s household include a person who is living with the principal person as their partner in an enduring family relationship.

(5) “Member of staff”—

- (a) in the case of a diplomatic mission, means a member of the mission within the meaning given by Article 1 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (set out in Schedule 1 to the Diplomatic Privileges Act 1964);
- (b) in the case of a consular post, means a member of the consular post within the meaning given by Article 1 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (set out in Schedule 1 to the Consular Relations Act 1968).

(6) In this paragraph—

“consular post” has the meaning given by Article 1 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (set out in Schedule 1 to the Consular Relations Act 1968);

“diplomatic mission” is to be read in accordance with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations done at Vienna on 18 April 1961;

“UK-based international organisation” means an international organisation which has its headquarters in the United Kingdom and on which privileges and immunities have been conferred under section 1 of the International Organisations Act 1968.

Recognised news publishers

4 (1) The following provisions do not apply to a recognised news publisher—

- (a) section 64(1) (requirement to register foreign influence arrangements);
- (b) section 66(1) (offence of carrying out activities under unregistered foreign influence arrangement);
- (c) section 67(1) (foreign principal must not carry out unregistered activities);
- (d) section 73(2) (offence of carrying out political influence activities tainted by false information).

(2) Section 67(2) (employees etc of foreign principal must not carry out unregistered activities) does not apply to a person who holds office in or under, or is an employee or other member of staff of, a recognised news publisher (acting in that capacity).

(3) The following provisions do not apply to a person who is not a recognised news publisher, where the arrangement in question is a news-related foreign influence arrangement—

- (a) section 64(1) (requirement to register foreign influence arrangements);
- (b) section 66(1) (offence of carrying out activities under unregistered foreign influence arrangement);
- (c) section 73(2) (offence of carrying out political influence activities tainted by false information).

(4) A news-related foreign influence arrangement is a foreign influence arrangement made between a person and a foreign principal who is a recognised news publisher where the purpose, or one of the purposes, of the arrangement is the publication of news-related material.

(5) In this paragraph—

“news-related material” and “publish” have the meaning given by section 50(5) of the Online Safety Act 2022;

“recognised news publisher” has the meaning given by section 50 of the Online Safety Act 2022 but as if, in subsection (2)(e) of that section, “in the United Kingdom” were omitted.

Legal activities

5(1) Sections 61(1) and 64(1) (requirements to register foreign activity arrangements and foreign influence arrangements) do not apply in relation to a foreign activity arrangement or a foreign influence arrangement to the extent that the arrangement relates to the carrying on of a legal activity by a lawyer.

(2) The following provisions do not apply to the carrying on of a legal activity by a lawyer—

- (a) section 63(1) to (3) (specified persons etc must not carry out unregistered activities);
- (b) section 67(1) to (3) (foreign principals etc must not carry out unregistered political influence activities).
- (3) “Lawyer” means—
 - (a) a person who for the purposes of the Legal Services Act 2007 is an authorised person in relation to an activity that constitutes a reserved legal activity (within the meaning of that Act),
 - (b) a solicitor or barrister in Northern Ireland,
 - (c) a solicitor or advocate in Scotland, or
 - (d) a person who is a member, and entitled to practise as such, of a legal profession regulated in a jurisdiction outside the United Kingdom.
- (4) “Legal activity” means—
 - (a) in England and Wales, a legal activity within the meaning of section 12 of the Legal Services Act 2007,
 - (b) in Northern Ireland, a legal activity within the meaning of that section, but reading the reference to an activity which is a reserved legal activity as a reference to an activity corresponding to a reserved legal activity,
 - (c) in Scotland, the provision of legal services within the meaning of section 3 of the Legal Services (Scotland) Act 2010 (asp 16), or
 - (d) acting as an arbitrator or mediator.

Employees etc

6(1) Where an exemption is conferred on a person (“P”) by this Schedule, the following are also exempt (subject to sub-paragraph (2))—

- (a) a person who holds office in or under, or is an employee or other member of staff of, P (acting in that capacity), or
- (b) a person the Secretary of State reasonably considers to be exercising functions on behalf of P as if the person were within paragraph (a).

(2) Where P is a foreign power, the exemption does not apply to persons within sub-paragraph (1)(a) if or to the extent that the person makes a misrepresentation about their activities or the capacity in which they act (whether generally or to a particular person).

(3) A misrepresentation is a representation that a reasonable person would consider to be false or misleading in a material way.

(4) A misrepresentation may be made by making a statement or by any other kind of conduct (including an omission), and may be express or implied.

(5) A misrepresentation may in particular include—

- (a) a misrepresentation as to the person’s identity or purpose;
- (b) presenting information in a way which amounts to a misrepresentation, even if some or all of the information is true.

Power to provide for further exemptions

7 The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision for further cases to which any provision of this Part does not apply.”—(*Tom Tugendhat.*)

This new Schedule brings together in one place exemptions previously found in clauses 68, 78 and other provisions of Part 3, and adjusts some of the exemptions.

Brought up, and added to the Bill.

Schedule 6**DETENTION UNDER SECTION 25**

Amendments made: 54, page 100, line 19, at end insert—

“(1A) The power in sub-paragraph (1) may be exercised only in relation to land or a building in the United Kingdom which is owned or controlled by a police force.”

This amendment and Amendment 55 clarify the places which may be designated for the detention of persons under section 25.

Amendment 55, page 100, line 30, at end insert—

“(5) In this paragraph—

“building” includes any part of a building;

“police force” has the same meaning as in paragraph 28.”

See Amendment 54.

Amendment 56, page 123, line 18, at end insert—

“(ba) in relation to fingerprints or samples taken by a constable who is a National Crime Agency officer, or a DNA profile derived from a sample so taken, the Director General of the National Crime Agency;”.

This amendment identifies the responsible chief officer of police in relation to fingerprints or samples taken by a National Crime Agency officer.

Amendment 57, page 124, line 9, leave out “police officer” and insert “constable”.—(Tom Tugendhat.)

This amendment ensures that the grounds for postponing a review apply where a detained person is being questioned by a constable who is a National Crime Agency officer.

Schedule 12**FINGERPRINTS AND SAMPLES**

Amendments made: 58, page 173, line 40, at end insert—

“(ga) the National Crime Agency;”.

This amendment includes the National Crime Agency in the definition of “police force”.

Amendment 59, page 174, line 21, at end insert—

“(ba) in relation to fingerprints or samples taken by a constable who is a National Crime Agency officer, or a DNA profile derived from a sample so taken, the Director General of the National Crime Agency;”.—(*Tom Tugendhat.*)

This amendment identifies the responsible chief officer of police in relation to fingerprints or samples taken by a National Crime Agency officer.

Schedule 13**DAMAGES AT RISK OF BEING USED FOR THE PURPOSES OF TERRORISM**

Amendment proposed: 132, page 176, line 29, leave out

“there is a real risk that”.—(*Stuart C. McDonald.*)

This amendment would ensure the court was satisfied on the balance of probabilities that damages were to be used for terrorism purposes before frozen funds could be forfeited entirely.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 56, Noes 282.

Division No. 91]

[6.27 pm

AYES

Bardell, Hannah
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, rh lan
Blackman, Kirsty
Brock, Deidre

Brown, Alan
Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Richard Thomson*)
Chamberlain, Wendy
Chapman, Douglas

Cherry, Joanna
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Crawley, Angela
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Richard Thomson*)
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Flynn, Stephen
 Foord, Richard
 Gibson, Patricia
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Sarah
 Hendry, Drew
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Jardine, Christine
 Lake, Ben
 Linden, David
 Lucas, Caroline
 MacAskill, Kenny

MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Mc Nally, John
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McLaughlin, Anne
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morgan, Helen
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Richard Thomson*)
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Qaisar, Ms Anum
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Smith, Alyn
 Stephens, Chris
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomson, Richard
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Wilson, Munira
 Wishart, Pete

Tellers for the Ayes:
Steven Bonnar and
Marion Fellows

NOES

Adams, rh Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carter, Andy
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chishti, Rehman

Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, rh Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, Sir James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben

Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, rh Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, rh James
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Knight, Julian
 Kniveton, Kate
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline

Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Paisley, Ian
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew

Shannon, Jim
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie

Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:

Julie Marson and
 Scott Mann

Baynes, Simon
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carter, Andy
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast
 by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, rh Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, Sir James
 Duguid, David
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, rh Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam

Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, rh James
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Knight, Julian
 Kniveton, Kate
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast
 by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Longhi, Marco

Question accordingly negated.

Schedule 14

MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendment proposed: 60, page 181, line 6, at end insert—

“Modern Slavery Act 2015 (c. 30)

9 In Schedule 4 to the Modern Slavery Act 2015 (offences to which defence in section 45 does not apply), after paragraph 36B insert—

‘National Security Act 2022

36C An offence under any of the following provisions of the National Security Act 2022—

section 1 (obtaining or disclosing protected information);

section 2 (obtaining or disclosing trade secrets);

section 3 (assisting a foreign intelligence service);

section 4 (entering a prohibited place for a purpose prejudicial to the UK);

section 12 (sabotage);

section 13 (foreign interference: general);

section 15 (obtaining material benefits from a foreign intelligence service);

section 16 (preparatory conduct).” —(*Tom Tugendhat.*)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 275, Noes 209.

Division No. 92]

[6.39 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Baron, Mr John

Lopez, Julia
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Paisley, Ian
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean

Rutley, David
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stride, rh Mel
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Julie Marson and
Scott Mann

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret

Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Brennan, Kevin

Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Burgon, Richard
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Richard Thomson*)
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Richard Thomson*)
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Flynn, Stephen
 Foord, Richard
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glendon, Mary
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Hayes, Helen
 Hendry, Drew

Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Richard Thomson*)
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate

Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pollard, Luke
 Qaisar, Ms Anum
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Stephens, Chris

Streeting, Wes
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:

**Liz Twist and
 Christian Wakeford**

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment 60 agreed to.

Third Reading

6.51 pm

Tom Tugendhat: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

It remains for me to thank enormously my right hon. Friends the Members for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds) and for Stevenage (Stephen McPartland), who did so much to get the Bill to the right place; my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, who has very graciously left me to get on with this; and all the Members who have been so helpful.

My great thanks go to the intelligence and law enforcement agencies in particular. Their extraordinary courage and skill have earned more than my admiration, respect and gratitude for many, many years, but never more so than in the last few weeks, in which I have been privileged to serve them.

It is worth pointing out very quickly one or two elements of the Bill that I have not yet had the chance to touch on. Let me make it absolutely clear that there is no possibility—no way, no desire, no intent—that any area in this Bill, or in any other that this Government would pass, would in any way diminish the unqualified right not to be tortured. That is an absolute right that this Government and, I know, other Governments, would all hold to. I should be absolutely clear that not only is there is no desire in this House for that to change, but there is no such desire in any of the services and agencies with which I have had the privilege of discussing it.

What our Government, our agencies and those who hold office in our name all know very well is that they are defending our rights and freedoms when they defend the rule of law. They are absolutely championing the values and liberties that matter to us. In the Bill, we are evolving from trying to stop spectaculars such as the tragedies that hit on 9/11 to employing spectrometers—finer

points of detection—to try to ensure that we eliminate risks that come in different ways. That is why I am so grateful to them all for the advice and help they have offered to ensure that the Bill is structured as it is.

I should make it quite clear that the Bill has opened up an area in which we will need to go further and in which I am glad the Prime Minister has asked me to go further: the defence of democracy. Our democracy in this country has sadly been under attack for too long. We are not alone; we know that our friends in other parts of the country and other parts of the world have faced similar attacks and similar areas of influence. I am delighted that the taskforce that the Prime Minister has asked me to lead will get on with its work very shortly, updating the integrated review and helping to ensure that this country is ready for the changes in the threats that we face so that the ultimate sovereignty of our people—the right to choose—is guaranteed and defended long into the future. That means that we have to set up not just powers to empower those agents who work in our name, but the guardrails to defend that right.

I am very glad that the Bill includes such provisions as the requirement for the Attorney General's consent—the Advocate General's in certain cases—to make sure that none of the powers is abused in any way. I am delighted that we have got that in the right place, because we know, sadly, that abuse is always possible.

I will end with the words of Ken McCallum, the director general of MI5, who today was very supportive of not only the Bill but many of the measures that his service has been carrying out. He has been inspirational in his leadership of his service and his defence of the United Kingdom, so I am delighted by his welcome for the foreign influence registration scheme, describing it as

“a modern power designed to tackle a modern threat”.

He is absolutely right, and the scheme is essential. For those reasons, I am grateful for the support we have had from the hon. Members for Halifax (Holly Lynch) and for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald), and other Members across the House.

6.55 pm

Holly Lynch: I rise to confirm that the Labour party supports the Third Reading of this Bill.

It is the first job of every Government to defend our national security from hostile states that wish to do our country harm, and from malign actors and extremists who want to undermine our democracy and everything we stand for. That is not a principle that divides us along party lines; it unites every Member of this House. It is why throughout the Bill's passage we have worked with the Government to get the detail right and to defend our shared interests, and why we will continue to do so.

Our world-leading intelligence and security agencies do incredible and unseen work, day in, day out, to keep us safe. We pay tribute to them and thank our brave officers and staff for their service. I also thank those in policing, the Home Office and the intelligence community for the way they have engaged with me and other hon. and right hon. Members involved in scrutiny of the Bill.

The threat posed by hostile states is on the rise. The annual threat update given today by Ken McCallum, the director general of MI5, was a daunting assessment

[Holly Lynch]

of the breadth and nature of the threats facing the UK. However, we remain concerned about clause 27 in particular and some of the details of the Bill, and we will continue to work with the Government and all those in the other place to find resolutions to those outstanding issues.

Labour supports the Bill because we could not take national security more seriously. We know that our democracy can be defended only when our agencies are equipped with the powers and tools they need, and when we can all have confidence in the procedures and oversight that accompany them.

6.57 pm

Stuart C. McDonald: I, too, thank all colleagues for their involvement and engagement in the Bill, even if we could have done with a little more time for that today. I also thank all the officers and staff of the Home Office and the agencies for their engagement. They have persuaded us of the merits of large parts of the Bill, if not quite all of it. I want personally to thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie) for keeping me right on lots of these issues, and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) for her detailed work with the Joint Committee on Human Rights.

We do need a Bill of this nature—in fact, a Bill of this nature is long overdue. There are still dangers—as I said on Report, we have to make sure that we do not criminalise people the Bill is not intended to criminalise or leave loopholes for people who should be criminalised, and that we rein in some of the more excessive powers—but the Government have listened to some of our concerns and responded positively to some of the amendments. I just encourage them to listen more as the Bill proceeds.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

6.58 pm

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Further to the announcement from the Chair on the result of the Education Committee elections, I would like to put on the record my thanks to the Clerks who organised today's elections and to all colleagues who voted in them. I recognise that a number of excellent candidates ran for the post of Chair of the Committee, and I pay tribute to all of them for the respectful and constructive tone of their campaigns.

Nothing can be more important for the future of our country than how we educate and support our children. I pay tribute to the excellent work of my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), in holding Ministers to account for that. I am grateful for the support of esteemed colleagues in all parts of the House in allowing me to follow in his footsteps.

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I also put on the record my grateful thanks to the staff of the House for the conduct of the Transport Select Committee election earlier today? I am very grateful to have won the support of colleagues throughout the House. I pay tribute to the other candidates. I think the election somewhat taxed the arithmetical skills of

the counters a little more than the election for the Education Select Committee, as it went through all the rounds of the contest. We had a good-natured and humorous campaign. I should mention in passing my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Karl McCartney) and his innovative and tuneful campaigning style.

I very much look forward to chairing the Committee. Transport affects all our lives and all our constituents. I look forward to digging deep into the many issues and challenges that are coming forward. In the two hours or so since the result was announced, I think I have received about 20 different requests for the Committee that I look forward to fielding. Again, I offer my grateful thanks to all colleagues.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the new Chairs of the Education Committee and Transport Committee for their points of order. I am sure that everyone in the House will have appreciated their kind words, not least those about the other candidates in the elections. I congratulate both hon. Gentlemen. I am sure they will have an enjoyable and interesting time carrying out the very important job of scrutinising the Departments, which I know everyone in the House appreciates—Ministers particularly appreciate that work. Many congratulations, and thank you also for your kind words about the staff of the House and their facilitation of the elections.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether you might be able to advise me on a slightly more sombre subject. In a question earlier today, the Immigration Minister responded to a concern raised by the hon. Member for Buckingham (Greg Smith)—I have been trying to find him to say that I was going to raise this issue—regarding the absconson of a gentleman who it subsequently transpires from press reports has been accused of a very serious assault of a young refugee child in my constituency. The Minister said he would investigate the matter and come back to the hon. Member. Can you advise me, Madam Deputy Speaker, on how I can ensure that, given that the matter took place in my constituency—we were not aware at the time—I get an update on the issue as well?

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The reports of the case are very serious and raise some questions about how the Home Office has handled this case. We do not know the full circumstances at the moment, but could you use your good offices to ensure that the Immigration Minister updates us and fully investigates this case?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady and the right hon. Lady for their points of order. Obviously I do not know the background to this case, but I can see that it is a very serious issue. Government Ministers are present and I think the Minister for Security may wish to intervene.

The Minister for Security (Tom Tugendhat): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sure that I speak for the Immigration Minister and the Policing Minister when I say that they will both look into it very carefully. I am sure they will return to answer these questions.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the Minister; that is extremely helpful. I know that it will be fed back that this has been raised, that it is a serious issue and that the House would like some further information about what has happened since.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): With the leave of the House, we shall take motions 3 to 6 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

POLICE

That the draft Police and Crime Commissioner Elections (Amendment) Order 2022, which was laid before this House on 17 October, be approved.

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE

That the draft Assistance with Voting for Persons with Disabilities (Amendments) Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 24 October, be approved.

PENSIONS

That the draft Pensions Dashboards Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 17 October, be approved.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (EDUCATION)

That the draft European University Institute (EU Exit) Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 17 October, be approved.—(*Amanda Solloway.*)

Question agreed to.

Algeria: 60th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Amanda Solloway.*)

7.4 pm

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con): As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Algeria, I feel privileged to have the honour of sponsoring this debate to mark the 60th anniversary of the establishment of ties between the United Kingdom and the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria. The past 60 years since Algeria's independence have been marked by close and cordial ties between our two countries, which, although very different on the surface, are in fact bound together by common history and shared objectives. As chair of the all-party group, I have engaged with Algerian businesses, British companies in Algeria, trade groups, the British ambassador in Algeria and, frequently, the two Algerian ambassadors in London. As a result, I have built close ties with the country, although—alas—I have not yet visited.

Throughout my time working on Algeria, I have chosen to characterise Anglo-Algerian relations as being composed of four main pillars of mutual co-operation and interest: energy, trade, security and culture, which encompasses history, tourism and heritage. Algeria aligns with a number of diverse issues that are of great relevance to me. Hon. Members will be aware that energy, business and history have long been my interests, alongside promoting British expertise in those areas globally. The UK's position as a finance hub, a tech hub, a home to world-class universities and a leader in many economic sectors puts us in a unique position to share our technologies and expertise with Algeria and help it to unlock its huge potential. Our recent presidency of COP26 and our green-tech capabilities will enable us to help Algeria to pursue its energy transformation.

Why is now the perfect time for a debate on British-Algerian relations? As the title of the debate indicates, 60 years of warm diplomatic ties are worth celebrating, but there is more to it than that.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for calling this important debate. Last month, I had the pleasant privilege of visiting Algeria in my role as the Prime Minister's special envoy for freedom of religion or belief and chair of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance—the first such visit of the alliance. I was genuinely pleased at the welcome that I received at meetings in the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Interior, both of which confirmed that they were willing to continue such dialogue, to which I look forward. Does he agree that it is important to continue such conversations wherever opportunities are made available?

Alexander Stafford: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention and I am glad that she had such a successful and fruitful visit to Algeria. I hope that one day in the not-too-distant future, I, too, will visit that beautiful country. I completely agree that now more than ever, there is a huge appetite on both sides for a deeper and closer relationship, catalysed by Britain's post-Brexit freedom to trade with whomever we wish, and by

[Alexander Stafford]

Algeria's concerted effort to put its colonial legacy in the past once and for all and to control its own destiny and relevance to the UK.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): First, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing forward the debate. Although it is important to provide high levels of support to British nationals in Algeria and to maintain good relations with the Algerian Government, there are—I say this respectfully—ongoing concerns about the treatment of minority religions in Algeria, one of which is Christianity, as I know he understands well. Christians are vulnerable to prosecution for blasphemy and there has been a systematic closing of 13 Protestant churches. Does he therefore agree that to maintain our diplomatic relations, the Algerian Government need to make religious persecution a priority and allow people to practise their faith in freedom and peace? Let us welcome the good things, but do more.

Alexander Stafford: It is an honour to be intervened on by the hon. Gentleman. This is my seventh or eighth Adjournment debate and he has never intervened in one, so it is a pleasure to be intervened on today. On his point about Christianity and the freedom of religion, it is important that everyone can practise their religion wherever and whenever they choose. In fact, I had a conversation with the previous Algerian ambassador to London about that very matter not long ago. I will touch on Christianity later in my speech.

It is important to recognise that we cannot understand Algeria or become its close partner without looking at its history and how it was formed as a country. Many Britons may be aware of Algeria only as a north African Arab nation with a recent French influence. That is undoubtedly true, but it boasts a heritage dating back thousands of years. In antiquity, it was the home of the famed Numidians, who were succeeded by the great Phoenicians, who founded nearby Carthage, as we all know. After a slow decline marked by the Punic wars among other things, Algeria fell under the control of the Romans after they defeated the Numidian king, Jugurtha.

In my potted history of the great country of Algeria, I will emphasise its great Roman heritage, which formed Algeria as the country that it is today. In 46 BC, Julius Caesar annexed Algeria to the Roman empire and the regional capital was chosen to be Cherchell. Emperor Trajan's strategy of reinforcing Rome's Algerian territories resulted in the great fortress at Lambaesis and the development of towns such as Timgad and Djémila. Timgad is upheld as a marvel of Roman town planning, with a beautifully preserved UNESCO world heritage site often described as Africa's Pompeii. The city was a home for retired soldiers, with the inscription in the forum reading "Lavare, Venari, Ludere", translated as "Hunting, bathing and playing", which surely sums up the good life for everyone, especially those who had given service to the empire.

As a result of Roman development, Algeria was regarded as a particularly productive part of the empire, becoming a main provider of agricultural surpluses to other distant territories. Later, Emperor Caracalla represented why the Roman model was so successful:

he was of Punic and Arab ancestry, with few actual ties to Rome, yet he was thoroughly Roman in citizenship, attitude and way of life.

At this juncture, Christianity enters the picture. The Christian faith has a long history in Algeria, and was present there long before Islam. By the 4th century, many Algerian Christians followed Donatism, a local church steeped in the ethnic and social values of the region and more popular in the inland, poorer towns. It was so named after its leader, the local Berber bishop, Donatus. St Augustine, the Berber Bishop of Hippo Regius, wrote a treatise against the Donatists. St Augustine's legacy can still be seen today at Annaba.

Augustine's importance as a Church father cannot be underestimated, given his huge impact on foundational Christian doctrine and theology, particularly in his seminal text "The City of God", a philosophical treatise vindicating Christianity in the face of the sacking of Rome by the pagan Visigoths. It is widely regarded as a masterpiece of western culture, yet it is absolutely fascinating to me that Augustine is clearly a son of Algeria. So Algeria, even back in Roman times, helped shape the face of western Europe.

Obviously, St Augustine is not the only famous Roman name to be associated with Algeria. Constantine the Great gave his name to the city of Constantine, which exists today under the same name as Algeria's third biggest city. It is one of the biggest cities in the world and known as the city of hanging bridges. Emperor Constantine reportedly said that it was the only place in the world where man is higher than an eagle.

Other Members will know that my historical muse is Justinian the Great, and I always find that in debates in Parliament there can never be enough Justinian. Justinian's story itself is inextricably linked with Algeria, because in 533 AD Justinian sought to restore Roman control over all its territories and sent the general Belisarius from Constantinople to north Africa with 16,000 men. Within a year, the victorious Belisarius had destroyed the Vandal kingdom and restored Roman rule, using this as a launchpad to reconquer Italy and much of the western Roman empire. Justinian's reconquest of the Roman west is clearly one of the greatest achievements of any empire, and this campaign was conducted by one of the most brilliant generals in history. It is incredible, once again, that Algeria was central to this seminal episode in history, and all that began in north Africa.

Algeria has had a diverse and varied list of rulers, however. The Arabs arrived in the mid-7th century, bringing Islam and Arabic to Algeria. The Arabs were without a doubt the most impactful of all of Algeria's invaders, very much forming the character of the country as it is today. This Islamic cultural presence was continued by the Ottomans, who ruled Algeria from 1516 to the French arrival in 1830.

The 130-year period of French rule had a profound influence on Algeria, which can still be seen today in language, customs and ties. The traumatic events of Algeria's war of independence live long, even now, in the memory of Algerians, and 1 million pieds-noirs fled to France amid the turmoil and horrors perpetrated by various groups on all sides, such as the OAS. The Évian accords in 1962 granted Algeria its independence, but meant that the French Republic shrunk greatly in area, population and importance.

Algeria then, unfortunately, fell victim to a repeat of the violence and brutality of the war of independence in the Algerian civil war of 1991 to 2002, in which the Algerian Government fought Islamist rebel groups. A hard-won victory by the Algerian Government has left ongoing insurgency fears in the country and an interventionist state security apparatus.

However, Algeria is looking to fashion modern, equal relationships that will be both mutually beneficial and respectful. Accordingly, the United Kingdom has only ever had positive relations with Algeria. Britain has been nothing but friendly to Algeria throughout history, building links based on friendship and equality, particularly in the past 60 years of Algerian independence. There is ample evidence of Anglo-Algerian harmony down the years. Official relations between Algeria and the United Kingdom date back to John Tipton's appointment as first British consul in Algiers in 1580.

The 1682 treaty of peace and trade heralded a prosperous relationship built on commerce, and the British enjoyed privileged treatment in Algiers compared with other foreigners. After the French invasion of Algeria, the British consul served as intermediary in negotiations between the French and the Ottoman Algerian ruler, and in 1833 this very Parliament here in Westminster rejected the French claim to occupy Algeria—it was always on Algeria's side. A number of British Army officers expressed admiration for Algerian resistance to French occupation, and Colonel James Scott even joined Algerian hero Emir Abdelkader. British travellers from the time published accounts praising Algeria as a good place to settle due to its climate and people. They were joined by visits from high-ranking British dignitaries, including King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra, who made a private visit to Algiers in 1905.

After Algeria's independence in 1962, relations between Algeria and the United Kingdom became deeper and stronger. The UK was Algeria's first client to import liquefied natural gas in 1964, and British companies were crucial in supplying equipment, machinery, and technological expertise for Algeria's industrial expansion. Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II visited Algeria in October 1980 on a historic visit, where she was received by the President and visited the Roman ruins at Tipaza. Likewise, in 2006 President Bouteflika made the first visit by an Algerian head of state to the UK since independence. In 2013, David Cameron was the first, although I hope not the last, British Prime Minister to visit Algeria.

Algeria and the United Kingdom share not only a deep history but impressive cultural ties. For example, the UK has been the second most popular destination, after France, for Algerian students wishing to go to university, and efforts are being made to expand that pathway further. British universities have also had successful study abroad exchange programmes with Algerian universities. Algeria has provided some of the world's best footballers to play in the English league, namely Riyad Mahrez and Saïd Benrahma. The books "The Praetorians" and "The Centurions" by Jean Lartéguy, which focus on Algeria, have proved hugely popular in translation in the Anglophone world. The film, "The Battle of Algiers" was critically acclaimed and ranked as one of the best films of all time, including in Britain. That shows the cultural impact Algeria is having. Even more excitingly, the ambassador has told me that

preparations are well under way for an Anglo-Algerian film focusing on the life of Algerian hero, Emir Abdelkader, which I hope will introduce that most important historical figure to an Anglophone audience.

Against that encouraging backdrop, what is the future of British-Algerian relations? Currently, a consultation mechanism exists in the UK-Algeria joint committee on bilateral relations, which was established in 2006 to provide an appropriate framework for discussing political, economic, educational and cultural relations, and international issues of common interest. Furthermore, a strategic partnership in the area of security was launched in 2013.

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab): Britain and Algeria go back a very long time and I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important debate. The United Nations recognises the Polisario Front as the legitimate representative of the Sahrawi people, and Algeria has a long history of supporting the Sahrawi people and the Polisario Front. Will the hon. Gentleman join me in placing on record our recognition of the work of Algeria when it comes to the issue of the Western Sahara and the Polisario Front?

Alexander Stafford: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that we have a great link with Algeria. Obviously it is not up to Britain to decide who Algeria has diplomatic relations with, or not, but it is clear that in any process we must have lots of dialogue and talk to all sides.

Let me return to the four pillars of co-operation that I referred to at the beginning of my speech. Energy is currently by far and away the greatest area of British-Algerian co-operation. Several British companies are investing in Algeria in the energy field, and are considered among the most important foreign investors, including BP. Oil and gas are a critical part of Britain's transition to net zero, and fossil fuel companies have a huge role to play in research and innovation for renewables. In the wake of Putin's illegal war in Ukraine, it is more important than ever that we have a reliable supplier of energy and, with my renewables background, I see a mutual opportunity for Britain and Algeria in the green energy space.

Algeria will need to pivot towards renewables over the coming decades. Promising steps have already been taken in harnessing the solar power potential of the vast Sahara desert. I believe that there is a central role for the export of British skills, technology and expertise in renewable energy to Algeria, particularly in solar panels, wind turbines and hydrogen. We must seize that opportunity for the benefit of UK plc.

Simultaneously, Algeria will reap the rewards of its natural geographic advantage—it is the biggest country in Africa, with lots of space and sun—to ensure that its energy industry and wider economy is just as prosperous with renewables as it is with fossil fuels. In the build-up to COP26 in Glasgow, I was pleased to see the now Foreign Secretary visit Algiers in March 2020 and sign a declaration of intent of co-operation in the field of environmental protection, sustainable development and renewable energies.

Jim Shannon: There was a story in the press over the weekend about green energy in relation to Morocco, with the possibility of some of it being exported to the United Kingdom using a channel under the sea. Does the

[Jim Shannon]

hon. Gentleman know about that? Is there a possibility of Algeria and Morocco doing a deal with the United Kingdom?

Alexander Stafford: I thank the hon. Member for intervening again in my debate; it is always a privilege to hear from him. That sounds like an interesting idea. As I said, in our post-Brexit world, we need to explore all options, especially when it comes to the decarbonisation of our energy fields.

Britain and British energy companies must work with Algeria to implement the Algerian renewable energy strategy, an investment of US \$100 billion by 2030 that will result in the country producing a third of all its domestic energy from renewable sources. There is definitely room for more to be done beyond energy, however, with rich opportunities to deepen ties in agriculture, infrastructure, pharmaceutical, mining and rare earths, cyber and digital. The aforementioned 2020 declaration of intent of co-operation established an investment taskforce to allow businesses to continue operating freely after the end of the UK's transition period with the EU, and committed to co-operating across a range of areas including political, economic, security and cultural relations.

It is hugely important that we have focused on education, too. That has led to an agreement for the first British school to open in Algeria and for the promotion of the English language. Likewise, I hope that many more high-skilled and talented Algerian students will come to study in British universities.

Security co-operation is critical in an ever more dangerous world. There are three elements to the partnership. The first is, of course, counter-terrorism, with Britain and Algeria continuing to fight Islamic terror wherever it may spring up. The second element is regional stability as Algeria acts as a vital bulwark against chaos in neighbouring Libya and across the Maghreb as well as in the Sahel to the south and the wider middle east. Similarly, a peaceful resolution to the deadlock in the Western Sahara requires Algeria's leadership and collegiality. The third element is in stemming the flow of illegal migration and human trafficking to Europe's shores. With small boats crossing the channel on a daily basis, Algeria has an important role to play in disrupting trafficking networks in north Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and the middle east.

Finally, and as I have spoken about at great length, there is great scope for increasing exchange in tourism, culture, history and heritage issues. Algeria boasts some of the richest history and the most impressive sights. I would like to see lots of Britons visiting Algeria in the manner that they happily and regularly visit neighbouring countries such as Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia, especially for the ancient sites.

As I draw to a close, I reiterate that I firmly believe that the region is a vital new frontier for Britain as we leave the EU and look to build stronger, exciting new trade partnerships around the world. Algeria is the largest country in Africa by area, and it is highly developed, with a young, dynamic, educated populace. It stands at the gateway to Africa: a continent launching the Africa free trade zone and upgrading a road from

Algiers to Lagos. Algeria is enjoying substantial GDP growth and provides free healthcare and education to its citizens, including free higher education.

Algeria is diversifying its economy by prioritising entrepreneurship, start-ups and renewable energy. I particularly welcome the new incentives being introduced and the new frameworks being set up by the Algerian Government to encourage foreign investment. Algeria is also looking for modern, equal relationships and wishes to build alliances in Europe to navigate a way forward through a volatile petrochemicals market. It also desires to lift opportunities for the Algerian people to new heights.

Of course, there are challenges, just as there are in any relationship, but on the 60th anniversary of the establishment of ties between the United Kingdom and Algeria, the future has never looked brighter for our relationship on all fronts, and the hunger for a deeper and closer partnership from both sides is impossible to ignore. Thus, I ask the Minister to bear Algeria in mind as the United Kingdom uses its new, exciting status as a sovereign trading nation, because I am certain that a good friend and ally is on our doorstep, waiting to welcome a successful British-Algerian future.

7.24 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (David Rutley):

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Alexander Stafford) on securing this debate and I commend him for his very considered words on the history between the UK and Algeria. I recognise the work he does as the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Algeria. In his speech, he talked about masterpieces of culture. I congratulate him and reflect on his masterpiece of a speech, which was incredibly well crafted, going back some distance in history further than I will attempt to do today—I will stick to the last 60 years.

The UK has been a firm friend to the people of Algeria since it gained independence in 1962, and remains so. As with all friendships, our countries have shared successes and difficult times, but the strength of our diplomatic relationship has held true. Most recently, we appreciated the solidarity shown by Algerian Prime Minister Benabderrahmane in attending the state funeral of Her late Majesty the Queen.

It has been 60 years since Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and President Ben Bella exchanged messages, establishing diplomatic relations between the UK and the newly independent Algeria. Prime Minister Macmillan shared hopes of reconstruction there, following a long and difficult struggle for independence. That hope came to fruition just two years later, when British and Algerian business entered into a joint venture on energy. The UK purchased Algeria's very first delivery of liquefied natural gas and assisted in building a key pipeline. We were impressed by Algeria's economic and social development during the 1970s. We also appreciated its strength of purpose on diplomatic issues during the 1980s, when Algeria's mediation was sought by many in the region and beyond in the resolution of disputes and conflicts. As my hon. Friend noted, Her Majesty the Queen visited Algeria in 1980, where she was received by the then President Bendjedid and visited victims of the Chlef earthquake in hospital.

As we all know, the 1990s was a challenging decade for Algeria, but it emerged from that period. Oil prices rose and a new President came to power. Our relations with Algeria entered into a period of reinvigorated engagement at the turn of the millennium, in particular on security issues, with the UK recognising Algeria's counter-terrorism experience and expertise. When we left the European Union, Algeria welcomed the opportunity to deepen our trade relationship and today our countries co-operate on a range of projects. Algeria is one of the key players in Africa and the international community, a respected and trusted security partner and a committed multilateralist.

As we mark six decades of diplomatic relations between our countries, we want to further strengthen and deepen our co-operation and relationship. My noble Friend Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, the Minister with responsibility for north Africa and the middle east, visited Algeria in June, where he met counterparts and discussed the importance of our partnership on education, trade and climate, in particular. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary looks forward to hosting Foreign Minister Lamamra for the next edition of our strategic dialogue. We hope to soon agree dates for the dialogue to take place early next year.

On security, Algeria plays an important role in the region. We welcome and look forward to strengthening our co-operation across shared interests, including defence, counter-terrorism and migration, and tackling the global challenges of human trafficking and organised crime.

On trade, we launched our developing countries trading scheme earlier this year, from which Algerian exporters can directly benefit, and we welcome Algeria's new investment law aimed at improving the business environment for international partnerships. We hope to take forward our shared commitment for a UK-Algeria trade taskforce to further strengthen trade and investment ties. We also stand ready to share the UK's expertise on finance, including reforms, infrastructure and green finance.

Human rights are a clear priority for the UK. We welcome Algeria's interest in assuming a role on the United Nations Human Rights Council, and we hope

to work constructively in that area. For example, during a recent visit that my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) made to Algeria as the Prime Minister's hard-working special envoy for freedom of religion or belief, we welcomed the constructive dialogue about ensuring the rights of religious minorities to practise their beliefs. Like her, I look forward to continuing that important dialogue, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) urged in his contribution to this important debate.

The UK has much to offer on energy and renewable technology. We want to supercharge our partnership with Algeria, which has great potential for solar energy in particular.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley says, education is a growing part of our relationship and helps us to build links, particularly between young people. We were delighted when President Tebboune announced in July that English would be taught from primary school onwards. We are proud that the UK is a popular destination for young Algerians to pursue higher education overseas. It is clear that sharing a language will bring our countries closer and enhance our cultural and business links.

Algeria is clearly a land of potential for its people, for its partners and for the world. Not only is it the largest and most developed country in Africa, but it has huge political and diplomatic capital in Africa, Asia, Latin America and beyond, as well as playing a key role in multilateral institutions. For all those reasons, we look forward to continuing to build on our historic relationship with the Algerian Government and people, working together to realise an even brighter and better future for the next 60 years and beyond.

Question put and agreed to.

7.31 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 16 November 2022

[CAROLINE NOKES *in the Chair*]

West Balkans: Council of Europe

9.30 am

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the West Balkans and the Council of Europe.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes, and a great pleasure to move the motion. I want to begin by saying that I have recently returned from a visit to Bosnia-Herzegovina, where I observed the presidential and parliamentary elections on behalf of the Council of Europe. It left me with a deep impression of a troubled state where nothing gets done. I will come back to that in due course.

First, I wish to thank three people: George Papandreou, the former Prime Minister of Greece, who has produced a solid paper on the Europeanisation of the western Balkans. I am grateful for his sharing of the information that he collected, even though his paper remains too European Union-centric in its overall thrust. The second person I want to thank is Sandy Moss, our permanent representative in Strasbourg. Thirdly, I thank the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe secretariat in London, which does so much for us, and particularly the work of Nick Wright, its leader who is with us today.

The western Balkans covers a number of countries, including Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo. Most of those countries are members of the Council of Europe and have also applied to join the EU.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): I know the hon. Gentleman is a member of PACE and I thank him for the updates on his work there. Does he agree that the Council of Europe has a key role to play in normalising bilateral relations in dispute resolution in the region?

John Howell: I thank the hon. Lady very much for her question. That is a large part of what my speech is about. The Council of Europe has a pivotal role in the area in being able to take forward the sort of agenda that she has outlined. I am grateful to her for raising that.

The granting of candidate status to Moldova and Ukraine has not gone down well with the western Balkans states. We can all understand why. It has been seen for what it is: a political act that has left the western Balkans high and dry. It is seen as being driven by political expediency in view of the dreadful war in Ukraine. It has left a growing disenchantment with membership of the EU and with the EU itself, which will do nothing to increase peace in the region or provide stability, despite the agreed commitment to the shared values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law—the three principal values of the Council of

Europe. That should have given the Council of Europe the inside track in working with the western Balkans to establish those values as the norm.

Despite calls over the years for the Council to take the initiative in the region, very little has been done. I will return to that. A catalysing activity for the region is the war in Ukraine. The influence of Russia in the region is enormous. As a starter, it has big strategic influence in energy, banking and real estate. Some of the countries support the sanctions that have been imposed on Russia. Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro and North Macedonia have done so. Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia have not. Serbia has signed a new three-year gas contract with Russia. We should note, too, that Russia is Serbia's biggest supplier of arms—all sobering thoughts in a European context. The influence of Russia can therefore be seen to be felt very widely across the whole region.

In addition, two other players have a key role. Turkey's activities have by and large been benign and focused on enhancing co-operation.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Ind): The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent and timely speech, and I praise his stewardship in leading parliamentarians on the Council of Europe. His mention of Turkey reminded me that there are elections in that country next year. Does he agree that the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe also does sterling democracy-extending work in the Balkans and more widely in election monitoring? He mentioned Bosnia—he and I were observing the elections in Sarajevo last month—but such work extends to America, where I was election observing. The organisation also had border scrutineers in Ukraine during the lead-up to war. Does he further agree that its work has been vital?

John Howell: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments, and it was a great pleasure to see her in Bosnia-Herzegovina where she was representing the OSCE. That was very much a joint mission to observe the elections, and I agree that the OSCE has a lot to offer, but today I shall concentrate on the relationship with the Council of Europe and what the Council can do, which perhaps has a longer-lasting effect in the region.

Turkey can play a role for good in the region and it has done much good work, but the second country that has a role to play there is Iran, whose activities cannot be described as beneficial. Iran, for example, is widely believed to be behind the attempted vote rigging that occurred in Bosnia-Herzegovina when the hon. Lady and I were there observing the recent elections. That vote rigging attempt was stopped, but it showed what Iran can do.

What can the Council of Europe do in the western Balkans? One of the key elements on which the Council should be concentrating is the rule of law, which is a principle that embeds all others. Furthermore, there are two broad areas where the Council has the edge over the EU, the first of which is developing and enhancing civil society across the region.

Without civil society, there can be no enduring and fundamental championing of the rule of law. We need a civil society that can be taken seriously and not just be one of those complainers. It needs to be active in promoting aspects of society such as good human rights. That is just the sort of area that the Council is

[John Howell]

trying to establish in Russia, although it faces great difficulties, but it should be much easier to achieve that in the western Balkans. That means programmes providing assistance and watertight governance, and ensuring that the systems—the Governments—accept the role that civil society can play.

Secondly, there is the broad area of concentrating on bringing the systems used by Governments more in line with the rule of law across Europe. Where are the extensive training programmes for the judiciary and its independence? I am aware of the Regional Rule of Law Forum for South East Europe, hosted by the AIRE—Advice on Individual Rights in Europe—Centre and Civil Rights Defenders, which has brought together some of the judges of the Court of Human Rights and the Venice Commission to establish best practice, but we need much more of that.

Where is the work with the Administrations to enable them to be willing to invite civil society into the reform process? Where is the work to increase the political will to do something about these issues, which will either increase democracy or provide a conflict with it that needs to be resolved? Where, too, is the ancillary but essential work of ensuring that the media are free?

Those are activities in which the EU is not, I am afraid, 100% active, but where the Council of Europe should be and could be. That requires a Council of Europe secretary-general who is prepared to roll up her sleeves and get out into the countries to sort out those programmes. Sadly, that is one component of the Council that is currently lacking. Instead, it has put three countries—Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Serbia—under monitoring procedures by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, while Montenegro and Macedonia have just come out of monitoring.

Margaret Ferrier: The hon. Gentleman mentioned that he recently observed elections in Bosnia and spoke at the Council of Europe about the aftermath of the Dayton agreement. Does he feel that the worsening situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina can be remedied?

John Howell: The hon. Lady seems to have read my speech, because she is anticipating some of the points that I will make later. I made that point at the Council of Europe and I am happy to make it later if she does not mind waiting a few more minutes until I get to that part of my speech.

Kosovo has been caught up in internal Council of Europe committee meetings and wrangling for a long time. Monitoring can play a great part in helping countries move forward with their reforms, including established countries such as France, the Netherlands and even the UK—I am the monitoring rapporteur for Turkey—but the amount that can be done through monitoring, as opposed to active programmes, is limited. It is not a big stick to tell the countries what they have done wrong; it is much more about bringing PACE's substantial resources to bear to help the country put right weaknesses that might have occurred in its human rights, rule of law or democracy.

How, for example, does PACE monitoring deal with political instability? If anyone thinks that political instability does not arise in that region, they should just look at two countries. We as a delegation are actively helping

Kosovo to overcome the difficulties that it faces and become a full member of the Council of Europe, against Serbia's objections which, of course, are backed by Russia.

Bosnia-Herzegovina contains Srebrenica—the site of a massacre of more than 8,000 Bosniak Muslim men and boys, which has been classed in the international courts as genocide. It might be thought that there is little to argue about, but Serbs do not accept that it was genocide, and Bosnia-Herzegovina has a mixed population.

Reconciliation, which is crucial for peace and security, requires an end to conflicting narratives about the past and a more vigorous prosecution of war crimes. That too is where civil society and the Council of Europe can play a key role. The council must not allow such disputes to fester while we put programmes in place, and we need good conflict resolution activity. If I were secretary-general of PACE—this is not a bid for election, although I am happy to entertain offers—I would seek to develop that area. It requires people with special skill and faith that the countries can come right.

The hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) will agree that the general elections we observed in Bosnia and Herzegovina were generally well run and free. The polling booths, although sometimes a little eccentric—one was in someone's front room—were generally well run. The only incident, to which I have already referred, occurred when those running a polling station turned up to open it with bags of polling forms that had already been completed.

A major problem, however, was that only three or four people were allowed in the polling booths at any one time. The queues stretched right out into the open air at times, because it took an average of 30 minutes for someone to vote because there were four very large, folded voting papers to read before they could identify their preferred candidates. It took that time to manage the paperwork. That is largely a result of the solution produced by the Dayton accord, which created an unsustainable constitutional system for the country. Sure, people were no longer voting with a gun pointed at them, but that cannot be the answer for the future. It cannot go on like that. Having three Presidents means that nothing ever gets decided. With a strong Muslim community, the country is divided into separate constitutional entities, all of which are threatening—at one time or another—to resign the country, such as the Republika Srpska. The high representative has already said that the country is

“facing the greatest existential threat of the post-war period”,

and its links with Russia are strong. It is a crazy and unsustainable situation. I congratulate Bosnia-Herzegovina on setting up such a large election-monitoring activity with both the OSCE and the Council of Europe, and other western organisations.

I have mentioned Kosovo. We as a delegation are actively supporting Kosovo, and have already offered to help it to become a full member of the Council of Europe. It can take its seats, but not vote, thanks to the work that we as a delegation did to encourage that as the first step for membership. I understand that our enthusiasm for Kosovo is the position of the UK Government as well.

It is difficult to comment on Albania without a comment on its Prime Minister. I have met Edi Rama, and did not find him to be the most conducive man for accepting the activities of the Council of Europe. We are

aware of the number of Albanians, certainly the number of Albanian single men, who are coming across the channel, but Albania needs to make lots of progress on reforms to the judiciary and against corruption.

The big problem with Serbia is normalising its relationship with Kosovo and aligning its foreign policy away from Russia to a western, normal perspective. These both mean a lot of work, and a great deal of rethinking. It is interesting that the EU sees the help of the Council of Europe as crucial for enlarging the EU to include the western Balkans. It is essential for the UK too, but we should not try to do it alone at this stage. The UK should use my delegation to put pressure on the Council of Europe to take a more active role in the region and step up to the plate. It is not a question of money either; the Council of Europe Development Bank is able to help with the investment. We need a strategic approach, looking at the region as a whole. The question of migrants is a big factor in this, but we must move away from the narrow confines of nationalism and xenophobia, and the Council of Europe can play a major role in that.

9.48 am

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) —I use that term advisedly—on opening the debate. His stewardship of the UK delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is exemplary, and I join him in his endorsement of the roles of those who help us here in the UK Parliament.

If we look at the west Balkans as a region—the hon. Member for Henley is right to say that we need to take a strategic view of the whole region—some things are common. Not everywhere has all of these features, but nevertheless one of the depressing things is to travel anywhere in the western Balkans and talk to young people, most of whom will say that their ambition is to leave. They do not generally want to leave for the UK, by the way; they normally want to go to Germany. The fact that young people have no hope or faith in the future is such a mark of what is going wrong. There are those of us who heard that message not so long ago in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but it is a common view across the region. It matters to us as the UK in narrow, national terms, but it matters to us in any case if we hold the view that a well-ordered world is in the interests of the United Kingdom. There are issues such as combating corruption and ensuring that the rule of law is underpinned by judges who are free of the taint of corruption. Those things matter and it is in our interest to ensure that we are part of a process that brings them together.

In the relatively short time I have, let me make one central point. At the moment, a battle is taking place that can be defined in national terms, or by groupings of nations. That is whether the Council of Europe and the European Union pull together and challenge the baleful influence of Moscow and, to a lesser extent, the growing presence of China in the western Balkans. Certainly, the influence of Moscow is almost entirely that of disruptor, through their friends in Belgrade as well as directly.

That matters because a disrupted western Balkans can descend into the kind of events that we have seen in the past. It is very difficult. Nobody would have predicted

the violence that took place in the Balkans in the past, not many years before the region was plunged into chaos. I do not want to be overly dramatic, but when Mr Dodik talks about independence or secession for Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina we have the basis of a major challenge. An independent Republika Srpska's armed force could lead to all manner of things, the like of which we should not contemplate. We have an interest, in any case, in the good governance of the region. That catastrophic view would not apply in most other countries of the region, I am glad to say, but we do have to challenge, both intellectually and practically, the role that Moscow and Belgrade seek to play in the region. That is one point I want to establish.

Many good things are taking place. Going back not that long ago, few people would have predicted that Albania would be a serious candidate for European Union membership, or North Macedonia, yet both those countries should be on a faster track into the European Union. It is always difficult, post Brexit, for UK politicians, even ones like me who were opposed to Brexit, to make the case for the European Union to take action. We need our friends in the EU to recognise that an EU that pretends to have the door open but in practice slams it pretty firmly shut is playing into the hands of the disruptors in the region, and those who already have the kind of despair I described among the younger generation and simply want to leave their countries.

There are some practical things we need to do. We need to work together, the Council of Europe with the European Union. That must underwrite everything that we do. There is no room for competition between the two bodies; we should be joined in everything that we do. That is fundamental, because it is about providing stability and the practical support that the hon. Member for Henley described. It is also about providing something else: the sense that there is a direction of travel that takes people to a better future.

In the end, the big prize is to say to the younger generation, which includes some very talented people, that their future is in their own countries in the region, to build that better west Balkans. If we can begin that process with sincerity and practicality, we can make a material difference. I know the region a little from over the years, but there are people in this room who know it a lot better than I do and I want to listen to what they have to say.

I will say this, though: the western Balkans matters to the United Kingdom. Perhaps it is not our principal area of activity at the moment, but one of the real tragedies of how we all operate is that today's crisis is Ukraine, yesterday's was Afghanistan and the day before it was wherever. The western Balkans was once that crisis that we thought was so important, and all our energies were directed there. As a Minister, I lived through the crisis in Kosovo, and we cannot go back to those days. The region is too important for us, so we have to make sure it is on all our agendas, not simply for today, but for the indefinite future. I thank the hon. Member for Henley once again for introducing the debate. It is an important debate that we need to remain fixed on.

Caroline Nokes (in the Chair): We have 34 minutes and five Members wish to speak. May I encourage you to keep to a limit of about seven minutes, although it is not a formal limit?

9.55 am

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Without doubt, the crucible and cockpit for all crisis in the western Balkans is Bosnia. This country has 3.2 million people, ethnically south Slav in nature, but split into three basic religions. Muslims make up 51%, and they are often called Bosniaks. Eastern Orthodox people represent 31%—often called Bosnian Serbs. Roman Catholics represent about 15%—normally called Bosnian Croats.

In 1992, the Bosnian Serbs attacked their neighbours, seizing large tracts of land, which they ethnically cleansed of non-Serbs. As the war went on, the Croats and Muslims also carried out their version of ethnic cleansing. An estimated 2 million people were driven from their homes. In September 1992, the United Nations authorised the deployment to Bosnia of a protection force, UNPROFOR. The UN troops were often called peacekeepers, but actually that was not their role. There was no peace to keep in Bosnia and UNPROFOR did not have the mandate to enforce it either.

Although several British Army observers, medics and liaison staff were already on the ground in Sarajevo and elsewhere, Britain's main contribution to UNPROFOR was a battle group based on the 1st Battalion, the Cheshire Regiment and a reconnaissance squadron of the 9th/12th Lancers. Around 2,400 troops deployed under Operation Grapple, which is what it was called, in November 1992, and I led it.

Our military has been directly involved in Bosnia since then, and 59 service personnel have lost their lives trying to help the country, among them my escort driver, Lance Corporal Wayne Edwards, and my interpreter, Dobrila Kalaba, who was deployed by us although technically not in the Army. Both were shot in the head, and I was shot in the leg. It did not seem to make much difference to me—I am still here—but I am very sad about the other two. Unsurprisingly, therefore, I have a deep personal connection to Bosnia, which I retain to this day.

The war, which started in 1992 when I was first there, continued until the massacre of Srebrenica in July 1995 and ended with the Dayton peace accords in 1996. That stopped the fighting and established a triumvirate of uneasy power sharing between the three major sides: Bosnian Serbs, Bosnian Croats and Bosniaks. Dayton was supposed to last only a few years until politics could be adjusted to make Bosnia a somewhat democratic and viable state, but the Dayton arrangements have become the status quo, and they are simply cracking at the seams.

The Bosnian Serbs in so-called Republika Srpska are seriously threatening to break away, and the Bosnian Croats are also making similar growling noises. If that happens, almost all authorities on the region believe we could easily see the renewal of civil warfare in Bosnia. Between 1992 and 1996, approximately 200,000 people were killed in that war and, as I have mentioned, 2 million people were displaced. That tragedy must not be repeated.

I believe that we, the British, are in a good position to influence what goes on in Bosnia. Our reputation there is quite high as a result of the actions of our soldiers over the years, as well as the continued interest that we hold in the country—witness the fact that Sir Stuart Peach is the representative there, and a good one too.

In my experience, the one thing Bosnians respect is good, motivated and professional soldiers on the ground, who know what they are doing. I do not suppose that it will come as a surprise to colleagues that I believe that we could go in there again.

Currently, we have very few military forces on the ground there and we do not contribute to the so-called EUFOR, the European Union Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is utterly and completely useless and does nothing but wander around the country, but we have a few staff officers at the nascent NATO headquarters recently established there. It would be a hugely significant signal if we were to send a British battle group to Bosnia under NATO command. I suggest that should happen, and soon.

My interest in Bosnia has not waned over the years. I have been there twice this year and will return again on 8 December. As my friend, the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd), has already mentioned, it is a tragedy that 170,000 people left Bosnia last year. They were mainly youngsters. Consider that 170,000 as a percentage of the population of 3.4 million. They are heavily bleeding the people who could be the future of Bosnia. Those people would not be leaving if they believed they had a future, so we, the British, who have invested so much in the country and have paid a blood price, should do all in our power to help that country of decent people sort itself out.

10.2 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Nokes. I thank the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) for leading the debate and for his consistent and sterling efforts as leader of the UK delegation to the Council of Europe. I think we all believe that that delegation is in good hands. If I had the opportunity, I would vote for the hon. Gentleman, and I know others would as well.

Although the UK is no longer a member of the European Union—I am proud to be a Brexiteer—we do our best through the Council of Europe to uphold human rights, democracy and the rule of law. I am my party's spokesperson for human rights and equality issues across the world, whether they be in Europe, the middle east or elsewhere.

I sincerely thank the right hon. and gallant Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) for his contribution. I have heard it before but it does not make it less powerful to hear it again. We are all aware of his courage, his bravery and his dedication to the peace and stability of the Balkans. He did it in uniform, and I give my thanks—indeed, all our thanks—to him for that. He is a dear friend; he knows that. We think very highly of him.

The debate is especially important as the last time we debated the issue was back in February, at the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and we have since seen the devastation that has occurred as a result. The UK has always been a leading force in the Council of Europe, ably championed by the hon. Member for Henley, in holding Putin to account, so it is great to be here to discuss the protection of other small states.

On 13 December last year, the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss), met the Foreign Ministers of the six west Balkan states of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo,

Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. The hon. Member for Henley referred to Turkey as well. I have a deep interest in Turkey, particularly because of its human rights abuses. The fact that it suppresses and discriminates against ethnic minorities and those of other religious viewpoints is something we have to highlight, and I am glad that the hon. Member continues to do that.

Margaret Ferrier: With the dangerous rhetoric about religion heightening in Bosnia and Herzegovina, does the hon. Member agree that protecting freedom of religion across the region must be a key priority, particularly as some neighbouring countries look to join the EU?

Jim Shannon: I certainly do. I know the Minister will respond positively. She knows that I have a deep interest in that issue. As the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief, it comes up all the time, and I will go on to speak about it. The hon. Member for Henley referred to fit and healthy single males who seem to be leaving Albania with regularity to come to the United Kingdom. I am not against any person who wants to emigrate, but do it legally through the system. Don't jump on a boat and come across.

I watched a TV programme last week that looked at a village in Albania. The village previously had a population of around 1,000, but it was down to less than 100. Those left behind were elderly people and children—not many children at that—because they are all coming across. When it comes to Albania, maybe the Minister could give some indication of what discussions there have been through the Council of Europe and what the Council will do to ensure that people do not come across in these increasing numbers.

Bob Stewart: I thank my good friend for allowing me to intervene on him. A good role for the Council of Europe that has not been mentioned is convening a conference to try to sort out a Dayton 2—a new approach to Bosnia. If the Council of Europe is so flipping powerful, it should actually convene this conference and get on with it. All these words and elections are meaningless if the country is broken because of its constitution, which is non-existent and frankly is a cockshy.

Caroline Nokes (in the Chair): Mr Stewart, please can you think about the language you use in this Chamber?

Bob Stewart: Ms Nokes, I am so sorry.

Jim Shannon: The emotion of the occasion perhaps got the better of the right hon. Gentleman. I wholeheartedly support—with the exception of the last couple of words, of course—what he says. We have stated on multiple occasions that the UK is committed to the western Balkans and to the defence and promotion of freedom. The west has proven instrumental in ensuring support for the west Balkans's call for greater Euro-Atlantic integration with the United States for both economic and cultural prosperity.

One major factor posing great concern is Russia. I spoke on this issue last time, and we have truly seen the utter malice and evil that Russia has subjected Ukraine to since we last spoke on the issue. The Kremlin has

repeatedly demonstrated that the Balkan states are a conducive environment to push back against the west, especially the USA. Putin's regime has refused to accept Kosovo's independence, attempted a brazen attack against Montenegro and committed covert attacks to target arms supplies that were destined for Ukraine. Russia is clever when it comes to subversion and in its violence, brutality and wickedness. When we look at these things logically, Russia has absolutely nothing to offer the west Balkans. These countries are in desperate need of prosperity and greater stability, and there is no comparison between the Council of Europe and the corrupt regime of Putin. That is the real threat in the Balkans.

Part of the Berlin process is to ensure that nine EU member states, along with the west Balkans and the UK, engage with the six Balkan Administrations to promote regional co-operation and integration agendas between EU and non-EU states. I know the hon. Member for Henley is trying to do that through his leadership. Through the Council of Europe, we care much about striving for democracy and promoting fair elections. No smaller state should be subject to violent extremism. The ongoing war in Ukraine has been devastating, and the United Kingdom has a role as a western ally to help Balkan states preserve companionship and autonomy. It has been clear that Serbia has moved closer to Russia by not imposing sanctions on the Administration. We have to look at what we can do to impress on Serbia the importance of making efforts to distance itself from Putin.

I will conclude, as I am very conscious that others want to speak. The UK works very closely with Governments in the Balkans region to support internal reforms and the rule of law. I wish for that to continue. I call on our Government—my Government—and the Minister who is in Westminster Hall today to ensure that there are ongoing conversations and support for the future of the western Balkans. I thank them—the Minister and the Government—as well as the Council of Europe, and in particular the hon. Member for Henley, for their work and achievements thus far.

10.10 am

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): In the brief time that I have, I will focus my comments purely on our relations with Albania, a country that I visited earlier this year with my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), who is the chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on Albania. I pay tribute to him for his professionalism in conducting that trip and in managing the APPG.

There is no doubt that there is growing controversy over illegal crossings over the English channel, but how we treat the existing Albanian diaspora here in the United Kingdom is very important and a key indicator of how we develop our relations with Tirana.

I am the sole Conservative Member of Parliament who was born in eastern Europe—I was born in Poland—so our relations with central and eastern Europe, including the Balkans, are of particular interest to me. I remember coming to this country for the first time, escaping communism with my family in October 1978, as a six-year-old child. I remember the tremendous warmth, kindness and hospitality that we were shown when we came to this country for the first time. That is what characterises British people and this country. That is

[Daniel Kawczynski]

what we are known for around the world—the way in which we treat people of different faiths, religions, backgrounds and other characteristics.

When Poland joined the European Union in 2004, there was a huge movement of people from that country to the United Kingdom. I remember that at the time the BBC and others whipped up hysteria about the huge numbers of Poles coming to this country, so much so that as I went around the United Kingdom meeting members of the Polish diaspora, I saw and heard evidence of racist attacks, abuse and intimidation of those hard-working Poles who had come to this country to contribute. It was because of the narrative that had been created by the media, by the BBC and by the newspapers. I felt so passionately at that time that I went on “Newsnight” and on Radio 4, and I challenged the media about their conduct, asking why they were focusing so much on people from one specific nation.

Of course we want to control migration, of course we want to control our borders, and of course we want to ensure that migration works in the interests of the United Kingdom. But if history has taught us one thing, it is that focusing on one particular type of people, or on a particular nationality, is a very dangerous thing for any society. And to blame that one particular group of people for the ills and difficulties that the nation is going through is the thin end of the wedge, and something that history has taught us repeatedly is extremely problematic.

I believe that Albanians in the United Kingdom are facing the same pressure that the Poles went through in the early 2000s—actually, perhaps even more so. I have come across cases in my constituency of Shrewsbury of young children of Albanian origin being bullied at school and experiencing racist abuse. Last week, I met Albanian citizens on Westminster bridge who were peacefully demonstrating and holding up their Albanian flags and saying, “I’m a carpenter”, “I’m a nurse”, “I’m a doctor”, “I’m a schoolteacher”, and, “We’re here and we’re contributing to the United Kingdom. We love this country. And yet the media portrays us all as criminals and part of some nefarious type of nationality that is here purely to take advantage of the British and to be criminals.”

I was very moved and touched by what I heard on Westminster bridge from those hard-working people. The demonstration that I saw last week on Westminster bridge is very different from how the event was characterised in *The Mail on Sunday*, which tried to portray those demonstrators as a marauding mob, hell-bent on creating violence. That is not what I saw on Westminster bridge. People like Mr Farage, who try to whip up this sort of anti-Albanian hysteria through the pages of *The Mail on Sunday*, should be very careful about what they are doing.

I want to raise a radio interview that my right hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) had with Jeremy Kyle. For me, Jeremy Kyle is the epitome—the personification—of that vilification and that “baying to the mob” mentality. He tries to create division and tension in order to sell his agenda and vilify this diaspora. I was proud of my right hon. Friend when he described Jeremy Kyle’s comments as “emotive, corrosive, offensive drivel”. I agree with him entirely. To characterise a whole nation in that way is wrong.

We all want to destroy the business model of criminal gangs, but we must not pick on the Albanians. I urge the Home Secretary to focus on the task ahead of her, and to be careful with the language that she uses. Certainly, some of the Albanian residents that I met on Westminster bridge expressed concern to me about the characterisation of them by certain politicians in this House. I recognise and celebrate the helpful contribution of Albanians.

Finally, my constituent, Arlinda Ballcaj, has joined Shrewsbury Conservatives; she does a tremendous amount of work to help me with my local party in Shrewsbury. She was the first citizen of Albanian origin to stand for Shrewsbury Conservatives as a council candidate. I am very proud of her. Unfortunately, she lost the seat. When I sat down with her, we both cried about the vilification that she came under, the racist abuse that she received and the conduct of some of the other candidates towards her. It was an emotional experience. I do not want any candidate to go through that sort of abuse. I very much hope that all of us in this House bear in mind my key message today: let us tackle the criminal gangs, but let us be very careful about how we treat the Albanian diaspora. They are here, and in the main they are hard-working, decent people who make a tremendous contribution to the United Kingdom.

Caroline Nokes (in the Chair): May I ask that the final two speeches are kept to five minutes?

10.18 am

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) on securing this debate. It has been an extremely well-informed debate, and it appears that virtually everyone around the Chamber has been to the western Balkans over the course of the last few months.

I serve as the Prime Minister’s trade envoy to the western Balkans. I want to focus less on the political perspective and more on the main element of my brief, which is trade. It is a means not just of growing economies, but of ensuring peace and harmony within those sometimes troubled states. It is clear that we have both a strategic and a financial interest in being close partners with this part of the world. As the trade envoy, I am tasked with encouraging and supporting the growth of business links between the UK and the region. To do so, I work with a wide range of organisations in both the public and the private sector.

As a region with relatively young democracies and market economies, it is to some extent characterised by a legacy of nationalism, ethnic tensions, protectionism and territorial rivalries. Some businesses may consider the region full of significant business challenges, such as bureaucracy, corruption and political instability. However, each country in the region is committed to tackling those issues head on, and improving the business environment. Progress is varied from country to country, and there are setbacks. However, the general direction is positive and strides are being made with Governments across the region, and they ought to be congratulated for their efforts.

Of course, as states hopeful of EU membership, each Government in the region are astutely aware of the need to continue making the necessary reforms to eventually

achieve that aim. There is much that the Council of Europe can do to step up its assistance to those nations in improving their application of the rule of law, tackling corruption, ensuring media freedom and putting reforms in place across the Executive, the legislature and the judiciary. That would also help them in joining other international organisations, including the Council of Europe.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Henley remarked, reconciliation is a key theme in the region and is essential to realising the goal of being admitted to the various international organisations. Numerous divisions exist both between and within states in the region; naturally, they are highly emotive and difficult to move on from. That is an area where the Council of Europe can play a significant role. Conflict resolution is difficult but essential. That means that those who have done wrong must be held accountable for crimes and prosecuted.

In some countries—Kosovo, in particular—the UK has not sufficiently focused on the trading relationship, instead preferring to support the country in state building and security issues. Other European countries, as well as the USA, have been quicker to capitalise on the opportunities. In other countries, such as Albania, our focus has dwelt on combatting organised crime. Given the direct impact that has on the UK, it is crucial that we address those matters and work together to resolve them. In doing so, we must remember that it is just one small aspect of what should be a wide-ranging and mutually beneficial relationship.

I want to address that particular issue in more depth. We will all be aware of the headlines in recent weeks. As my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) has highlighted, we have had protests in Parliament square relating to the channel boat crossings. I will say directly to the Albanian people, particularly those who live, work and contribute here, that the UK values their contribution. Most Albanians are here legally and contribute significantly to our society. The vast majority are law abiding and integrate well, maintaining strong relationships within their diaspora. Sadly, there are criminal gangs who exploit them; we are familiar with that. We enjoy a long history with Albania, and we ought to be able to overcome the present difficulties by working together to tackle the minority who are involved in drug trafficking and other crimes.

Those difficulties can be overcome through measures such as the mutual readmission agreement, which has already seen over 1,000 Albanian foreign national offenders returned. However, both of our countries need to do more. Fortunately, that is possible due to the strong and wide-ranging relationship we share with Albania as a close NATO ally, a partner in the UN and a vital partner in ensuring Europe's collective security.

I suggest to the Minister that now would be a good time for her Department, in co-operation with the Department for International Trade, to launch a major initiative to encourage UK businesses to look more seriously at the opportunities that exist in Albania in particular, but also in the wider region. As has been said, those countries are losing their young people at an enormous rate. If we could do more to establish businesses there, the long-term effect would be to encourage those young people to stay in their home country. That would also, of course, be beneficial to our country as well.

I can see, Ms Nokes, that you are urging me to conclude. Yesterday, my hon. Friend the Member for Henley urged me to increase my contribution!

Caroline Nokes (in the Chair): I would like to get Mrs Latham in, please.

Martin Vickers: I will wind up by saying that a great deal can be done to extend our trading relationship. I urge the Minister to work with her colleagues in other Departments to enhance our relationship, and as trade envoy I will certainly do my part to assist.

10.25 am

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, I think, Ms Nokes. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) on securing this really important debate and all Members who have contributed so far.

I want to make two short points about the western Balkans and the Council of Europe. The first is based on worrying political developments in the western Balkans, and the second on my visit to Bosnia in February and the report of the International Development Committee on atrocity prevention, which was published following that visit.

As right hon. and hon. Members know, the Council of Europe is the leading body supporting human rights on the European continent. Although we are no longer members of the European Union, we remain at the heart of the rights-based union of the Council of Europe, including through the delegations from this House and the other place, ably led by my hon. Friend the Member for Henley, that we send to the part-sessions of the Parliamentary Assembly.

As my hon. Friend set out, however, the Council of Europe has been worryingly slow to act in relation to recent developments in the region, which I know from first-hand experience still experiences political instability following the troubles of the 1990s. Indeed, political instability in the region is increasing: there has been violent unrest in Montenegro, concerns about the Dayton peace accord, which ended the Bosnian conflict, and a freeze in negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia over Kosovan independence.

These are very worrying times, and the influence of what is taking place in Ukraine is keenly felt. That is why the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, at its October meeting, called for the EU to increase the speed and urgency of its enlargement process to the western Balkans. Without urgency on the part of the EU, the European vision may lose its appeal to those nations, and they will be at risk of Russian aggression, as we saw in Ukraine. That would be a shame, as the steps being taken by the western Balkan nations in pursuit of EU membership are incredibly positive. They include Bosnia's 2022 laws banning female genital mutilation and forced marriage. I support the Council of Europe's motion calling on the EU to increase the impetus accorded to the accession process for the western Balkans, and I hope the EU leadership will take that on board to help prevent further instability in the region.

My second point relates to the Council of Europe's role as a guardian of human rights on the European continent and atrocity prevention. The International

[Mrs Pauline Latham]

Development Committee's report on preventing atrocities, "From Srebrenica to a safer tomorrow: Preventing future mass atrocities around the world", highlighted that in addition to a Government strategy on atrocity prevention, multilateral international action is absolutely crucial in safeguarding the population from some of the horror of events such as Srebrenica in Bosnia in July 1995, and more recently the reported war crimes of Putin's forces in Ukraine.

The Council of Europe must not be understated; it must be prepared to be outspoken on any issues of atrocity prevention, not only through the influence of the European Court of Human Rights, but through the Parliamentary Assembly and the Committee of Ministers. I hope the Minister will comment on how the Council of Europe can bring its influence to bear on the conflict in the field of atrocity prevention. This is a crucial moment, and the Council of Europe must not delay or hesitate.

This vast and hugely important subject cannot be dealt with thoroughly in the 90 minutes assigned to us. I hope the Minister will give consideration to the two points I have raised. First, the UK must exert what influence we can on the EU in support of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe resolution from October, encouraging more integration for the western Balkans. Secondly, I would be grateful if the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Henley could confirm that all parts of the Council of Europe will be particularly active in atrocity prevention in Ukraine, following the recommendation from the IDC report about acting multilaterally.

10.29 am

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms Nokes, and to make the winding-up speech for the Scottish National party. I commend colleagues from across the House for making a number of powerful speeches that have provided some great insight into the region and the work of the Council of Europe. In particular, I commend the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) for introducing the debate and for his work on the Council. It is important that, post Brexit, the UK builds on existing links to deepen and strengthen them, because being absent from Brussels does not mean being absent from other ways of communicating and co-operating.

The western Balkans is at a pivotal moment, and it is important that while we rightly focus on events in and around Ukraine—especially the events overnight, with deeply worrying news coming from the region—we do not lose sight of the countries in the western Balkans, because they are vulnerable to what the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) described as the baleful—that is the best word for it—influence of the Kremlin. There is a clear need for us to maintain focus there.

Colleagues know—I do not need to rehearse this—that I am a committed pro-European politician and pro-EU politician. I was a Member of the European Parliament for 16 years, and I greatly regret the UK's absence from it. The EU is poorer for that, and the UK is poorer for it too. I think Scotland's best future is as an independent state within the EU. We will come back to that.

One thing that I would say, arising from my 16 years in the European Parliament, is that it is important that colleagues remember that the Council of Europe and the EU are not in competition. There is always a risk of institutional vanity, but those organisations are best and most effective when they are in lockstep and in harness, working together. As a student in Warsaw in the '90s, I saw that the EU accession track and the assistance that that brings from the Council of Europe, the Venice Commission and the EU itself can be hugely powerful spurs—a North star—for domestic reforms and capacity building in democracy, peace building, justice and the rule of law, which is hugely important for the western Balkans.

We have heard an important wake-up call from the Council of Europe, and I commend to the Chamber the resolution of 11 October, which states:

"The Parliamentary Assembly... firmly believes that helping Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo meet their aspirations for closer European integration is important not only for the countries concerned but for the European continent and will benefit all European citizens."

It goes on:

"Surveys show that an increasing number of people in the Western Balkans, especially amongst the youth, are pessimistic about the prospects of EU accession. The European vision is losing its shine. In its place, ethno-nationalism has resurfaced, a very worrying development in a region in which the"

spectre of violence still looms large. It continues:

"The Assembly calls for a new impetus to be given to the European Union enlargement process."

I could not agree more. Even if the UK is not part of the EU, I would hope we all agree that closer integration of the western Balkan states into the European framework, however that is defined, is in all our interests.

When I was a Member of the European Parliament, I always supported, as did many UK colleagues, a wider EU. I rejected any idea that the EU is a community of geography and that there is a limit to where Europe stops and starts. I explicitly rejected the idea that the EU is a religious community and that a Muslim country or a country with a significant Muslim population cannot be part of it.

It grieves me that those voices have been removed, and there is a risk, as the hon. Member for Henley mentioned, that voices that would see a more insular and more exclusive EU are stronger within EU discussions now that the UK is absent. That is something we should all regret, because such a development would be a tragedy for the west Balkans, given that the Kremlin is all too ready to gobble those countries up. We have seen what that can mean in the region, and we must do all we can, in all our forums, to ensure that it does not happen again.

I shall close with a few concrete questions to the Minister, whom I welcome to her place. I appreciate that she is newly in post and that the answers might not readily come, but in the context of the integrated review I hope she will take on in a constructive spirit the ideas she has heard today and the suggestions I shall offer.

There is a real, pressing need to expand and better fund the UK's Council of Europe mission, because being absent from Brussels does not mean being absent from Strasbourg; quite the reverse. We need more resources, as well as more focus on what the Council of Europe is doing and what the UK can do within it.

We also need to increase bilateral support to build up precisely those democracy capacity-building and disinformation-countering measures across the states of the west Balkans. The UK is in a position to do that bilaterally or through the Council of Europe. I would applaud both approaches, and I would be glad to hear greater plans to see that come forward. The SNP has long called for an atrocity prevention strategy to be rolled out through the UK embassy network. Such a strategy would be important worldwide, but particularly in the western Balkans, where our excellent UK missions are doing sterling work, and an atrocity prevention strategy being higher up the FCDO's agenda would help them in that. I really hope that we see a comprehensive Russia strategy in the integrated review. It is clear that the Kremlin is operating on multiple fronts, and we need to ensure that we are ahead of that and taking due note of it.

The western Balkans is an important part of Europe's geography and an important part of our world view. I really commend the hon. Member for Henley on bringing forward this debate today. Where there are constructive ways to help the people of those great countries to get closer to us and enjoy the peace and prosperity that we enjoy, I will certainly support them.

10.35 am

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairpersonship, Ms Nokes. I thank the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) for securing this debate at a critical time for the entire western Balkans and for the Council of Europe's engagement with it. I also extend my thanks to our permanent representative, our judges, the whole delegation to the Council—many of whom have spoken today—and our envoy in the region, Sir Stuart Peach, who is doing an excellent job.

We have heard some fantastic speeches today, which have drawn on the huge experience we have in the room. The hon. Member for Henley made a comprehensive speech, speaking of the long arm of attempted Russian influence and the range of challenges across the region and in multiple individual countries. I did not agree entirely with all his views on disenchantment with the EU across the region; I was there recently and, while it is clear that there is frustration with the process, I also saw a lot of enthusiasm for further integration into the European family on multiple levels.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) and his work in Kosovo. He spoke from his extensive experience. In particular, he spoke of the hope we need to offer younger generations across the region, and indeed in many troubled parts of the world, as being key to ensuring stability in the future. The right hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) spoke from his own extensive experience in Bosnia. I pay tribute to him and particularly to the work done by him and his fallen comrades in the region in the past. He said the risks of a further descent into violence are very real, and we should all be aware of them. We heard many other excellent contributions. As always, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) made important points on human rights and freedom of religion across the region.

The hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) made some important points about not in any way demonising or targeting the diasporas of individual

countries with our language and about the damage that that can do to communities playing a critical role in the UK. I very much agree with much of what he said about Albania. We have to be very careful; we need a pragmatic, official-led response to the challenges we see in the channel. The Home Affairs Committee has been very clear that what we are seeing is being facilitated by organised criminal gangs, which is why we have proposed a new National Crime Agency cell to tackle these groups upstream. We need to determine asylum claims swiftly so that those without claims can be returned, but that cannot descend into the language that we have seen from some parts of the media and, indeed, some senior politicians. It does huge damage to our good relations with Albania, which is one of our NATO allies. I sat in NATO headquarters just last week and saw the Albanian flag fluttering in the breeze alongside our own—we need to remember that Albania is our ally at a critical time. Indeed, many Albanians play a crucial role in this country.

The hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) was with me on a trip to Kosovo earlier this year. He made some critical points about trade and commercial links. I saw that myself with him in Kosovo; we need to expand those. The hon. Members for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) and for Stirling (Alyn Smith) also made some critical points about why the region is so crucial and why the UK has a key role to play. It is right that much of our focus as parliamentarians in recent months has been on Putin's heinous war of aggression against the people of Ukraine, but the western Balkans is just as critical because of the potential for future instability and the UK's unique historical role there, as we discussed in the debate in June. Like all present, I maintain that the work of the Council of Europe has never been more significant in ensuring peace, security and democracy for the people of our continent.

I visited Pristina and Skopje earlier this year and have previously travelled in Bosnia and elsewhere across the region, so I am familiar with the challenges, but there are many grounds for hope as well. I saw dynamic young populations keen to expand their links with the rest of Europe, including the UK. In Kosovo, in particular, I saw a young and vibrant population with a strong desire to join the Council of Europe. I join the calls, led by the hon. Member for Henley and supported by the Government, for Kosovo to be a full member of the Council of Europe.

However, we clearly see significant tensions, often fomented and aggravated by internal and external forces, and those tensions have the capacity to unravel into violence. We must be under no illusions about the seriousness of what we see in the western Balkans at the moment. There is real potential to undermine and unravel the immense progress made since the 1990s. Tensions between Serbia and Kosovo are high, following recent disputes over the licence plate issue, and the resignation of Kosovan Serbs from the country's institutions, despite Prime Minister Kurti's calls for co-operation. Discussions have been going on; we met Prime Minister Kurti when he was here a couple of weeks ago.

Any further escalation of that situation could put the work done by the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue at risk. I am afraid we have seen some very unhelpful rhetoric from President Vučić in Serbia. We have also seen a range of measures in Serbia that undermine human

[Stephen Doughty]

rights and freedom of expression, including the backlash against EuroPride in August. Serbia has been reclassified as partly free, rather than free, by Freedom House.

We have seen President Vučić becoming increasingly close to Russia in explicit ways, declaring his intention to maintain friendly relations, signing a three-year agreement on gas supplies, and signing other diplomatic co-operation agreements at the UN, during the United Nations General Assembly, though we are not sure what is in those. Serbia has to make a fundamental choice; does it have a European future with progress, the rule of law and democracy, or is it to be a proxy for Putin and his regressive agenda, which we see acted out so violently in other parts of Europe at the moment?

Much of today's debate was rightly about the situation in Bosnia. The recent election unfortunately confirmed that ethno-nationalism continues to typify political life in the country. Milorad Dodik and Republika Srpska remain intransigent when it comes to healing divisions and keeping the Dayton process alive. In October he pledged to 30,000 people at a rally that secession will become a reality for the Bosnian Serb entity, and he won re-election on that basis. He has also voiced support for Russia and China, and he went as far as to say that, if NATO intervened in Bosnia,

"We will ask our friends to help us."

Dodik also supported the illegal and bogus annexation referendums staged by Putin in Ukraine in September, and he has taken a sledgehammer to the delicate balance of power in Bosnia. The implications of that could manifest themselves dangerously for the region and across the continent. We must be fully aware of that. It is only right that we have issued sanctions against a number of the individuals involved in undermining the Dayton agreement.

I have specific questions for the Minister, whom I welcome to her place and her new role. What conversations have the Government had with the secretary-general of the Council of Europe regarding targeted initiatives to protect democratic institutions across the western Balkans? She will have seen the resolution at the PACE assembly on 12 October that, since the Thessaloniki summit, political and public enthusiasm for further integration with Europe has been sapped, due to a slowing and stagnation of the processes. What comments does she have on that? I know we are outside the EU, but what does she believe we can do at this critical time, when others seek to undermine us, to stop that sapping of enthusiasm for integration in terms of accession processes with the EU and the role of the new European political community, which we are part of?

The EU-Western Balkans summit takes place in Tirana on 6 December. I understand that the UK will not be present formally, because we are not in the EU, but the UK has a critical role in many of these locations. I am disappointed that we will not be there in an associate fashion or taking part in discussions. Will the Minister tell us what discussions she has had with friends and allies in the EU and what contact there has been between our special envoy and the EU special envoy in the region ahead of that summit?

We have heard today about Russia's efforts to spread disinformation and undermine democracies across the region. I was concerned to hear of the locations in Serbia that Russia is using to spread disinformation

across the region in relation to not only Kosovo but Montenegro, Albania, North Macedonia and elsewhere. Will the Minister say a little about what we are doing to share our expertise in counter-disinformation and cybersecurity across the region to assist countries to have the strongest possible resilience against those Russian efforts?

Caroline Nokes (in the Chair): Perhaps you could think about drawing to a conclusion.

Stephen Doughty: I am coming to my conclusion. I am on the final page.

Caroline Nokes (in the Chair): Leave time for the Minister.

Stephen Doughty: I will leave time for the Minister, Ms Nokes.

I hope that the Minister can assure us that the Government see the Council as a crucial part of promoting democracy across our continent, fundamentally reinforcing the values that we all share, and that they will continue to support our delegation and its work in the months and years to come.

10.45 am

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): The Minister for Europe would have been delighted to take part in the debate, but I am afraid that he is travelling on ministerial duties. It is a pleasure to be able to respond on behalf of the Government. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) for securing the debate, and I recognise his valuable work as leader of the UK's delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

As we have heard, the western Balkans continues to face challenges to its future stability, security and prosperity. Those challenges come from both within and outside the region. Our policy is to support a more prosperous and secure western Balkan future, built on strong foundations of democracy, the rule of law and regional co-operation. We will continue to challenge those such as Russia and Iran that seek to undermine those aims by sowing division, disinformation and distrust. That is why the UK is working with partners and allies, including in the Council of Europe, to support the six states of the western Balkans.

As hon. Members may know, the UK was a founding member of the Council of Europe. It was Sir Winston Churchill who first publicly suggested its creation nearly 80 years ago. Since then, we have been an active defender of the institution's values: freedom, liberty and—most importantly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Henley reiterated so clearly—the rule of law.

Next May, in Reykjavík, the organisation will hold only the fourth Heads of State summit in its 73-year history. We support Iceland's proposal to focus on the Council's core values and strengthen them across Europe; against the backdrop of Putin's heinous and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine, it has never been more important to protect those values. The UK welcomes the Council's swift action to expel Russia, and His Majesty's Government and the UK delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly played a crucial role in that

quick response. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Henley and colleagues for their continued determination to lead on this.

The UK will continue to support reforms that support peace, stability and freedom of democracy across the Balkans, and the Council of Europe will play a vital role in that. The region's future lies in sovereignty and self-determination. Its people and Governments have repeatedly spoken in support of greater integration with the Euro-Atlantic community. The Council of Europe's monitoring and technical assistance is fundamental to the west Balkan countries' progress on their EU membership aspirations, and the work that hon. Members continue to lead on—the challenges they have set out today—will continue to drive those hard efforts to help western Balkan nations to strengthen.

The Council's tailor-made action plans for Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania and Kosovo will look to push these stabilising solutions further. The whole gamut of the Council of Europe's work to ensure that human rights, democracy and the rule of law are firmly embedded in the western Balkans is something that we will continue to actively support. As highlighted by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon)—an ever-strong champion of freedom of religious belief—the UK and the Government are unwavering in their commitment to promote freedom of religion or belief for everyone, everywhere. We continue to work with western Balkan partners to ensure that those rights are protected.

Through its office in Pristina, the Council of Europe is supporting Kosovo's reform agenda on human rights, the rule of law and democracy, among other issues. Kosovo is a young country that, during its short existence, has made great strides in aligning itself with European democratic values. We have been engaging with other Council of Europe members through our embassies and strongly emphasising our support for Kosovo's application for membership, and our permanent representative in Strasbourg has also emphasised that. Membership will bring clear benefits to the Kosovan people, including minority communities; in particular, it will strengthen citizens' ability to challenge the Government when they feel that their human rights are being impinged on.

I congratulate all the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina on the 2 October elections. The OSCE's observation mission judged that they were, overall, peaceful and democratic, but instances of fraud must be investigated and prosecuted. The High Representative's task is to support Bosnia and Herzegovina towards a secure future. When he imposed electoral reforms on 3 October, he made it clear that he had no choice but to act, given the absence of domestic political will. We cannot allow malign forces to destabilise Bosnia and Herzegovina, whose politicians and authorities must work for the benefit of all citizens.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) reminded us of the tragedies in Bosnia in the 1990s—the bloodshed and brutality that scarred that country. His leadership as a peacekeeper in those troubles and his continued reminders to us all in this House ensure that we keep Bosnia's future success, economic stability and a place for growth for its next generation at the heart of our policy making.

I urge those politicians and authorities to collaborate and co-operate in order to ensure that the election results, and much-needed reforms, are implemented

swiftly and effectively for the benefit of their citizens. That includes implementing long-standing European Court of Human Rights judgments, such as that in the Sejdić and Finci case, which cannot be enacted by the High Representative.

We are also concerned about recent tensions between Serbia and Kosovo, where parties must refrain from rhetoric and actions that risk escalating the situation. They must not endanger the progress made in recent years, or derail efforts to reach a comprehensive and sustainable agreement that benefits the people of both countries and the wider region. The UK will continue to work closely with Kosovo, Serbia and international partners towards that goal, including through our support for the EU-facilitated dialogue. It is vital that both sides honour the dialogue commitments that they have made so far. We encourage continued talks between the Kosovo Government and Kosovo's minority communities—in particular, to strengthen inclusive and transparent local governance supporting the needs and interests of all Kosovo citizens. In this regard, it is vital that Kosovo Serbs return to Kosovo's institutions to represent the communities that they have been elected to serve.

Montenegro, a valued NATO ally, is at a crucial juncture under its current caretaker Government. Political stalemate and weaknesses in some institutions leave it vulnerable to influence from beyond its borders. We urge Montenegro's political parties to engage in talks and chart a constitutional path together, and to set the conditions for future elections.

The Council of Europe's work in Albania and North Macedonia plays an important role in progress towards reforms. I note the enthusiasm of my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), as trade envoy, for further trade encouragement, which I will share with colleagues. He will know that UK Export Finance has substantial capacity to assist British companies to look to Albania. In Albania, the Council provides training and capacity building to the judiciary, prosecution and law enforcement authorities. The hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) highlighted Albania's goal of EU accession—a sovereign choice—which acts as a stimulus for reform. We welcomed the formal start of accession talks in July of this year. Institutions play an absolutely vital role in tackling organised crime, including the criminals driving the illegal channel crossings that have cost so many lives.

I would like to take the opportunity to put on the record the strength of the close and long-standing UK-Albania relationship, including in the Council of Europe. As my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) highlights, the 150,000-strong Albanian diaspora here in the UK are so important to the UK. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary most recently met Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama in Berlin earlier this month. We want a stable and prosperous bilateral partnership, benefiting not only our two countries but the region and Europe as a whole. We are working together against drugs and people trafficking and money laundering. The NCA has a strong relationship with Albanian partners, with growing co-operation and data sharing.

If I may—I am sure that you would agree with me, Ms Nokes—I would like to encourage the constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham not to be discouraged by her initial failure in

[Anne-Marie Trevelyan]

electoral presentation: many of us have stood for office several times before winning. Arlinda Ballcaj's commitment to her community and willingness to stand in order to speak up for those among whom she and her family live are commendable.

The people of the western Balkans deserve to enjoy peace, security and prosperity. As colleagues have said, as progress beyond historic crises helps these countries to begin their EU-facing positioning, we continue to welcome their work. We work alongside to support that, hand in hand with our partners, including the Council of Europe, which does such valuable work. I have noted some of the powerful voices from across the House on an atrocity prevention focus. I reassure colleagues that we are developing our work on that across our network to put in place early-warning mechanisms that have track indicators. There were a few questions I was unable to answer today, for which I apologise, but I will ensure we do so in a timely manner.

10.54 am

John Howell: I thank everyone who has participated in this debate. They have made it a very cross-party debate, as is typical of the Council of Europe, and as is typical of how I try to run the delegation. There are two things that I will recall from this debate. The first is the overall impression that the western Balkans matter to us, and that we need to spend a lot of time looking at them. The second is that when I first became the leader of the delegation, nobody in these sorts of debates had heard of the Council of Europe, or at least nobody quoted it, but today many people have quoted from the reports of the Council of Europe and many have referred to it. That is a fitting tribute both to me and to the delegation for the enormous work we have done to ensure that we continue to play a vital role in the Council of Europe. That is vital for Europe more widely and for making sure that we are well known and active across the region.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the West Balkans and the Council of Europe.

10.56 am

Sitting suspended.

Family Law Terminology

11 am

Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the terminology used in family law.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes, not least as I know you are a huge champion of families, and when you looked after relationship work in the Department for Work and Pensions under previous ministerial briefs, you understood the importance of this field of work.

Who does not love a good on-screen relationship drama? Lovers falling out, marriages breaking down and dramatic affairs of the heart are the stock-in-trade of film, soaps and the media. But when children are caught in the middle of storylines, we routinely hear, "I'll see you in court", "I'm going for custody of little Johnny and little Sarah", or the possessive—"She's my daughter"—and divorce is described as a battle to be won. This language is hugely unhelpful to families who are going through the heartache of separation.

I was a family law solicitor before I came into this place, and I saw the fallout of unnecessarily divisive battles. I am often found shouting at the telly when they get the terminology wrong. My love of "Coronation Street" and "Eastenders" probably needs to be outed here—I am going to write to the producers about the report and the debate today. Language really matters in family law.

In real life, every year around 280,000 children see their parents separate. It surprises many that the term "custody" should have stopped being used 30-odd years ago when the Children Act 1989 came in, but it surprises nobody that the language of war used for separating families is damaging to all involved, with approximately 40% of all separating parents bringing issues about their children to the family court. For too long we have allowed thousands of children to be caught up in an adversarial court system.

The language of the legal system is accusatory and divisive. Parents are described as Smith v. Smith; barristers will talk about "my opponent"; we refer to "the applicant" and "the respondent"; and we have "dispute resolution" rather than problem solving. The most important humans in a child's life are therefore immediately pitched against each other at a time when co-operation is most needed.

Many years ago while working for the relationship experts OnePlusOne, I wrote an article that explained—there is lots of evidence—that destructive and acrimonious conflict between parents puts children at greater risk of emotional problems such as depression and anxiety. Children may develop behavioural difficulties and become aggressive and difficult. Parents do not want that. For the majority of mums and dads, separation is extremely painful and a decision not taken lightly. The wellbeing of their children is their main concern, and often the first concern when they come in to speak to lawyers.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): In the time I have had the privilege of knowing the hon. Lady, she has addressed these issues with a deep interest and knowledge, and I thank her for that. In children and family courts, children often hear big and complicated words without knowing their meaning, but they know the emotional impact—for example, custody in prison, being in pain,

separation, being alone and perhaps even violence. Does she agree that the justice system could and must look at the courts' choice of words, their impact on young children's development and the fear they instil about the environment those children are growing up in and the changes that they might face?

Siobhan Baillie: I thank the hon. Member for Strangford for what was, as usual, a thoughtful intervention. He is absolutely right. The language we all use, whether it is in the media or in the legal system and court documents, can be changed. It will not be easy—we all use terminology that is outdated and that we have been told is wrong, and we get it wrong sometimes—but it can be changed, and we have to work towards that.

With that in mind, I encourage everyone to look at the “Language Matters” report by the Family Solutions Group. The FSG was set up by the eminent Mr Justice Cobb in 2020. It is an excellent and constructive multidisciplinary group of experts working with separated parents and children. There is a lot of emotion in this area, but it is trying to find solutions and I recommend that everyone look at its work.

Let us be honest: the courts system that we are working in is stretched to breaking point. Over 66,000 new cases started in the family courts in April to June 2021, which is up 14% on the same quarter the year before. The case numbers are increasing. The pressure on courts in the pandemic was a tipping point because so many hearings were cancelled. Delays in cases involving children are always counter to a child's best interests, yet despite the best efforts of the Government, the judiciary and lawyers, from 2011 to 2021 the mean duration of disputes and cases involving children increased from over 31 weeks to 41 weeks—up by a third. It is now commonplace for hearings to be cancelled at short notice, and the number of litigants in person are rising exponentially. That gives the judiciary an impossible task in many cases.

Let us imagine how hard it is for emotionally charged parents to go through a confusing court system on their own. When I was practising, people would save up to have one hour of my time. That is all they could afford—hundreds of pounds. They would get as much as they possibly could from me and head into the court system on their own, often terrified and desperate to do a good job. We come back to language in the courts system. The FSG report sets out the archaic language that is familiar to me, the judiciary and lawyers, but court bundles, pleadings and section 7 statements are alien to most people.

In essence, the court should be the last resort for parents, but sadly it is often seen as the first port of call. However, our system can be changed so that parents who do not have legal issues to resolve do not go anywhere near a judge, particularly for child arrangements. Many cases are not about law but about communication or relationship issues, responsibilities, schools, hobbies or the scheduling of a child's time once they are in two homes. If there is no safety, or if there are domestic violence or protection issues, parents would be best served by being supported to reach agreements as early as possible outside the court system.

I have said for years that I estimate that about a third of private law children cases should not be in court, but I defer to the brilliant judge Sir Andrew MacFarlane,

the president of the family division, who I heard on a Radio 4 programme the other day. He estimated that about 20% of families could be helped outside court. If we invested in helping 20% to 30% of families stay out of litigation, we would not only help the children of those families but free up court time for the families that need it most. In the case of *Re B*, His Honour Judge Wildblood said:

“Do not bring your private law litigation to family Court here unless it is genuinely necessary for you to do so.”

Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con): As a former magistrate in the family proceedings court, I completely agree that when people come for contact arrangements with their children, very often the magistrates are acting in the role of mediator and helping them to come to a decision in the court. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is not the place for parents to go to have other people sort out their child arrangements for them?

Siobhan Baillie: I agree. It is not a good use of magistrates' time, either. This is not easy for parents—nobody should suggest that they rush to court, because often that is not the case. At the moment, parents think that court is the only place to go to get disputes resolved. That change in society and culture would help to free up the court's time, which is incredibly important to my hon. Friend and other magistrates. His Honour Judge Wildblood went on to say this, directed at parents and lawyers:

“If you do bring unnecessary cases to this Court, you will be criticised, and sanctions may be imposed on you. There are many other ways to settle disagreements, such as mediation.”

I am looking to the Minister to help me and other parliamentarians to change the family law system to, in turn, help the Ministry of Justice to achieve its goals to ensure that people can access justice and court time in a timely way when they really need it.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): I agree with what the hon. Lady is saying. The problem is that there are insufficient resources in mediation services, but if we invested in them, we could make savings further down the road within the court system and the Ministry of Justice. Is that something she would encourage?

Siobhan Baillie: It is absolutely fantastic to hear the hon. Gentleman talk about mediation. There has actually been a lot of investment in mediation. The demand went up an awful lot when we had a voucher system, which we may hear about from the Minister. Where demand has gone up, we need to meet that demand, because those parents will end up in court if we cannot get them into mediation services. It is absolutely great to hear the hon. Gentleman champion mediation in that way, and we will look to the Minister to hear more about the options.

I am asking for a few things today. Will the Minister confirm that the Ministry of Justice's much-needed focus on family law reform is continuing, now that the Lord Chancellor is back in his post? It went quiet for a bit, and the Lord Chancellor previously did an awful lot on this issue. What has happened to the demand reduction plan? I know the Department was looking at that very carefully, and it was designing the plan to keep families out of court wherever possible. Does the Minister agree

[Siobhan Baillie]

that the FSG should receive a formal response from the Government to its “What About Me?” and “Language Matters” reports?

Can the Minister please confirm that the Ministry of Justice is working across Departments to embed support for separating families in services such as family hubs, and to learn from the Department for Work and Pensions’ successful reducing parental conflict programmes? Will the Government confirm that they will investigate extending family law projects and pilot schemes? We know that they are working really well and teaching us better practice for cases involving children, so we would like to see more of them. Finally, will the Minister get representatives of the FSG to meet officials in the Department in order to discuss their proposals?

I genuinely believe that changing the options available to parents, re-educating society about the impact of litigation on children and changing the legal language of separation will help millions of parents and, importantly, the life chances of children. I hope we can work together to make that happen.

11.12 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mike Freer): As ever, it is a joy to serve with you in the Chair, Ms Nokes. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Siobhan Baillie) for securing a debate on this important topic. It is a topic on which I know she has campaigned for quite some time and with vigour. I tried to find the blog she wrote some years ago, but I suspect I may have to dig a bit deeper to find it. If she has a copy to hand, I would be very interested in reading it.

As parliamentarians, we are all aware of the power of language to influence, to make others reflect and to be a force for good. The focus of the family court must always be on acting in the best interests of the child, as well as on creating stability and reducing conflict for families. The language used by professionals, and in the systems, processes and guidance that make up the family court, can set the tone for how families and individuals interact with it and with each other, both in and out of court. Our choice of language makes it clear what we value the most, and it can act as a reminder that children are at the heart of the family justice system.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud mentioned, the Family Solutions Group, which is a collection of multidisciplinary experts looking at how to improve the family justice system for children and families, noted in 2022 that the

“language for separating families has evolved out of an adversarial legal system: it is accusatory and divisive. It is also potentially harmful, increasing conflict through battle metaphors while parents compete for justice and control of their children.”

The Government have recognised that the language used in the family court needs to move away from pitting parents or couples against each other. Instead, the emphasis should be on clear and simply terminology that recognises children as children, not as cases, and that encourages individuals to reach joint agreements. We should be moving away from arguments about custody and residence, and towards what is the best outcome for the child, instead of perpetuating the idea that there are winners and losers in the family court. We should be encouraging resolutions and agreements.

Reducing conflict between separating parents is a priority for the Government. I will set out the actions we have taken to support them and their children before turning to some specific measures to improve the language used in the system. We are introducing measures to reduce the number of disputes that come to court in the first place so that we reduce the time that children are left to deal with uncertainty and minimise exposure to the court system for young people.

My hon. Friend mentioned the family mediation voucher scheme, which was launched in March and is designed to remove the barriers that parents face in accessing mediation. Family mediators are trained to support separating parents to move past their conflicts and resolve issues in a non-adversarial way. Mediation can often be a quicker means of reaching an agreement. We hope that by offering separating parents the opportunity to mediate, we can reduce the period of uncertainty and distress for children by avoiding more lengthy court proceedings.

More than 11,800 couples have now accessed the mediation voucher scheme and received £500 towards the cost of their mediation. A Family Mediation Council survey of the first 2,800 cases suggests that 65% of separated parents reached whole or partial agreements in their mediation, which means that they no longer needed to attend court. Clearly, an amicable agreement will always be in the best interests of the children.

Where court is unavoidable, we are working to ensure that disputes are resolved as quickly as possible, and that the processes are as understandable and stress-free as possible, especially for children. For instance, we have adopted a more investigative approach to proceedings. In February, we launched the first integrated domestic abuse courts pilot in Dorset and north Wales, delivering on a 2019 manifesto commitment. This new approach to child arrangement cases seeks to reduce conflict, protect victims and survivors and enhance the voice of the child by gathering more information during the early stages of the process, which allows courts to narrow down issues, and minimises the time spent pitting parties against each other in a courtroom setting. The new pilot also includes the option for children to meet judges or have direct access to a judge in their case who can give them direct feedback in simple, plain language on the recommendation decisions about their lives. Of course, that puts a human face to the process.

The Government introduced the Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020 to allow no-fault divorce and end the pointless blame game when a marriage or civil partnership has irretrievably broken down. Instead, it allows couples to focus on resolving more important priorities, such as how best to co-parent any children. The Act also aimed to help couples to reach amicable decisions by introducing joint applications for divorce, which was not previously possible. Joint applications replace the adversarial concept that divorce is something done by one party to the other. We have also made changes to the language of divorce to reduce language that automatically pits individuals against each other. We have removed terms such as “petitioner” from the process. Those are simple changes, but they set the tone for how individuals engage with each other in court.

My hon. Friend stressed the importance of language and terminology. The Government used the Children and Families Act 2014 to remove the concept of winners and losers from cases involving children. It removed

terms such as “residence” and “contact”, and replaced them with more child-focused language such as “child arrangements”.

Technology also plays a significant role in how people access and understand the family justice system. The Government are creating a more modern and straight-forward justice system that is accessible to all. His Majesty’s Courts and Tribunals Service’s reform programme has been running since 2016, and aims to move court applications across all jurisdictions online. That commitment includes providing online systems and resources that are written in plain English. Although there are times that legal language is required, all HMCTS forms and gov.uk resources go through a plain English review to make sure they are clear and accurate. We are committed to making not only the family courts accessible but the wider justice system. So far, divorce, probate and public law proceedings have moved online, and private law cases also have an option for online applications. We are continuing to work on providing more resources for child arrangements, finance applications, adoption and certain protective orders.

Finally, I want to champion the work of the Family Justice Young People’s Board, and set out how it contributes to improving how the family justice system is using language and terminology. The young people’s board is a group of over 50 children and young people, aged between seven and 25 years old, with either direct experience of the family justice system or with an interest in children’s rights and the family courts. It works directly with the Ministry of Justice and other partners across the family justice system to share their experiences and unique viewpoints, helping to bring a vital perspective to our work. The board has been working to demystify the family justice system for children and young people, both in private and public law proceedings.

Working with the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service, the Family Justice Young People’s Board have produced several resources and guides for

children that aim to break down family court terminology, as well as more complex procedural processes that children will experience in court. I encourage everyone to read their “Mind Your Language!” guide on the words for professionals to avoid using in proceedings, such as terminology that is too complex. I also recommend their first book, “In Our Shoes”, for the moving first-person testimonies it provides from children and young people going through the family justice system.

To conclude, the Government are committed to improving the experience of the family courts for children, and are taking action to make the family justice system a less adversarial experience for those who go through it. We are doing that by supporting parents to resolve their issues without the need to come to court, by improving the language and terminology used in the systems and that underpin family court, and by ensuring that at all levels the voices of children and young people who experience family justice are heard.

I reiterate the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud made; family justice system reform remains a top priority for the Government, and I can reconfirm that it remains a priority for the Lord Chancellor. The projects on law reform and reducing court backlogs are a key priority for the whole Department. As my hon. Friend stressed, if we can get people out of the courtroom, it releases court time for more complex cases. The FSG remains a key partner of the Department, and the family division sits as an observer of the family justice board. The Department is entirely aligned with the objectives of my hon. Friend and the points she raised have firmly landed. I look forward to working with her in the future.

Question put and agreed to.

11.22 am

Sitting suspended.

Male Primary School Teachers

[SIR GARY STREETER *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered increasing the number of male primary school teachers.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Gary. I am grateful for the opportunity to raise what I think is a really important issue, and I am sure we will have plenty of time between us to discuss some of its merits—perhaps we will not need the full 90 minutes.

I want to start by setting the scene and explaining why I have secured this debate on recruiting more male teachers into primary schools and, indeed, teaching more generally—we are short across the board. Having the debate this week is important in the build-up to International Men's Day this weekend, and I will touch on the impact of the issue on our young people and young boys, and on their mental health and stability.

Of course, there are many challenges facing our schools, not least the financial squeeze that all organisations are feeling from inflation and rising costs. Don't get me started on the curriculum, teacher recruitment and retention, and empowering teachers on Ofsted—I am sure the Minister and I could debate those things all day, which would be very enjoyable. As I will explain, increasing the number of male primary school teachers is socially and culturally important.

I declare an interest: before I accidentally became a politician, I had always planned to be a teacher, and I had considered teaching in primary schools. I never quite got there before I fell into some local issues—bin-related drama, as it happens; people get very passionate about wheelie bins—that led to me becoming a district councillor, and the rest is history. Despite not having ended up in teaching, children's welfare and primary education remain really important to me personally, not least because I have primary-age children myself. I have committed much of my time over the past five years in this place to policy that is in one way or another related to supporting children.

Another issue that is really important to me—and, I think, to our society—is equality. I have been perhaps the most vocal critic of our equalities legislation, which is almost always misused and misunderstood. The Equality Act 2010 is often explained as protecting characteristics such as being female, BME or LGBT, but that is not the case. It protects biological sex, race and sexuality, among others—both male and female equally; white, black and anything else equally; and gay and straight absolutely equally. It is, after all, the Equality Act.

The intention behind the law is that the exact same legislation that is cited in order to support young women into science, technology, engineering and maths subjects, where they are historically under-represented, and into university—even though today's figures show they are over-represented—should also be used to support young men where they are under-represented in professions such as nursing or, indeed, primary teaching.

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): My hon. Friend is a great loss to teaching, but he also has a great passion for sport. I recently met representatives of the Professional Footballers Association, which helps thousands

of men and women transition from their footballing careers into other careers. Surely this is a big opportunity for the Department for Education to work with them, particularly—given the thrust of this debate—to help get more male teachers into primary schools.

Ben Bradley: I thank my hon. Friend, who makes a really important point. We had a debate in this place only a few weeks ago about more flexible routes into teaching, and that sounds like a brilliant one. We also touched on routes from early years education into primary teaching. If someone is able and qualified to teach and support five-year-olds in an early years setting, surely they could do the same for six-year-olds in a primary setting. Some of the barriers make it very difficult, but my hon. Friend has mentioned what sounds like a fantastic scheme, which is perhaps an example of how taking positive action under the Equality Act could increase the number of male primary school teachers.

The law exists to enable us to tackle this issue, but it is almost never interpreted in that way. In a recent debate on access to teaching, which took place in this very room, the previous Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis), informed me that there are no schemes or planned schemes to support young men to get into primary teaching. The point of my speech, and of securing the debate, is quite simply to ask why, because we have the opportunity to address this issue. That is why we are here, but what is the problem?

I have some figures that Members might find surprising, as it feels like the issue has gone under the radar. I know it is the subject of conversations outside the school gates among parents of primary-age children, because I am one and I have had such conversations with a number of parents at my own children's school, but the figures might surprise a wider audience. Only 14% of primary and nursery teachers are male—significantly less than one in five. That is actually a slight rise from 12% in 2010, but the total teaching workforce has become more female-dominated in that time: more than 75% of teachers are now female, up from 74% a decade ago. Out of nearly 17,000 primary schools in England, 3,240 have no male teachers on the payroll whatever—not one. At an average of just under 300 pupils per school, that is nearly 1 million children with no male role model in their education setting.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): My daughter is in her second year of training for qualified teacher status, having done her PGCE. I asked her whether she agreed with my hon. Friend's premise that more men should be encouraged into what is a largely female workforce. She made the point that he just made: many of our young people are growing up without a male role model in their lives. She pointed out that it is really good for children to see men in a caregiving role, which is essentially the role in a primary school. She made one or two other observations, which I may share with him later.

Ben Bradley: That is exactly right. If we are striving make public services representative of our communities and society, primary education should be at the very heart of that. It is hugely important to teach young people about relationships and provide role models. I thank my hon. Friend for that point, and I will come on to it in more detail.

This is a particular problem in my region in the east midlands. A study for the Institute for Social and Economic Research in May found that nearly a third of all state-funded primary and secondary schools in the east midlands do not have a single male classroom teacher. That is the highest proportion in the country. In London, the figure is 12.5%, which is still a lot of schools, but in the east midlands 30% of schools do not have a single male teacher. That means that one in three children have no male role model in the classroom—not even in the building—whom they can seek out.

Not only are men less likely to become teachers in the first place, but those who do are far less likely to remain in the profession than their female counterparts. We have been unable to recruit and retain male teachers. I know it is a problem with female teachers too, but it particularly so with male teachers. The stats I have just shared make that issue particularly clear.

Lots of action has been taken to address inequality in teaching. There has rightly been lots of action to get more women into leadership roles in education, and to make teaching more racially diverse. Indeed, the teaching population is more ethnically diverse than the country as a whole. As I said, those imbalances are tackled under the Equality Act, yet although one in three children in my region has no male teacher at all and only one in four teachers are male—it is even lower in primary school at just 14%—there are no schemes, and as the previous Minister said, no planned schemes, to try to redress the balance under the Act, which is intended to support men and women and protect them equally. It is not working; it is not being used properly.

Members might be thinking, “All right, the figures are skewed. We can see that there aren’t many male primary school teachers—not many blokes in the profession. Why does that matter?” Well, I will tell them why. It touches on a point that my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) made. Having male primary school teachers is really important for a number of societal, psychological and social reasons. First, male and female teachers contribute to children’s gender knowledge in a balanced way. They contribute to their understanding at a very young age of what male and female are and what they mean, and of what those roles might be. That may seem a small thing, but for an ever-increasing number of young people who do not have a male role model at home, and who often do not have male role models they can learn from and emulate in their personal lives, having them at school is important.

In an increasingly difficult and often frustrating society where discussing gender can sometimes be incredibly unclear and misleading—certainly complicated by mixed and politically charged messages about what being male means and what gender is—a simple balanced interaction with male and female positive role models is important. At a time when masculinity and being a man can be portrayed very negatively, and young men increasingly find it hard to figure out what their role in life and in our society might be, leading to all sorts of mental health problems, which I am sure we will discuss over the course of this week in the build-up to International Men’s Day, it has never been more important for them to have a consistent, respectable male role model they trust in their life. I would make the same case in support

of men in youth work, for example, which can do so much for the relationships, trust and security of young people in our communities.

For the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children, the presence of male teachers might be vital, allowing them to observe men who are non-violent, for example, and whose interactions with women are respectful and positive. This is particularly important for children from dysfunctional backgrounds—households with domestic abuse, or other family environments that are not healthy. If the only consistent male figure in someone’s life is actually a bad role model who is teaching bad behaviours, how is that person to know or learn any different?

Today, some 2.5 million children grow up without a dad at home, which has an impact. Moreover, there were estimates in 2020 that some 30,000 or more children are exposed to domestic abuse at home every month, whereby the man in their life and in their home sets a poor example and relationships are dysfunctional. Male teachers—safe, trusted, respectable role models—are absolutely vital for those children.

I am consistently saying “children”, rather than “boys”, because I mean all children. Good male role models are important not just for boys but for girls, and for exactly the same reasons. They are equally important in helping children to understand how men and women treat each other, or should treat each other. For children to have trusted adult males they can rely on in their lives is important for them to understand, as I have said, some of the issues around gender, and roles and responsibilities, and also to tackle the problems caused by poor examples and poor role models, if children have those at home, and show them a different path.

I think this is a self-perpetuating cycle, whereby limited visibility of male teachers means that men are less likely to go into teaching. Again, I draw the comparison with nursing, as stereotypes abound in that space, too. The stereotype is that primary school teaching is a women’s job, and that men teach design technology and physical education; similarly, men are doctors and women are nurses. That is all outdated and old-fashioned; it is absolute nonsense, of course.

However, there is still an outdated and ill-informed prevailing view that primary teachers are women; that should not be the case, but when we look at the statistics we see that it is largely the case. That view often means that men do not apply for primary teaching jobs. I might as well keep adding in nursing, because there is a similar challenge in that profession. These are areas where the Equality Act is absolutely clear that measures could and indeed should be taken to tackle a clear imbalance and disparity between characteristics, whereby one group is massively under-represented. That is precisely what the Act is intended to tackle, yet we heard here in Westminster Hall just a month or so ago that there are no schemes or plans for schemes to try to tackle that imbalance.

Quite simply, I ask the Minister: why not? When we put so much energy and resource into teacher recruitment and retention, which is hugely important for our schools, why not? We offer huge financial incentives for people to teach key subjects, but this issue is key, too. A lack of male role models will have a negative impact on the lives of young people, leaving an increasing number of young men with mental health problems, unable to work out

[Ben Bradley]

who they are and what their role in society is, and leaving young women in particular and young people in general with unhealthy views about what relationships with men should look like.

In my view, a lack of men in teaching is actually more important in society—for its fabric and for the wellbeing of our young people—than a lack of maths teachers, but we incentivise maths teachers. We are not incentivising male teachers and healthy relationships. Why? Is there a logical reason or is it, as I suspect, something else? I have already spoken about the Equality Act. My experience of it is that there is a deep-seated fear within parts of Whitehall, which thinks that if they use the Equality Act to do something that supports men, they will get slated on Twitter. That is probably true. When I have had these types of conversations and raised these points, I get slated on Twitter as well, but it is important to recognise that Twitter quite regularly spouts a load of nonsense and we cannot be governed by Twitter.

I firmly believe that the wider public will be fully supportive of what I am saying here in Westminster Hall today and the premise behind it. We need more male teachers, in primary schools in particular and in schools in general.

Mark Pawsey: My hon. Friend makes some very interesting points about financial incentives. I think that it is accepted that salaries and careers in secondary education are generally more highly remunerated than in primary education, which does not provide an incentive for male teachers to go into primary teaching. Often in a relationship, males are seen as the main breadwinner, and while none of us would want there to be a particular financial incentive for male teachers, the attractiveness of primary school teaching really needs to be looked at.

Ben Bradley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the wider recruitment and retention challenge as a whole, and trying to get more people into teaching, and primary school teaching. As I have touched on, we debated some of the avenues that we might take to support more people, and people with a wider range of backgrounds and experiences, by providing easier routes. Earlier, my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson) mentioned the transition from coaching, for example, into teaching, or a transition from early years into teaching. There are different ways in which we can support people through schemes such as that to incentivise male teachers. Perhaps the football example is a good one. We can imagine that lots of men in their 30s who are ending a career in sport, or who have been coaching and looking after young people in a coaching environment, could easily transition into a teaching-type role.

Justin Tomlinson: It goes even further than that, because the majority of those men are aged between 18 and 24—they have not quite fulfilled their dream of premier league stardom. The PFA is desperate to sit down with the Department for Education to talk about this; it is already working with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. I hope my hon. Friend will join me in encouraging the Minister to sit down with the PFA.

Ben Bradley: I absolutely support that—I would love to have that conversation. That is a prime example of the kind of scheme that is supported by the Equality Act and everything I have described. It is exactly the kind of thing that we could and should do to try to incentivise people in a massively male-dominated space to transition into teaching. That is a perfect example of what I am talking about; I thank my hon. Friend bringing it up.

Aside from setting up that conversation, which would be really helpful, what can the Minister do to ensure that the importance of this is recognised, barriers are removed and the tools we use to tackle these inequalities in other areas are also used for this? All the data, anecdotal evidence and common sense should tell us that this issue is really important. I hope that that can be recognised in policy. I thank colleagues for engaging in the debate and I look forward to the Minister's response.

Several hon. Members rose—

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): I call Jim Shannon.

2.46 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Gary. Thank you for calling me to speak—it is not often I am called straight after the Member who moves the motion, but it is a real pleasure. I thank the hon. Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) for leading the debate. He leads on many things in Westminster Hall. I have been there to support him when he has spoken on other subjects in education and I wanted to continue to do that.

There is no doubt that this conversation needs to be had. For some time now, the trends and statistics across the whole United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland have shown that male teacher figures have either dropped or lulled. Whatever the reasons for that, and there are many reasons indeed, we must do more to encourage men—especially young graduates—to get into the world of teaching. We must also play a key role in destigmatising those reasons as to why men are put off and discouraged from getting into the profession.

In previous debates to which the Minister has responded, I have tried to bring a Northern Ireland perspective. That perspective in relation to male teachers will replicate the very point made by the hon. Member for Mansfield in his speech and by others in their interventions. Male teachers are under-represented in the primary school teaching workforce in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The stats for Northern Ireland are just as bad as those cited by the hon. Member for Mansfield. Back home, just short of 23% of all teachers are male; in primary schools, only 15% are male.

In the '60s and '70s, I went to a boarding school—it was many moons ago, so I will see how far back I can go on that—where we had only one female teacher. The rest were all male teachers. I suspect that the trends have changed and, where it might once have been male dominated, it is now very clearly female dominated. My three boys went to Grey Abbey Primary School. Before the new principal joined 15 or 20 years ago, it was a female-only school: all the teachers were female; the principal was female. That has not changed very much over the past few years.

The figures for Northern Ireland have decreased over the past decade. The most recent figures for Northern Ireland, from '21-'22, show that there are some 4,800 male teachers in Northern Ireland, compared with 16,160 women. The percentages are quite clear—it is about 23%. That shows a trend. How do we address that? That is what the hon. Member for Mansfield was asking. We have to look at that.

I appreciate that this debate is about primary school teachers, but I would just add, to show the extent of the problem—the hon. Gentleman might already know this—that we do not have one male nursery teacher anywhere in Northern Ireland. I am quite perturbed by that as well. I understand that trend when it comes to nurseries; there is a perception that it is always girls working in nurseries, and the facts show that it is. Those statistics alarm us greatly. To address them, we must look at the reasons why this is the case not just in Northern Ireland but across the whole of this great nation.

One of the main issues is peer pressure. Men are often socialised to believe that teaching is a female-led job that requires extensive care and nurturing. That is wrong, but it may be a feeling that we have and an issue in society that needs to change. If we are going to make that change, we need to make teaching as attractive to males as it is to females. Despite all that, men statistically tend to end up in higher authority roles—for example, as senior teaching staff or school principals. I do not know whether that is to do with their age or whatever it may be, but there are certainly trends there that need to be looked at. That has been seen as a faulty or illegitimate argument that plays into “anti-gender role” rhetoric. None of this should not come at the expense of decent classroom teaching; merit and effort should mean more than just gender.

It saddens me that there have been narratives of males seeking employment in teaching to display their dominant characteristics. People say that, and that might filter through society. That is wrong, but if it does in any way knock people out of kilter, we have to address it. It further marginalises men who want to be teachers and to support and encourage our young people as they go through their education. Those narratives are simply not the case and are simply not right.

Male teachers are capable of being role models—the hon. Member for Mansfield set that out very well. Society is not broken, but young boys need a male figure in their lives to focus on, and male teachers are capable of being role models to both boys and girls. It is good for children to see that male teachers can be kind and encouraging. The hon. Gentleman referred to them as being caring, and they are. Compassion and understanding are not exclusive to one gender. There has been an assumption that male teachers can play a crucial role in a young child's development, especially if they come from a family with only a single parent or mother.

I am not being critical, Sir Gary—it is not my form—but I just want to make this point, which was brought to my attention through my engagement with things we are involved with in my office and from talking to teachers. Fatherless children have been shown on some occasions to stray and to get involved in addiction issues, whether it be drugs or alcohol. As the hon. Gentleman referred to, having a male figure in their life can—not on all occasions—help to maintain an element of stability and give a child a role model outside the home, so that they feel less pressurised.

A former Secretary of State for Education initiated a £30,000 grant for a project run by the Fatherhood Institute that aims to break down the barriers that dissuade men from starting childcare careers and to tackle the myth that men are less suited to caring roles. As I said, compassion and understanding transcend all genders across society. I was interested in the comments made by the hon. Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) about his daughter. Those were my thoughts too coming into this debate. He illustrated the point well through his daughter's comments, and I wholeheartedly agree with him.

Mark Pawsey: My daughter thinks the staffroom is a better place from having a mixture of genders in it. Male and female teachers can engage with each other in the workplace. The perspective of a male teacher may be slightly different from that of a female teacher, and the opportunity to share those experiences in the staffroom is important.

Jim Shannon: I absolutely agree. The hon. Gentleman is fortunate to have such a wise daughter, who seems to understand the position of a teacher in school with great wisdom and knowledge. I wholeheartedly agree that that mixture and blend would be better for us all.

I always respect the fact that the rules are different here, as they might be in other regions across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but we have a UK-wide problem. I understand that the Minister does not have to answer for Northern Ireland, but whatever he answers will be the template for all of us across the four regions, because the issues are the same. The dearth of male teachers in primary schools is the same, but how do we address it?

I encourage the Minister to take the lead for all of us. I will certainly be sending the *Hansard* copy of the debate to my Minister back home and probably to some of the schools as well to let them know what we are doing. I ask the Secretary of State for Education to engage in an in-depth discussion with his counterparts in all the regions about further action on encouraging and incentivising more male teachers. If we can do it here, we can do it everywhere. What we can learn here can be replicated back home. What we have done back home might be of help as well.

Back home, teaching courses have a decent number of male students, but there is clearly a barrier—I am not entirely sure why—that stops them fulfilling teaching roles in schools. We must fix that. If someone has a desire to teach and to be in education, that desire needs to be encouraged in whatever way it can to get males working in primary schools. We must ensure that the blockades are removed to help increase the numbers of male teachers.

Again, I congratulate the hon. Member for Mansfield on securing this debate. It is a very worthy one, and I look forward to the speech by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan), who always brings knowledge to these debates, and particularly to the Minister's speech.

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): I call the Opposition spokesman to speak forth.

2.57 pm

Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Gary. I want to start by thanking the hon. Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) for securing this debate on an issue that I know he cares passionately about. It is also an important issue to consider at a time when there are challenges facing the workforce in our nations' schools, where we see a crisis in the recruitment and retention of teachers and school support staff. It is clear from the contributions from Members on both sides of the House that we all agree that male primary school teachers play a vital role in children's and young people's development.

The hon. Member for Mansfield spoke about ideas for practical action to remove or overcome barriers to teaching. He shared the views of parents and carers and mentioned the value of positive role models in schools. In their interventions, Members made helpful points about career progression, from coaching to teaching, and about making primary school teaching a more attractive profession. As ever, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) made helpful points from his perspective in Northern Ireland, sharing figures and trends in the workforce and making helpful points around peer pressure and why that might be a barrier to more men coming forward to work in our nations' primary schools.

Despite the strength of feeling across the House today about how much male primary school teachers have to offer in terms of equipping our next generation for the future, the Government have sat on their hands and failed to tackle the areas where they have fallen short. In response to a written parliamentary question from the hon. Member for Mansfield in October, they responded that they wanted to

"attract and retain diverse, talented teachers from all backgrounds, and this includes recruiting male teachers."

The Labour party agrees with that approach, but why does the Government's own data continue to show that males are under-represented in the primary school teaching workforce in England?

As we heard earlier, the most recent data states that just 15.5% of state-funded primary school teachers in England are male—around 34,000 out of a total workforce of 220,000. We also know that, for over four years now, that proportion has remained at the same level, and Ministers have failed to take action to improve it. Despite the stagnation, the latest Department for Education data indicates that recruitment of male primary school teachers shows no sign of improvement, with just 2,367 male primary school teachers recruited in 2021-22—a mere 16% of the total. That is in stark contrast to the more than 12,000 women, or 83%, who were recruited as primary school teachers during the same period. All children need positive male role models who come from a diverse range of backgrounds, and that includes male primary school teachers, yet the Government's mismanagement of education is driving teachers away from classrooms.

I look forward to the Minister's response on a number of points. What action is he taking to address the current levels of under-representation of male state-funded primary school teachers in England, including, specifically, on retention? What action is he taking to boost the recruitment of male primary school teachers in England

and to tackle the stigma around male primary school teachers? Ministers cannot go on pointing to the wider economic fallout for their failure to recruit the diverse, representative teacher workforce in England that we need. It is the actions of the last 12 years of this tired Government that have got us into this mess. Labour is ambitious for our children's futures and we will deliver the well-rounded education—

Justin Tomlinson: Will the hon. Member give way?

Stephen Morgan: I am just going to carry on. We will deliver the well-rounded education that our children need and deserve to ensure that they are ready for work and ready for life. If Conservative Ministers will not deliver that for our children, the next Labour Government will.

3.1 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Nick Gibb): It is a pleasure to speak forth under your very capable chairmanship, Sir Gary. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Ben Bradley) on securing this important debate on increasing the number of male primary school teachers in the run-up to International Men's Day. I thank him for his contributions on this topic during a recent debate on apprenticeships and training. I know that education is a priority in his work, both in his previous role on the Education Committee and in supporting Mansfield and Ashfield as an education investment area. I echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson): my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield is undoubtedly a sad loss for the teaching profession, but we are very happy to have him here in the House of Commons representing his constituents as ably as he does.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon referred to the PFA wanting to find a way to help ex-professional footballers to be encouraged into teaching. He will know that I want to do more to improve sport in schools. He and I have had many conversations over the years. I will certainly take up his offer to arrange a meeting; I would enjoy that very much indeed.

The Government are committed to providing world-class education and training. We know that accomplished teachers, regardless of gender or background, provide positive role models and shape the lives of young people. That is why the Department aims to attract and retain highly skilled and talented individuals from all backgrounds and to support them throughout their careers.

The Department's current recruitment marketing campaign on teaching, "Every lesson shapes a life"—with its brilliant marketing and advertisements on television and radio to recruit people into teaching—is deliberately targeted at various audiences, including recent graduates and potential career changers. That targeting is regardless of background. The marketing takes every effort to ensure that all the advertising is fully reflective of the target audiences, including men. If hon. Members see those adverts, they will see precisely how that marketing does that very effectively.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield will be aware, despite the challenges of a competitive recruitment market, the Department's target for the number of trainees starting postgraduate initial teacher training

primary courses has been exceeded in four of the last five years. In 2021-22, 136% of the postgraduate initial teacher training target was achieved in primary.

Too often, we hear schools and universities saying that they know a good teacher when they see one. The Department is committed to dismantling the stereotype of what a good teacher looks like and supporting people into the teaching profession regardless of their background. Although it remains true that men make up a smaller proportion of the teaching workforce, the number of male teachers in primary schools has gradually increased since 2010. There has been an increase of more than 7,000 male teachers in state-funded nursery and primary schools, from 28,180 in 2010 to 35,202 in 2021. My hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield cited that in percentage terms, but clearly it is still a very small proportion of the total workforce.

Jim Shannon: That shows a trend that, unfortunately, we do not have in Northern Ireland. I know that that is not the Minister's responsibility, but I am keen to know whether he has been able to ascertain why the trend is for an increase here on the mainland, because if there is something that the Department for Education is doing here to improve the situation, I would very much like, as I said in my speech, to use the pluses from this debate for us back home. If the Minister could share any information on that, I would be much obliged to him.

Nick Gibb: What is interesting about that intervention is that the problem, the issue, that we have in this country is reflected in Northern Ireland, where of course education policy is devolved, so this is not specifically related to education policy; it is a deeper, societal issue and requires considerable consideration. I will come to those points shortly.

Male teachers are more likely to work in secondary schools than nursery and primary schools: 14% of nursery and primary school teachers are male—that is up from 12% in 2010—but 35% of secondary school teachers are male, although that is down slightly, from 37.8% in 2010. Let us look at the picture as a whole: 28% of all male teachers teach in state-funded nursery and primary schools, whereas 65% of male teachers teach in secondary schools and 6% of male teachers teach in special schools and pupil referral units. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), in his speech, cited similar proportions in Northern Ireland.

Male teachers do progress to leadership positions at a higher rate. As of November 2021, in state-funded nursery and primary schools, 26% of headteachers were male, compared with 14% of all nursery and primary teachers. There is also data to suggest that men progress faster. For example, in 2020 the median new female primary headteacher had been qualified for 19 years or fewer, compared with 16 years or fewer for the median male primary headteacher—whatever a median male primary headteacher is. People know the point I am making in terms of averages.

The Department is committed to making teaching and teacher recruitment as inclusive as possible. That includes recruitment campaigns designed to attract a diverse pool of candidates to teacher training, including men into primary teaching. All candidates have access to tailored support to help find the best route into teaching for them. Although we are seeing increasing

representation in some areas—for example, recruitment into initial teacher training is increasingly racially diverse—the Department recognises that some groups, including men, are still under-represented compared with the working-age population. I know that that view is shared by my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) and his daughter, who is herself a primary school teacher. This is particularly evident in the teaching workforce in primary schools.

The Department is committed to using all our new sources of data and insight, including the new in-house recruitment services, to identify barriers to accomplished people becoming teachers and staying in teaching. From initial attraction, to recruitment, development and progression into leadership, the new services and support are designed to deliver a high-quality and diverse workforce, for the benefit of pupils across the country. Excellent teaching of course starts with recruiting excellent people, from all backgrounds, and the Department does work hard to create diverse recruitment campaigns, as I mentioned, that attract brilliant students, recent graduates and career changers into teaching. Through the new Get Into Teaching website, prospective trainees can access tailored support and advice from expert, one-to-one teacher training advisers, a contact centre and a national programme of events. The Get School Experience digital service also helps potential candidates find and arrange experience in the classroom before deciding whether to become a teacher.

To transform the application process, we successfully rolled out the new initial teacher training application service in England in 2021. The Apply for teacher training service has removed recruitment barriers and is better supporting a wider range of excellent applicants to apply for teaching. The new Apply for teacher training service gives the Department more data and gives us greater insight into the behaviour of male candidates and all candidates, and of schools and universities that offer initial teacher training. That helps us to identify and address barriers for under-represented groups, including men.

If there is one area in which we can help to address the concerns raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield, it is through understanding why certain candidates are refused an initial teacher training place and what causes any particular candidate to drop out of the application process. We will learn a lot through the new website and I can commit to my hon. Friend that, as a consequence of this debate, I will also monitor any differential data that relates to the sex of the candidate going through the application process.

The Department is committed to tackling barriers to becoming a teacher, including reforming the routes to teaching. That includes a review of the postgraduate teaching apprenticeship, to create a more efficient and streamlined route. As well as that, we are providing a seamless journey into teaching for the best candidates. We have increased the starting salary to £28,000, seeking to ensure that the teaching profession is increasingly competitive, and we have the ultimate goal of getting to a starting salary of £30,000 in the following year.

At the recruitment stage, we have targeted our financial incentives where we know they are most needed. That is why we have put in place a range of measures for trainees from 2023, including bursaries worth up to £27,000 and scholarships worth up to £29,000, to encourage talented trainees to apply for those subjects with the greatest need for new teachers.

[Nick Gibb]

In conclusion, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield for his interest in and passion for the recruitment and retention of the highest quality teachers, and his particular interest in increasing the number of male teachers in primary schools. Recruitment of primary school teachers remains strong, with the Department exceeding primary recruitment targets in four of the last five years. That said, the Department is taking action to increase teacher recruitment and retention and to boost teacher quality through several high priority programmes, including the early career framework, which I have not touched on today.

At the recruitment stage, the Department has made progress in encouraging applications from the highest quality candidates through our marketing campaign and the transformation of our recruitment services. Meanwhile, our world-class teacher development programmes are designed to support all teachers in the early stage of and throughout their careers, right through to executive leadership. I am very happy to continue these discussions with my hon. Friend in the months ahead.

3.12 pm

Ben Bradley: I thank everybody who has taken part in the debate; it was an interesting conversation. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) pointed out that it is important to recognise that this is an issue across the whole UK. It is not a small or isolated problem; it is reflected in primary school teaching across the entire country.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson) gave a practical example of something we could do, which is already being discussed. I am grateful that the Minister has agreed to take that forward. It is interesting to compare how much funding, time and energy is, quite rightly, committed to helping young women into football, with the fact that not a lot is committed to getting young men from football into a profession in which they are under-represented. It would be good to redress that balance in a positive way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) bought his daughter's views and opinions to the fore, and was absolutely right to do so. He made an interesting and important point about how having a balanced workforce makes a school a more enjoyable place to work, given the increased range of diversity, experience and background.

The hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan) made lots of partisan points that I wildly disagreed with, but he was absolutely right about the

wider recruitment and retention challenges. An awful lot needs to be—and, I hope, is being—done to tackle those challenges. Here is a recruitment solution: make a big point of positive action, which we use in other spaces, to help us to recruit male primary teachers.

I welcome the Minister back to his place. His knowledge and experience in education is unmatched in this place, and he is very welcome. I am grateful for his kind words and for his commitment to meet the PFA. Perhaps we have started something beautiful that might lead to some outcomes. He pointed to his commitment to sport, which is fantastic. As an aside, he will be aware of the work I am doing on sports facilities that are locked away at schools. We have been trying to work on that issue for a long time.

The Minister talked about adverts and how teacher recruitment campaigns are balanced. That is interesting because in other areas the Equality Act allows us to specifically target certain groups, and we have no issues with that. The language in this place and in wider society—this is not a criticism of this place, as this is a wider societal trend—shows that we are very happy to overtly say that we want to see more women in STEM subjects and in certain professions, but we rarely hear people say, “We want to see more men in x.” The language is about being balanced across all genders, all sexes and all the rest of it. That is a very different conversation, which I find really interesting. We seem less comfortable making those points in the same way, but I hope that can change. I would like to not get into gender or any of that at all, to be honest. My fundamental issues with the Equality Act are well documented in *Hansard*.

I was pleased to hear the Minister's points about the importance of that balance and that the number of male teachers has risen, and his commitment to monitoring recruitment and applications, which will be helpful in driving this forward. Fairness of access and support during career progression is also absolutely right. I look forward to further discussion and seeing schemes come forward—perhaps there will be more footballers in primary schools very soon. I thank colleagues and you, Sir Gary, and, of course, the Minister for his time and consideration.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered increasing the number of male primary school teachers.

3.15 pm

Sitting suspended.

Energy Price Support: Northern Ireland

4 pm

Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance): I beg to move,

That this House has considered energy price support to households and businesses in Northern Ireland.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Gary. I welcome the opportunity to have this debate and I am pleased that the Minister has joined us. The main purpose is to focus on energy cost support for households and businesses in Northern Ireland, with a focus on the urgent delivery of the £400 energy support scheme and the payments to those using home heating oil.

I am extremely concerned about the impact of delays in support for Northern Ireland households, and the ongoing lack of clarity around when that support will arise. The UK Government have yet to clarify whether the £400 energy support and the £100 in support for oil-reliant households will be made available to Northern Ireland.

I will give a few words on the broader context. I appreciate that the current energy cost crisis reflects a range of international and domestic factors. Beyond the short-term energy support interventions, there are clear imperatives around insulation and other energy-efficiency measures, and diversification of energy supply, especially in relation to renewables.

Northern Ireland has some of the most challenging rates of poverty and other social and economic indicators in the United Kingdom, including low productivity, high economic inactivity and reliance on benefits. It also has a different energy market from the rest of the UK, with different suppliers and a different profile of energy sources, and with its connectivity on the island of Ireland. Most notably, almost 70% of Northern Ireland households use home heating oil, compared with less than 5% in the rest of the UK.

Northern Ireland is already facing a series of unprecedented risks. Our political institutions have collapsed. There are huge challenges to consumer and business confidence, creating enhanced risks to the economic outlook.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Down (Stephen Farry) on securing this debate. It is a great subject for us back home. The welfare of our local businesses is extremely important. He will know that our family-run and smaller businesses are the backbone of our constituencies—his, mine and those of other Members here—making them unique.

A local Japanese restaurant in my constituency that has only been open for about six months has seen an increase in its electricity bills of £900 to £3,000 per month. Should this remain an issue, it is clear that jobs will be lost and the business forced to close. Does the hon. Member agree that more consideration must be given to the long term—not just the next four months, but beyond—because businesses are clearly on the brink of closing?

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): Order. Just a reminder that interventions should be brief, Jim.

Jim Shannon: I thought that was brief.

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): That was not brief.

Stephen Farry: By Jim's standards, it was. I am grateful to the hon. Member for that intervention. I agree with him about the looming cliff edge that will come next year. It is also relevant to stress the issue of spending power in the economy, particularly in the run-up to Christmas for the hospitality sector.

Delivery of energy support should have been implemented by the Northern Ireland Executive. Normally, Northern Ireland would receive Barnett consequentials, based around equivalent spending in Great Britain, and would therefore have the scope to design or modify schemes to address local circumstances. Delivery of the £400 payments would have been implemented by now in those circumstances.

Furthermore, the size of the Barnett consequentials may well be significantly greater than the value of support that comes from direct provision from the UK Government to households and businesses. The Government have recognised that it would have been much easier for delivery to have been through a devolved Executive. However, in a political vacuum, it has fallen to the Government to intervene. I acknowledge the need for that, given the circumstances.

The energy price guarantee is now in place for Northern Ireland. That said, there are concerns about the scale and duration of the support, particularly what happens from next April onwards. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) has already touched on that point. For today, the most pressing issue is clarity on the timescale for the delivery of the £400 energy support payments, and how that will be phased, plus the implementation of the home heating oil support.

Despite those pressures, unlike in England, Wales and Scotland, households in Northern Ireland have not yet received a penny of the £400 energy support. There had been indications that we would receive that support in November, one month after the rest of the UK, yet it is now looking increasingly unlikely to be delivered this side of Christmas. We are also hearing that the payment might now be staggered, which means that households will have to wait even longer into next year.

Claire Hanna (Belfast South) (SDLP): I thank the hon. Member for securing this debate on such an important issue—he is always current. I do not know of any suppliers that will deliver less than 200 litres of heating oil, so the £100 support that was proposed would not even get a tank filled—people will have to put in about £150 before they can even avail themselves of it. Does he therefore share my concern about what would happen if that support were staggered or delivered in a piecemeal way?

Stephen Farry: Absolutely. There are huge issues in recognising the subtleties of what is efficient for making deliveries in the home heating oil market and the minimum size of delivery, and £100 pounds will not cover the minimum order volume. It is also worth stressing that there are economies of scale. The larger the order, the cheaper it is proportionally, so the households that are struggling most will be hit doubly by that pressure point.

Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP): Another big problem that we have in Northern Ireland is supply and the volume of storage. Kerosene works out around 7p a litre more expensive than in any other region of the United Kingdom.

Stephen Farry: I am grateful to the hon. Member for that intervention, which again highlights how the situation in Northern Ireland is different from the rest of the UK, and reinforces the importance of trying to tailor solutions to address our very particular circumstances.

It also emerged this week that the UK Government's joint taskforce responsible for delivering the scheme into Northern Ireland has met only twice. While households across the rest of the UK are being insulated from the worst effects of the crisis, families in Northern Ireland are still waiting for this lifeline and have no clarity about when it will arrive. It is not tenable to argue that, because the money will be coming next year, Northern Ireland will not be missing out. There must be a real urgency for getting this resolved now.

Disposable incomes in Northern Ireland are being particularly eroded by rising energy costs. This represents a grave threat to the wellbeing of households. People in Northern Ireland are also being left behind in terms of their ability to access energy support and are suffering as a result. A survey by National Energy Action in Northern Ireland in June indicated that 45% of Northern Ireland households were already spending more than 10% of their total household income on energy costs. This will be even higher now. That has resulted in dangerous coping mechanisms. Some 80% of Northern Ireland homes admitted to rationing their use of central heating in an effort to reduce costs, and one in 10 households has resorted to skipping meals to ensure that they have enough money to pay for their energy.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman is being incredibly generous, and I thank him for that. Some figures I got from Northern Ireland today indicate that an estimated 12% of Northern Ireland families live in absolute poverty—it is even worse than normal poverty, if there could be such a thing. Does that not support his case for why we need urgent help in Northern Ireland now?

Stephen Farry: I am grateful again to the hon. Member for his intervention. Households are facing, in effect, destitution, which is taking poverty to the nth degree in terms of their ability to cope. Similarly, reliance on food banks has increased by 76% in Northern Ireland over the past three years, which is way in excess of the increase in any other UK region. We cannot afford to see households tipped into poverty, more children going hungry, or more pressure on the national health service due to worsening physical and mental health.

These behaviours put households at significantly increased risk of detrimental impacts on their health and wellbeing, and people in 75% of households admitted to being stressed, anxious or worried about paying for the cost of their energy, either at present or over the winter months ahead.

Fuel poverty organisations in Northern Ireland are already overwhelmed by demand. NEA in Northern Ireland has seen significant rises in the number of households seeking emergency support. Indeed, it was forced to suspend its referral system temporarily in

October because of unsustainable levels of demand on the service, a trend that has now been replicated across other organisations in the sector.

There will also be a knock-on consequence for consumer spending. Potentially £300 million of spending power is at risk. This is particularly crucial in the run-up to Christmas, with many businesses, which are struggling themselves, depending on Christmas trade to survive. It is make or break time for them.

Northern Ireland is also suffering because we have a very different energy market from the rest of the UK, and the UK Government's energy price guarantee does not reflect that. Although households using gas have been protected from price rises through the Government's energy price cap, those who use oil are yet to receive the paltry £100 of support. That is a mere £100 in heating assistance, which applies to almost 70% of Northern Ireland households. Therefore, the vast majority of homes in Northern Ireland have not received a penny in support for heating cost pressures so far—that is, those households that do not use their electricity for heating.

We know that oil prices have not risen as much as gas prices. Nevertheless, £100 is simply not enough, particularly given the up-front costs of filling an oil tank. The Consumer Council for Northern Ireland estimates that it now costs £460 to fill a typical 500-litre tank, compared to £269 this time last year. In practice, as the hon. Member for Belfast South (Claire Hanna) has already mentioned, there is not a supplier in Northern Ireland that will provide a tank fill for less than 200 litres, meaning that households need to find an additional £150 before they can even avail themselves of support. Orders for oil need to be larger in order to access those economies of scale.

We also still do not know when or how this £100 will materialise in Northern Ireland. Not only is the assistance for Northern Ireland households late, but it is lower than the assistance provided to those in the rest of the UK, if we make that comparison between oil and gas costs.

There are also problems and distortions that come from the use of electricity bills to help oil customers. It is likely either that those people will end up with a credit on their electricity bill that they cannot access at this time of greater stress, or that this will lead to people switching from oil heating to using electric fires, which are potentially more expensive, pose greater health and safety risks, and put further strain on the electricity grid.

Finally, I am also worried about the looming cliff edge that is faced not only by households but by businesses next April. Recent research by Danske Bank indicates that energy prices rank highly among the key concerns for businesses in Northern Ireland. The latest data from the Office for National Statistics shows that 58% of businesses in the food and drink sector say that their energy prices were their main concern in November, up from 39% in October. Businesses are also extremely concerned about the risks associated with consumer spending, and the current impasse on the energy assistance for Northern Ireland puts local businesses at a direct disadvantage in that respect. I urge the Government to acknowledge that most businesses will likely need continued support, and to confirm that they will cast the net widely in that regard.

In summary, the human costs of this energy crisis are very real. I suspect that the ongoing uncertainty about post-April assistance will only serve to fuel the economic costs, as consumer spending and business investment will be constrained as a result. I urge the Government to provide assistance and greater clarity as a matter of extreme urgency, for the good of the people of Northern Ireland, the business community and indeed the broader economy, all of which will ultimately have fiscal consequences for the UK Government if conditions further deteriorate.

I am grateful to the Minister for his presence today. I will focus on the most pressing questions that I hope he will respond to, among other comments that he may wish to make. When and how will households receive the £400 of energy support? Will the Government review their calculation and the level of home heating oil support, and how is that support to be delivered?

4.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kevin Hollinrake): It is a pleasure to speak with you in the Chair, Sir Gary. I congratulate the hon. Member for North Down (Stephen Farry) on securing this very important debate, and I thank the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon), for Belfast South (Claire Hanna) and for South Antrim (Paul Girvan) for their interventions. They all made important and salient points relating to the problem in Northern Ireland.

Given the record energy prices, the Government understand the pressures being faced by households and businesses in Northern Ireland and right across the United Kingdom, and we are taking direct action to address the issue. Clearly, the crisis has been driven by Mr Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine, which has caused a surge in the global price of wholesale gas, leading to an unprecedented increase in the amount that households and businesses are paying for the gas, electricity and oil they use. This has compounded already high prices in economies across the globe that are recovering from the covid-19 pandemic. The effects of the price rises are being felt up and down the country, but the Government are determined to ensure that families can provide power for their homes and that businesses can power the economy.

Paul Girvan: While we have been sitting here, I have taken the opportunity to check on today's oil price. In England, people can buy a litre of 28 kerosene for 85.9986 pence, but the current price in Northern Ireland is £1.0835—a difference of 22 pence. How can we address the imbalance in transporting oil from GB to Northern Ireland? We have no refinery in Northern Ireland, and no way of dealing with it.

Kevin Hollinrake: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point, and I heard his comments earlier about the increased price of oil in Northern Ireland. The hon. Member for North Down spoke of the very high number of households in Northern Ireland that are off-grid, and that is extremely important. I will try to cover that point in my remarks.

The announcements made by the Government in September demonstrated our commitment to protecting UK households and businesses through the energy price

guarantee, the energy bill relief scheme and the energy bills support scheme, which is the key matter under discussion. Under the plans, households, businesses and public sector organisations across Northern Ireland will be protected from significant rises in energy bills, thanks to the Government's support. As well as outlining the support that still needs to be delivered, I will set out what the UK Government are already delivering in Northern Ireland, and what is to follow shortly.

The energy price guarantee in Northern Ireland launched on 1 November, offering equivalent support to that provided in Great Britain for domestic households. The scheme reduces the price that energy suppliers charge customers for units of gas and electricity, providing money off energy bills. Households will receive backdated support to cover October 2022 through a higher discounted rate. Through the EPG scheme, a typical household in Great Britain with both gas and electricity contracts will save around £700 this winter, based on current prices. Equivalent support will be provided for households in Northern Ireland.

Government support will also be provided for households that use alternative fuels for heating, such as heating oil or liquefied petroleum gas instead of mains gas. The alternative fuel payment scheme will provide a one-off payment of £100 to ensure that all households that do not benefit through the energy price guarantee receive support for the cost of the fuel they use. The £100 payment has been calculated with reference to increases in the cost of heating oil between September 2021 and September 2022. The aim is to ensure that a typical customer using heating oil will be offered support that is broadly in line with that offered by the energy price guarantee for those using mains gas to heat their homes. However, I hear what hon. Members say, and we are monitoring the price of heating oil and other alternative fuels very closely, now and in the months ahead, to see whether further payments are required at a future point in time.

Households in Great Britain that are eligible for the payments will receive £100 credit on their electricity bills this winter. For Northern Ireland, the Government are working with electricity suppliers to explore how the payment could be delivered via electricity bills under a similar delivery model. Details of when the payment will be made will be confirmed shortly—we have heard that word a number of times from Ministers at the Dispatch Box—so I cannot give the hon. Member for North Down a firm date, but we are very keen to deliver it as quickly as possible.

Jim Shannon: I thank the Minister for his response. In Northern Ireland, my understanding is that the proportion of those who are dependent on oil—I think the hon. Member for North Down (Stephen Farry) referred to this—is between 65% and 68%, so two thirds of the population in Northern Ireland need the payments. I hope he does not mind, but I am going to press the Minister on this. He says the payment is imminent or will be made shortly, or whatever. The people back home in my constituency—indeed, all our constituents—want it, and they want it now. The people have it here on the mainland, and we want the same.

Kevin Hollinrake: I totally understand that. We have to get this right. There are some complications in terms of timing, which I will set out. I wish I could give the

[Kevin Hollinrake]

hon. Gentleman a firm date. I get frustrated, too, in debates like this. I am slightly sitting on the fence in not giving a firm date, but I guarantee to him and other Members that the measure will be implemented as quickly as possible. I had meetings with officials earlier today. They are fully cognisant of the issue and keen to deliver quickly.

There are a number of complications. There is no central register either in Great Britain or in Northern Ireland for people who do not use the gas grid for their heating. We are working rapidly with stakeholders on the best way to identify those who merit support. Households that are eligible but do not receive alternative fuel payments because they do not have a relationship with an electricity supplier will receive the £100 via the alternative fuel payment alternative fund, which will be provided by a designated body.

Stephen Farry: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way and for what he has said so far. May I press him on the data on customers who use home heating oil? If we take the entirety of households in Northern Ireland and subtract those currently using gas, we can use the dataset that remains and assume that they are using home heating oil. That will give the Minister 99% accuracy. Similarly, I hope the £400 energy support will come shortly. Will the Minister explain the technical issues to the people of Northern Ireland, who are slightly confused as to why it is taking so long? We appreciate that the companies in Northern Ireland are different from those in Great Britain and that there might be question marks over their viability, but, to our minds, they are well-established and secure companies, so there should not be any real doubt about their ability to deliver the Government scheme.

Kevin Hollinrake: I will go on to explain some of the complications. The hon. Gentleman's points have been well made and heard by me and officials, so we will do what we can. In the discussions that I had this morning, it sounded as though there was a solution. We just need to roll it out as quickly as we can.

The energy bill relief scheme for Northern Ireland will apply to all eligible non-domestic electricity and natural gas customers, including businesses, charities and the public sector, which receives its gas or electricity from licensed suppliers. Discounts will be automatically applied by suppliers to the energy bills of eligible customers, covering energy usage between 1 October 2022 and 31 March 2023. The scheme, as has been said, will run for an initial six-month period. The exact discount applied will depend on the type of contract a customer is on and when it was agreed. Although the scheme applies to energy use from 1 October, savings applied to October bills are typically received in November, which means businesses in Northern Ireland start to feel the benefits in November.

The Government announced on 21 September that we will also provide support to non-domestic consumers who use alternative fuels in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Further information will be provided shortly. The schemes are supporting millions of households and businesses with rising energy costs, and the Chancellor made it clear that they will continue to do so from now until April next year.

Beyond April, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor—this applies to the whole of the United Kingdom—have agreed that it would not be responsible for the Government to continue exposing the public finances to unlimited volatility in international gas prices. A Treasury-led review is considering right now how households and businesses will be supported after April 2023 and will publish its findings by January 2023. The objective is to design a new approach that will cost the taxpayer significantly less than planned while ensuring enough support for those in need. It is very important that non-domestic customers that are less likely to be considered vulnerable to energy price increases, particularly larger businesses that are not energy-intensive, use the six months we have to identify measures they can take to protect themselves against high energy prices.

On support already received, low-income households received a cost of living payment in July of £326 and will receive another payment of £324 by 23 November. The energy bills support scheme launched in Great Britain in October provides eligible households with a discount of £400—that is the key point in front of us—that is being paid in six-monthly instalments in the UK.

Energy policy is devolved to Northern Ireland, but the issue has now been put back to the UK Government to deal with. The hon. Member for North Down referred to the taskforce. The reason it only met twice was that its job was to determine the best way to address this issue, and it determined that the UK Government should do it. The issue is now with officials and Ministers in my Department to make sure that we deliver the scheme in a way that accounts for the differences in Northern Ireland, and we are working with suppliers to get this across the line as quickly as possible.

Detailed work is under way to establish how suppliers can use their systems to pass funds on to consumers in a way that is consistent with the Government policy intent, while ensuring that public money is properly protected. We will of course use our experience thus far in the scheme in the rest of the United Kingdom, and we will work with the Utility Regulator in Northern Ireland to deliver the scheme.

We have already acted to resolve one of the barriers to delivering the scheme in Northern Ireland by taking new powers in the Energy Prices Act 2022, which received Royal Assent only on 25 October. We now need to provide clarity on timings on when the scheme will be finally rolled out to households in Northern Ireland.

Some households in Northern Ireland who do not have a direct contract with an electricity supplier or a meter of their own, for example park homes, cannot receive the £400 discount directly via an electricity supplier. We will also support those households under a separate arrangement called the energy bills support scheme alternative funding.

The Government have delivered and will continue to deliver comprehensive support for energy consumers across the United Kingdom to overcome the extraordinary challenges we are facing. We are delivering support to households and businesses in Northern Ireland through the EPG and the energy bill relief scheme already, but we fully recognise the need to provide further clarity on when these measures will be delivered to consumers in Northern Ireland and are working at significant pace to do so.

I cannot give a firm date, but I can give the commitment that we are trying to expedite payments by every possible means. We have listened to the points made by the hon. Gentleman and others, particularly about off-grid homes, which is an issue not just in Northern Ireland but across the country, and we are working to make sure that the payments are at the right level. I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising this important topic today. I will continue to work with him to try to make sure that we get the money out of the door as quickly as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Conflict in Ethiopia

4.30 pm

Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the conflict in Ethiopia.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Gary. This debate has come at a very significant time for the Ethiopian people. It is exactly two weeks since an agreement was struck and signed in South Africa between the Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the Tigray People's Liberation Front, or the TPLF. The ceasefire officially ending this brutal two-year conflict is welcomed by all Members of this House. However, according to Ghent University, an estimated 600,000 people have lost their lives, some 875,000 people have become refugees and 90% of Tigray's population are now dependent on food aid. Those are staggering figures.

Of course, information is still being gathered. Establishing the full facts is incredibly difficult. This is partly because of the serious danger to even well-established and world-renowned non-governmental organisations, whose first priority has to be to protect their workers and those to whom they must give emergency aid. While we sit in this warm, relatively calm and peaceful place, hundreds of incredibly courageous and dedicated aid workers will put their own safety and comfort aside to help the human victims and survivors of the atrocities of war. We may never know the names of those who prioritise the safety and survival of others, but their selfless humanity cannot and should not be underestimated or go unrecognised by this House and politicians the world over.

Although it was a great relief to hear the news of the cessation of this bloody conflict, just two weeks before, UN Secretary-General António Guterres had expressed his deep concern that the situation in Ethiopia was spiralling out of control, and there continue to be reports of conflict in northern Ethiopia, including looting in Adwa and drone attacks. There are gravely concerning reports that, despite the ceasefire, Eritrean troops continue to defy the ceasefire and are still active. We know that they did not formally take part in the peace agreement. With no assurances of an internationally recognised and supervised ceasefire monitoring mechanism, that continues to contribute to fears over the safety and security of civilians, particularly in Tigray.

The conflict has been one of the world's deadliest, so ensuring that peace is maintained and agreements are adhered to has to be a humanitarian priority for Governments the world over. What I want to hear from our Government today is what actions they are taking to ensure that, either through direct interventions with the Ethiopian Government and/or through the UN.

I have touched on the famine, death and displacement of Ethiopia's people, but what is perhaps most difficult to discuss is the sexual violence and human rights atrocities committed over the course of this conflict. There has been extensive verification of widespread atrocities, including by Amnesty International, the UN councils and commissions on Ethiopia and the testimonies of many incredibly brave survivors. As politicians, we hear such evidence from warzones quite frequently, but I have rarely been as shocked and moved as I have after hearing about some of those experiences.

[*Rosie Duffield*]

The stories are anonymised to protect the survivors. Aida, a 20-year-old from the indigenous Irob minority, was kept in sexual slavery with two other Tigrayan women. She was gang raped by Ethiopian and Eritrean military commanders for over a month in November 2020. Lilly, a 23-year-old from Irob, was kept in sexual slavery with six other Tigrayan women and was repeatedly gang raped by troops when they were hiding in that area. Both women escaped, but one has now given birth as a result of rape. Hanna, a mother of two suffering from breast cancer, was gang raped in a church after being dragged away from family members. Her breast was cut off by a commander and she was left unconscious after being raped by eight soldiers.

There are many hundreds, if not thousands, of similar stories being collected by incredibly brave and outstanding volunteers like Rita Kahsay, who spent three months in refugee camps speaking with those displaced by this conflict. She has painstakingly taken the testimonies of survivors at great personal risk. Some of the most horrific crimes were carried out on children. The Joint UN Human Rights Office-Ethiopian Human Rights Commission found that Tigrayan boys were not spared from the weaponised rapes that took place.

I am lucky enough to be in touch with Rita thanks to the work of a former Member of this House, Sally Keeble, who has continued to raise the plight of the Tigrayan people. Rita could have chosen to simply pursue her path as an engineer in the UK, but she felt compelled to act and help those left in the country of her birth. Her family are dispersed, and she has not been able to be in regular contact with them for at least two years.

Those are the human beings; those are the experiences of people caught up in brutal, bloody and deadly conflicts that have absolutely nothing to do with them. Those are the circumstances that lead to displacement and the creation of hellish refugee camps. Many risk their lives to get to safety by any means.

If those who signed the peace agreement truly welcome peace, they must allow bodies such as the UN to carry out their work. If they truly welcome peace, aid in the form of food and medical treatment must be allowed through, and aid agencies must be allowed to carry out their work unhindered. If they truly welcome peace, that process should be seen to go smoothly by politicians and the displaced diaspora so that the rebuilding of those devastated lives can begin. We in the UK must listen to the joint UN and Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and play our part to help all those affected. We have to act as a global community and seek every assurance that the peace and cessation of violence in Tigray will be meaningful, real and lasting.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): Order. The wind-ups begin at 5.10 pm. We therefore have about 30 minutes and there are six of you seeking to catch my eye, so that is about five minutes each. Let us be disciplined voluntarily.

4.36 pm

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Gary. It is also a pleasure to see my right hon. Friend the

Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) back in the Government. Like me, he greatly values the effect that British aid has had over very many years and wants it to continue. I know he takes a deep interest in these subjects, as does my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend East (Sir James Duddridge)—it is really good to see him in the debate.

We have held a number of debates on Ethiopia. I have secured an urgent question and have taken part in the debates. I have chaired the all-party parliamentary group on Ethiopia for a dozen years or so, and I continue to take a deep interest in the country. I am very sorry to see what has been happening over the past few years. I was at the Ethiopian embassy two weeks ago. The ceasefire had been announced the night before; it was a very moving moment and there was a lot of hope. I am very hopeful that we can make progress. The hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) set out the case for peace and spoke movingly. I congratulate her on securing this debate.

The tragedy of the conflict is that Ethiopia has held together for so long, despite having very sizeable Christian and Muslim populations and something like 80 tribes and 80 languages. Yes, Eritrea broke away many years ago, but Ethiopia has been very peaceful. It has had great economic success, with growth rates that we in the west would envy, and is one of the safest countries to walk around. That is the tragedy.

I have called constantly for the UN and the African Union to take more of an interest than they appear to have been taking, although there has been a good deal of success recently from the work carried out by the African Union. We now need to make sure that is followed through and the peace holds. Both sides and Eritrea are accountable for that. They have to make sure the peace holds for the very reasons that the hon. Lady set out. We have to make sure food, medical supplies and everything else that is needed in that part of Ethiopia gets through to Tigray.

I say this slightly reluctantly, but it is important that the west is not seen to lecture developing countries because we have had our own problems. We had 30 years of conflict in Northern Ireland, and we saw what that did to morale; it destroyed futures. We saw what it did through the 3,000 or so lives that it took. We saw the effect that had on the economy in Northern Ireland. At the worst of the troubles, the unemployment rate in Northern Ireland was something like 25%. That is what war and conflict does to a country. On that occasion in the embassy I said that, since we have had relative peace in Northern Ireland, we have had relative prosperity. Yes, there are problems, as we heard in the debate just a few minutes ago. But it is a far better place—it is almost unrecognisable from the place that it was. That is because the conflict was ended. I know that is the wish of the hon. Member for Canterbury, who very ably introduced this debate. I know it is the wish of everybody in Westminster Hall. It is certainly my wish. My call goes out to everybody involved to embrace peace and enjoy the benefits of peace.

4.40 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): I will stick to five minutes as you asked, Sir Gary, so we can all speak. I congratulate the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) on securing the debate and the way she

introduced it, particularly her drawing attention to the way women were treated during the conflict in Tigray, the abominable abuse they suffered, and sadly probably continue to suffer, and the lack of closure in that part of the conflict.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): The cessation of hostilities agreement is obviously very good news. For there to be lasting peace, however, it is crucial that victims and survivors have justice. Does the hon. Member agree that accountability for war crimes and serious human rights abuses is paramount?

Jeremy Corbyn: Absolutely. I am sure that everyone agrees with the hon. Member on that point. I certainly do. I was going to say this further on in my speech, but I will say it now: we must ensure that the UN Human Rights Council has unfettered access to all parts of Ethiopia to examine these abuses and the crimes that have been committed. In the past, it has been barred from access and had to interview victims by telephone and things like that. Obviously, that is a very unsatisfactory way of reporting.

The other point I make about Ethiopia generally is that there are almost a million refugees in Ethiopia from most of the neighbouring countries: South Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea and so on. There is a massive demand placed on Ethiopia to deal with that. I hope that when the Minister comes to reply, he can give us some indication of what support we can give to ensure that the refugees are decently treated and, where they want to and where it is possible, what assistance we can give them in returning to the country they come from.

The Tigray conflict ended because of the intervention of South Africa, with the support of the African Union, and we should be very grateful for that. It was good that they brought about the ceasefire and the agreement. The ceasefire and agreement are one thing. What is important is the progress that happens after that: the investigation of the crimes that have been committed; getting humanitarian aid, medical aid and food rapidly into Tigray; and not being blockaded or blocked from going in.

There is also the question of their democratic point of view. They could not take part in the Ethiopian elections last year. The government in Tigray has been dissolved and there is no regional government in Tigray—it is done from Addis Ababa. Surely there is therefore a big democratic deficit in Tigray. If that democratic deficit is not addressed, it could well be the source of future stress and conflict.

The last point I want to make is this: Tigray is not the only part of Ethiopia where there are problems. The Roma community are also facing tensions and stresses. There has been unrest and violence, and there have been deaths as a result. It is not for us to interfere in the running of another country—I am absolutely clear about that—but we must be prepared to recognise that we may be able to play a role that can help by facilitating the UNHRC and with necessary aid and support of a humanitarian kind. We must ensure that we do not supply arms that fuel this conflict to any actor on this field and that arms that we sell elsewhere do not end up in Ethiopia, because the terror, death and real problems that the people of Ethiopia face—drought, famine, poverty, the lack of medical aid and other issues—must be addressed as quickly as possible.

Ethiopia was the one country that was never colonised by the Europeans. I see it as the major beacon of Africa. It is the centre of the African Union and so much else. Let us respect that history and participation and give all the support we can to what we hope is a path to long-term peace in that country.

4.45 pm

Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Gary. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) for securing this important debate and setting the scene. As horrific as it is, it is important that we never forget. It goes without saying that the suffering caused by the conflict in Ethiopia is truly heartbreaking. I have constituents with family in Tigray who have not seen or heard from any of their family members in the past two years because of the communication blackout. They do not know whether their families are alive or dead. Indeed, the stories they have heard about the conditions in Tigray mean that their assumption is that some of their family members will almost certainly have passed away.

Hundreds of thousands of people have died in the conflict, more than 3 million are internally displaced and 13 million need food aid in northern Ethiopia. Yet there is a sense that this humanitarian crisis is not being treated with the utmost urgency. According to the Norwegian Refugee Council, the crisis in Ethiopia is one of the 10 most neglected displacement crises in the world, all of which are in Africa.

Last week, members of the International Development Committee and I were lucky enough to be joined by experts on the horn of Africa's hunger crisis. We were told that the conflict in Tigray has intersected with a series of other factors to create a devastating food crisis. High inflation in world markets, partly as a result of the conflict in Ukraine, is pushing up the price of food and fertilisers. Climate change is increasing the prevalence of droughts, and the covid pandemic is devastating economies and livelihoods. We were told that there is the real possibility of famine and that the World Food Programme has not managed to get aid into Tigray since 24 August. We must welcome the recent agreement to allow full access to food and aid, but must closely track its implementation. There is no time to waste with almost a third of children already suffering from malnutrition. Michael Dunford, who is regional director at the World Food Programme across the horn of Africa, said at the evidence session that the cuts to the overseas aid budget are harming the WFP's ability to respond to people's needs. He said that, in 2019, the World Food Programme benefited from £181 million funding from the UK Government. In 2022, it has received less than a third of that figure—£55 million.

The Government are failing to do all that is possible to provide humanitarian support and help create the conditions for lasting peace and prosperity for the people of Ethiopia. I would therefore like to make three recommendations to the Minister. First, we must restore our commitment to spending 0.7% of GDP on overseas development assistance if we want to retain the capacity to adequately respond to crises. Secondly, a significant amount of funding must be immediately directed to bilateral aid for Ethiopia. Thirdly, we need to restore our previous contributions to multilateral agencies, such as the World Food Programme.

[Kate Osamor]

The Committee also received evidence from Mamadou Dian Balde, the UNHCR representative in Ethiopia. He told us last week that we need greater investment in medium to long-term programmes to ensure resilience to climate change, which would include irrigation schemes and drought-resistant crops. I hope the Minister, who is in his place, will listen to all of us and be able to help not only those of us in this Chamber today, but the families who are worried sick from not knowing whether their families are alive or dead.

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): I made an error: I counted six instead of five speakers, so the next two speakers can in fact have six minutes each. I apologise—especially to you, Jeremy.

Jeremy Corbyn: Can I come back for two more minutes?

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): No. I call Jim Shannon—you can have six minutes.

4.50 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Sir Gary. I am now glad I was called at the end, because I have an extra minute; I thank hon. Members for being so generous. I am particularly interested in this issue, and I thank the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) for setting the scene so well. Some of the evidence and information in her speech was hard to listen to, and quite unnerving, but I understand that she wanted to set the scene.

I speak, and declare an interest, as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on international freedom of religion or belief. I have a deep concern and heart for all those individuals who do not get the opportunity to express themselves from their religious points of view. The situation in Ethiopia is tragic. Thousands are dead, and many more are displaced, owing to the conflict. Over 13 million people in the northern region of Tigray need food aid and lack essential services. While ethnic conflict rages on, freedom of religion or belief remains a sorely disregarded human right.

Against the background of political violence and unrest in Ethiopia and Tigray, it should be remembered that it is difficult to differentiate between faith-related and ethnically or politically related attacks in Tigray. All too often, the religious dimension is brushed aside because of the close links between ethnicity and religion, and their close links to the various drivers of the conflict. It is difficult to characterise incidents as based solely on religious identity.

I omitted to welcome the Minister to his place; I am very pleased to see him there. He has had a deep interest in these matters over the years, so I am optimistic that he will respond to our questions in a positive fashion.

When some say that the number of reported incidents based on religion or belief has dropped—from the figures and the evidential base, that does not seem to be the case—that should be understood in the broader context of the conflict. In Tigray, religion is closely entangled with ethnicity and politics. There is no denying that the conflict has had a devastating impact on Christian communities. Many churches have been destroyed and many Christians killed.

The hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) gave me some literature related to Aid to the Church in Need, which had an event in the House of Lords. I could not attend, but I know that you, Sir Gary, were there. I sat and read one story, about the Eritrean Axum massacre, in November 2020, when there was an attack on a church where 1,000 people were worshipping:

“It might be that more were injured and died later. 750 were killed for sure.”

That illustrates the issue very clearly. As the hon. Member for Canterbury mentioned, Eritrean troops stand accused of a campaign of ethnically motivated cultural cleansing, and of participating in massacres of Ethiopian Christians. The people doing that are the army, police and those in authority. I feel very sad to say this, but Aid to the Church in Need was told that nuns have been raped as part of the attack on Tigray. That gives hon. Members an idea of the brutality, violence and ethnic cleansing that is happening. People have to be accountable.

Ethiopia ranks 38 on the Open Doors world watch list for the world's worst places to be a Christian, despite Christianity being the majority religion in the country, as the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) mentioned. Given that Christianity is the religion favoured by most, it is hard to understand that Christians have been targeted. In Ethiopia, converts from Islam to Christianity, as well as converts to Protestant Churches from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, face mistreatment from family, friends and the wider community. Islamic extremist attacks against churches are increasingly prevalent. So many Christian converts face pressure to renounce their faith and continue to suffer as a result of political unrest, dire humanitarian conditions and added environmental pressures as a result of some of the driest conditions since 1981. Last year, the Government said that their priority was

“to ensure that Ethiopians, irrespective of ethnicity, religion and political affiliation, receive life-saving aid and that humanitarian access to areas affected by conflict and insecurity is restored.”

My question to the Minister is this: if that was said by our Government—my Government—then can we have an update on where we are? Can the Minister confirm that the lifesaving aid and the humanitarian access has been delivered?

In conclusion, this is not the first debate we have had on the situation in Ethiopia. I very much focused my contribution to this debate on the religious persecution perspective, which I know you have a deep interest in, Sir Gary, as do many others in this Chamber, because it matters. However, the other issues and factors in Ethiopia also matter, so I call on the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, our Minister and our Government to fulfil their promises and to take what I have said into consideration when engaging in discussions with Ethiopia. We have a duty in this House and an opportunity to be a voice for the voiceless—for those people who have nobody to act for them—and today we are doing just that.

4.56 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair today, Sir Gary. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) on securing this important debate. The conflict in Ethiopia, which began two years ago in the

region of Tigray, has been and continues to be brutal, devastating and destabilising for the wider horn of Africa. There are reports of thousands of deaths and abductions and of the widespread use of rape and sexual violence in the conflict, and warnings that the scale and systematic nature of the violence, and the language that accompanies it, may amount to genocide.

I pay tribute today to brave journalists, including Lucy Kassa, who has borne witness to the scale and intensity of the violence, and politicians, including Filsan Ahmed, who resigned from the Ethiopian Government over their handling of the conflict in Tigray. Both are remarkable young women who have borne significant personal cost for their work to give voice to people suffering under this conflict.

For some of my constituents, the conflict in Tigray has meant a total loss of contact with close family members over the past two years. I have a constituent whose parents and brother, who has Down's syndrome, are in Tigray. She knows that her aunt was one of the first to be killed in the conflict, but she has not had any word at all from other family members for more than two years, resulting in unbearable worry, anxiety and anguish.

The conflict has left 20 million people across Ethiopia in urgent need of food aid, hospitals entirely without medicine and 2.8 million children without access to school. The scale of the conflict is as appalling as its brutality, with 500,000 people dead as a result of fighting and conflict-related factors such as famine, and 100,000 dead just since the fighting resumed in September. Yet for a conflict that is causing such suffering and has the potential to cause such widespread destabilisation, there has been extraordinarily little international outcry or mainstream media coverage of the devastation and insufficient international engagement.

The ceasefire that was recently signed is welcome, but it is not clear that it is yet having any impact, with further reports of violence today—not entirely surprising given the absence of the Eritrean authorities from the negotiations, since Eritrean forces are reported to be among the main perpetrators of violence in Tigray.

The humanitarian need is desperate, as is the need to investigate the crimes that have been committed so far within this conflict, to gather evidence and testimony and to ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice. There has been extensive verification of widespread atrocities in Ethiopia, including by Amnesty International, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and the UN Human Rights Council. Their inquiries have found evidence of atrocities that may amount to war crimes, including massacres of civilians and evidence of language indicative of genocide.

One extreme feature of this conflict is the widespread use of sexual violence. Conservative estimates are that more than 26,000 women have been affected, while some estimates are far higher. While all parties to the conflict have been accused of atrocities, the UNHRC's investigation identifies Tigrayan women as having been targeted for particular violence. It also found that the Ethiopians were the only air force in possession of the drones being used in aerial bombardments, including on a refugee camp.

The highly respected Dr Denis Mukwege Foundation released a report in November 2022 that concluded that data suggests Ethiopian and allied forces committed

conflict-related sexual violence on a widespread and systemic basis in order to eliminate and/or forcibly displace the ethnic Tigrayan population. The UN Human Rights Council has found action taken by the Ethiopian legal justice system to be wholly inadequate in terms of numbers of prosecutions and lack of information about prosecutions and convictions. It is a dire situation that demands the attention of the world.

I welcome the Minister to his place. I know that he has a personal commitment to see peace in Ethiopia. I ask him to set out what actions the UK Government are taking over atrocity crimes in Ethiopia, both through direct interventions with the Ethiopian Government and through the UN. Will the Government invite representatives from Tigrayan civil society and other diaspora communities in the UK affected by conflict-related sexual violence to their Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict conference? What actions are the UK Government taking to progress and support investigations on the reports of genocide in the Tigray region of Ethiopia? Finally, what actions are the UK Government taking to help to secure humanitarian access into Tigray to meet the urgent needs of the population there?

My constituents, and all those whose families are affected by this terrible conflict, need to know that the UK Government are doing everything possible to work for peace, justice and humanitarian access.

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): We now turn to the Front-Bench speeches. I suggest seven minutes rather than five for the first two speeches, then the Minister can take the rest.

5.1 pm

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP): Having spent as long as I did in the European Parliament, where 90 seconds was a long speech, I am well used to brevity, Sir Gary. I congratulate the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) on securing a debate on this important issue. I am glad that we all welcome the ceasefire and peace agreement in Tigray. Brokered by the African Union, it has been a real achievement for the South Africans. We should give them their due in this; it was in danger of becoming a frozen conflict before their involvement. African diplomacy has gone a long way towards resolving the conflict.

With the Minister in his place, we should look towards the future and what we can do to help the people of the region enjoy a durable peace. I will focus on the durability of the agreement that has been struck, the accountability for crimes and justice for victims, and the food insecurity that I am deeply concerned will set the conditions for a relapse into further violence in the region.

The durability of the agreement was hard won. Even as the ceasefire was being announced, one side referred to the “terrorist” Tigray People's Liberation Front, and the other side to the “fascist clique”. Eritrea was not a formal signatory to the agreement, but it clearly was involved. We have not seen any disarmament thus far under article 6 of the agreement. What assessment have the UK Government made of the prospects for disarmament on the ground, particularly in terms of how the verification of the withdrawal of the Eritrean forces is going to be checked? We have already heard

[Alyn Smith]

concerns about the access of international observers. What sort of access are we going to be pushing for to verify that the agreement, particularly article 6, is being implemented?

We are all united in believing that accountability for war crimes is integral for a just peace going forward. That is something that we really are in a position to assist with. It concerns me deeply that no side of the conflict has accepted that any war crimes were committed by their side. I am not sure the conditions for accountability and honesty are necessarily there yet. I can see why accountability would not be foreseen within a ceasefire agreement, but surely the international community cannot lose sight of the need for accountability mechanisms.

Again, I ask what the UK Government are doing to assist those accountability mechanisms. The African Union is doing a great deal of work on that, as are the UN authorities, but their access has been hindered. That can be usefully taken forward by the UK Government to ensure access and give financial support—even in terms of lending personnel to the investigators. Those war crimes need to be properly explored and people held to account.

On food insecurity, the point is wider than just Tigray, Ethiopia or the horn of Africa, but the numbers facing food insecurity in that region are very stark. According to the World Food Programme, there are 13 million people across northern Ethiopia alone who are in real danger of food insecurity, including 5.4 million people in Tigray, 7 million in Amhara and 1.2 million in Afar. There are millions of people in real danger of starvation right now. Aid was not able to get through, but now it is, which is one of the big advantages of this ceasefire.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation has classified Ethiopia as a whole at its highest alert level for hunger and starvation. That is a real challenge to the international community and a challenge, as well as an opportunity, to the UK Government to step up. Now that aid can get through, we all need to consider how we can best help to prevent the conditions for a relapse into violence from occurring.

The Minister well knows the SNP position on the return to the 0.7% aid criteria; he has his own well-documented thoughts on that. I appreciate that he has collective responsibility today, but surely in the case of Ethiopia and the horn of Africa there is a real need for more aid than we have seen. As well as reinstating the 0.7% aid—and even if we are short of that—I would make a plea today for increased UK Government aid, particularly to combat food insecurity in that region. I would be glad to hear about that. Otherwise, I fear that the conditions exist for the bad guys to come back. The peace is fragile. Of course the agreement is significant, but it needs help, and I think we are all united in that effort.

5.6 pm

Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): It is a real pleasure to serve under you as Chair, Sir Gary. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) for securing the debate and opening it so brilliantly. I thank all other right hon. and hon. Members for their contributions; it has been an excellent debate.

The devastating conflict in Ethiopia has lasted for two very long years. As my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury stated, some estimates suggest that as many as half a million people have died, including hundreds of thousands of civilians. The ceasefire agreement could simply not come quick enough and Labour is deeply grateful to the diplomats who have worked to secure it, most of all the African Union and its representatives. We need to face the reality that the chaos in the Conservative party over recent months has weakened the UK's international voice, but now we need to look forward. I hope the new Minister will tell us how the Government will deepen the UK's support for African Union mediation, peacekeeping and peace-building work over the coming years.

East Africa was named a priority region by this Government in their "Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy". Now we need to understand how that commitment will be implemented to support peace, security, inclusion and accountability. The first priority, as we know, must be to support humanitarian access for the people of Tigray. In August, 89% of the population in Tigray were assessed as food insecure, and 29% of children under five and half the pregnant women and breastfeeding women were malnourished. That situation will inevitably have worsened since then.

Over the past two years, many people have been descending into deeper desperation in the absence of aid. That in itself is sure to have fuelled the conflict, because if the only way people can eat and survive is by signing up to fight, why would they not do that? That desperation puts women and children at massively increased risk of abuse and exploitation, so what progress has been made with humanitarian access right now to all parts of Tigray? Let us face it: demand for assistance is extremely high in many parts of Ethiopia and across the region because of the terrible drought. Are we confident that aid agencies have enough resources to take full advantage to deliver life-saving help quickly?

The Minister has rightly said in response to my written questions that the UK stands ready to support the peace process—that is fabulous—so now I would be grateful to understand how. Will he tell us if discussions are ongoing with the Government of Ethiopia and the African Union? Like my hon. Friends, I have several constituents who have been agonisingly out of contact with their families in Tigray for many months now. Surely we can expect a rapid and final end to the communications blackout and the restoration of services.

Jeremy Corbyn: Like my hon. Friend, I have constituents from Tigray, Oromia and Ethiopia as a whole, and they are going through the most awful stress. There is a lack of communication, but they want to send help and aid in support. Does she think we could do more to facilitate information, to give the families some sense of security about what is happening to their relatives? The community in this country is also very keen to send whatever help it can.

Ms Brown: My right hon. Friend has known me long enough to know that I agree entirely with what he just said. As my hon. Friends the Members for Canterbury, for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), and for Edmonton (Kate Osamor), have highlighted, there have been many credible reports of repeated war crimes and potential crimes against humanity.

It is unacceptable that the UN-mandated International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia has been so heavily restricted in its work. Despite those restrictions, the commission has set out damning evidence of horrifying abuses by all parties to the conflict. Because of the lack of access for journalists and human rights defenders, the violations we know about may well be only the tip of the iceberg.

It would be good to know how we are preparing for the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative conference in two weeks' time. There have been many reports of women, children and men being subject to horrific sexual violence, including repeated rape and torture. Many seem to have been targeted, based on their identity, with sexual violence being used as a weapon of war. I hope that the Minister will tell us how the UK is working to support survivors through access to specialist services, including mental and physical health support, and access to justice.

For many of the survivors who have been displaced it is not currently safe to return home. Many are in camps in Sudan as well as across Ethiopia. I am sure we all understand that specialist support needs to get to where they are now, and quickly. I genuinely struggle to see how the enormous divisions in Ethiopia will mend without proper accountability. That is about security as well as justice for the victims.

I am struggling to understand how we can have confidence in a sustainable peace, if there is not healing and inclusion in Ethiopia. I hope that the Minister will tell us more about the approach that he will take to support credible accountability for the countless victims of abuses in this war. I want to ask the Minister about some of the pitfalls, as it would be devastating to the people of Ethiopia and damaging to UK interests if the agreement fails.

First, the agreement excludes Eritrea, and it is not clear how the rapid withdrawal of all Eritrean forces will be ensured. The Government have failed to mirror previous US sanctions against Eritrean entities involved in the conflict, so I hope that the Minister will consider that as a lever that he might have to deploy.

We know that there are significant border disputes, particularly around western Tigray. Many of the alleged systematic abuses, including ethnic cleansing, relate to that area. A pathway will need to resolve those disputes fairly and peacefully. The ceasefire does not end the need for close and consistent engagement by the UK—far from it. Let us be clear: the UK has much to gain from a just peace.

Ethiopia has made an enormous contribution to sustainable development and to the pan-African vision and its institution. The potential of the people of Ethiopia is even greater than their history. I believe that our partnership and collaboration could be much stronger if the UK supports the peace to hold, and if justice is done and seen to be done for the peoples of that very great country.

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): Just before I call the Minister, can I check, Rosie, whether you want to take advantage of time to wind up the debate?

Rosie Duffield: I think I would like to give the time to the Minister.

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): We will give time to the Minister. It is a pleasure to call the Minister, Andrew Mitchell.

5.14 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell): Thank you, Sir Gary. This is the first time I have had the privilege of performing under your eagle eye. It is my third time in government, since I first became a member of the Government in 1992, but I have never taken a debate in Westminster Hall before, so I hope you will treat me gently on this occasion, as I am a bit of a debutante.

I am very grateful to the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) for securing this debate. I thought that she led and framed it with humanity, wisdom and knowledge, and the whole Chamber will be grateful to her for doing that. I am also grateful to other hon. Members and right hon. Members for their contributions to the debate, and I will try to respond to as many of the points that were raised as I can. I will come directly to the important points that were raised at the end of my remarks if I do not cover them in the speech that I am about to deliver.

After two years of brutal and bloody conflict, today's debate takes place at a moment of hope. There is finally a path towards peace and prosperity for the people of Ethiopia. During two years of fighting in the north of the country, thousands of people have been killed. There have been human rights violations and abuses on an appalling scale, as has been set out during this debate, and some 13 million people have been left in need of humanitarian aid. It has been one of the world's most destructive conflicts.

The peace agreement signed on 2 November by the Ethiopian Government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front is an opportunity to bring a permanent end to this conflict. I recognise the achievement of both parties in taking this step towards peace. I particularly commend the role of the African Union and its envoy—the former Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo—who led mediation efforts, with support from South Africa and Kenya.

This weekend, there was further cause for optimism. On Saturday in Nairobi, senior military commanders from both sides in the conflict signed a further agreement that maps out implementation of the peace process. At the forefront of this agreement is a rapid return to full and unhindered humanitarian access to Tigray, which, as Members have made clear today, is absolutely vital. The peace agreement provides for a permanent cessation of hostilities, the disarmament and demobilisation of Tigrayan forces, and the restoration of services across Tigray. It also provides for a restoration of the constitutional order and the presence of federal authorities within the region.

This is a comprehensive agreement which, if implemented in full, can be the basis of a lasting peace. However, its implementation is far from certain. It will require sustained, magnanimous and restrained leadership on all sides, and support from Ethiopia's friends across the international community. The UK Government have offered our support to the Ethiopian Government and the African Union. So far, the early signs are promising.

[Mr Andrew Mitchell]

Since 2 November, we believe that fighting has largely ceased, and the agreement signed on 12 November demonstrates commitment to implementation.

Humanitarian access is desperately needed. The UN estimates that 13 million people in northern Ethiopia require assistance, which includes millions of people in Tigray whom humanitarian agencies have been unable to reach since August. Humanitarian access has been one of our chief concerns throughout the conflict, and I know that that concern is shared by many in this Chamber. The UK Government have consistently called for humanitarian agencies to have unhindered and unfettered access to northern Ethiopia.

My predecessor as the Minister with responsibility for development, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford), raised this issue when she met Ethiopia's deputy Prime Minister, Demeke Mekonnen Hassen, on 22 September at the UN General Assembly and she followed up that meeting with a visit to Ethiopia on 19 October, when she again held talks with the deputy Prime Minister.

In both those meetings, our message was clear: stop fighting, start talking and ensure that all those affected by the conflict can access humanitarian aid and essential services. We therefore welcome the commitment of the Ethiopian Government and the TPLF to enabling humanitarian aid to enter Tigray and to the restoration of essential services. It is crucial that this agreement rapidly makes a difference on the ground.

Turning to the issue of drought, the conflict has taken place in the context of a wider humanitarian crisis in Ethiopia. In the south and east of the country, there have been four consecutive seasons of failed rains, which is unprecedented. This has led to a devastating drought. In October, my predecessor visited a region in Ethiopia that has been impacted by drought, and she witnessed one of the largest and most severe humanitarian crises in the world. As many as 24 million people have been affected in Ethiopia alone. In the past 18 months, the UK Government have allocated nearly £90 million to support communities in the Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Oromia and Somali regions of Ethiopia, which have all been affected by conflict and drought.

The issue of human rights has been raised by a number of right hon. and hon. Members. The peace agreement affirms the principle of respect for fundamental human rights. It commits to the creation of a comprehensive and national transitional justice policy aimed at delivering truth, accountability, redress, reconciliation and healing. Throughout the conflict, there have been appalling records of human rights abuses and violations. The civilian populations of Tigray, Amhara and Afar have endured the most terrible suffering.

Throughout the conflict, the UK has consistently called for an end to human rights abuses and violations, and for accountability for those found to have perpetrated them. We have raised this issue frequently with all parties to the conflict through our embassies in Ethiopia and Eritrea, through my predecessor's engagement with Ethiopian Ministers, and at the Human Rights Council. The UK was a co-sponsor of the resolution of the Human Rights Council that established the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia,

and we are also providing direct funding to support the important work of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission.

Jeremy Corbyn: I thank the Minister for his contribution. Is he confident that unfettered access to all parts of Ethiopia will be given to the UN and other agencies?

Mr Mitchell: I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that I am not confident about that, but we are pressing in every way we possibly can, and we must move forward optimistically. I will come to his specific point in a moment, when I address some of the comments that have been made during the debate.

Jim Shannon: In my contribution, I mentioned the issue of religious attacks. I know the Minister will come back to that, but I also want to press him on the issue of access to humanitarian aid for the Christian groups in Tigray, which are not getting the access to aid that they should.

Mr Mitchell: If I may, I will come back to the hon. Gentleman's comments later.

The presence and conduct of Eritrean forces in Tigray has fuelled the conflict and made its resolution more challenging. The Eritrean Government were not party to the peace agreement, but will inevitably be crucial to its success. We have consistently called on Eritrea to withdraw its troops from Tigray—I repeat that call today, and urge the Eritrean Government to support the peace agreement. We recognise that a durable peace in the horn of Africa depends on mutually acceptable security arrangements, which must include Eritrea, and we encourage those in the region to find solutions through dialogue.

I want to make a couple of points about our development assistance. Before the conflict, our development partnership with Ethiopia—one of the best in the world—had lifted millions of people out of poverty. Indeed, the results of spending British taxpayers' money in Ethiopia were truly stunning, and helped Ethiopia to become one of the world's fastest-growing economies. We want Ethiopia to return to more prosperous times, and the peace agreement calls on international partners to support its implementation, to help build infrastructure and to support economic recovery, although the UK will play its part in that. The UK Government have already provided 54 trucks to the UN World Food Programme in the region, and we are working with partners to remove the logistical barriers that prevent them from operating at full capacity. If the peace deal holds, we will encourage international financial institutions to support Ethiopia's recovery.

Ms Lyn Brown: To my obviously amateur ear, that did not sound like an awful lot of aid for the number of people in need of support. Does the Minister think it is enough?

Mr Mitchell: If the hon. Lady, who knows a great deal about these matters, will bear with me for a moment, I will come specifically to the issue of money.

This may be a moment for optimism. There is an opportunity to end one of the world's most destructive conflicts, but that opportunity must be comprehensive

and nurtured by everyone. The prize is a return to peace and prosperity for a nation of over 100 million people, and the UK stands ready to do all that we can to assist with that.

I will comment briefly on a number of points that were raised during the debate. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) for what he said. He is one of the experts, having had a relationship with Ethiopia and its people for many years. The House benefits greatly from his expertise. The former leader of the Labour party, the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), raised a number of important issues. He asked about the delivery of aid to the conflict areas. Yesterday, for the first time, two trucks from the International Committee of the Red Cross got through to Mekelle. Nothing has got through for so long, so I hope that that may be a significant breakthrough on which we can build.

The hon. Gentleman the Member for Edmonton—

Kate Osamor: Lady.

Mr Mitchell: I do apologise. The hon. Lady the Member for Edmonton (Kate Osamor), who always takes a great interest in international development, asked specifically about the figures for aid, and made three very interesting recommendations. Others, too, asked for these figures. In the last 18 months, the UK has provided nearly £90 million of humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia. Our support has reached people in Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Somalia and Oromia, and last year UK funding in Ethiopia provided nutritious food for over 200,000 malnourished women and children; emergency health supplies for 1 million people; clean water to over 200,000 people; and child protection services to over 40,000 children affected by the conflict.

In August, the UK provided an additional £6 million to the Ethiopian humanitarian fund, and in October the former Minister for Development, the right hon. Member for Chelmsford, announced £14 million of support to assist 150,000 women and children affected by conflict and drought. Those contributions are part of a wider £156 million UK commitment to humanitarian

support for crises in east Africa this financial year. The hon. Member for Edmonton will recall that when I had responsibility for these matters at the Department for International Development I was always keen to demonstrate what results we achieved for that expenditure of British taxpayers' money, so alongside the figure that I have given her I stress the number of people we are reaching with that sort of aid.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) asked about religious freedom. To amplify what I said earlier, at the 51st session of the Human Rights Council we co-sponsored a resolution to extend the mandate of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, and we have added £4.5 million to help to build the capacity of Ethiopia and the Human Rights Commission. That does not directly address his point about religious freedom, but I am sure that he will understand that it goes hand in hand with human rights. We are very conscious of the importance of the issue that he raised.

The hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) asked about PSVI. I want her to know that we have invited a range of representatives, including from civil society groups. She also talked about the role of journalists. We are very conscious of that, and she will know that the Government have made a particular point of trying to support press freedom overseas through the work of the Foreign Office. She asked whether people would be held to account for what they have done. I stress as strongly as I can that we will do everything that we can to ensure that there is no impunity for war crimes and those who have committed human rights abuses.

The hon.—

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): Order. I am so sorry; our time has run out. We could have listened to the Minister for a lot longer.

5.30 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).

Written Statements

Wednesday 16 November 2022

DEFENCE

Shipbuilding Update

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace): Today I am providing an update on our plans for the next stage of the fleet solid support ship programme.

I am pleased to announce that Team Resolute has been selected as the preferred bidder to provide three solid support ships for the Royal Navy. This appointment follows on from the award to BAE Systems in Glasgow of the £4 billion contract for five Type 26 frigates earlier this week. Both are good news for UK shipyards and the skill base.

Team Resolute, comprising Harland & Wolff, BMT and Navantia UK will, subject to final approvals from Ministers and HM Treasury, be awarded a contract worth £1.6 billion, before inflation, to manufacture the crucial vessels providing munitions, stores and provisions to the Royal Navy's aircraft carriers, destroyers and frigates deployed at sea. The contract will deliver more than 1,000 UK shipyard jobs, generate hundreds of graduate and apprentice opportunities across the UK and a significant number of further jobs throughout the supply chain. Team Resolute has pledged to invest £77 million in shipyard infrastructure to support the UK shipbuilding sector.

Blocks and modules for the ships will be constructed at Harland & Wolff's facilities in Belfast and Appledore, and this work will also support a significant UK-based supply chain. Some build work will also take place at Navantia's shipyard in Cadiz in Spain, in a collaboration allowing for key skills and technology transfer to the UK from a world-leading shipbuilder.

The entire final assembly will be completed at Harland & Wolff's shipyard in Belfast, to Bath-based BMT's British design.

The awarding of the contract will see jobs created and work delivered in Appledore, Devon, Harland & Wolff Belfast and within the supply chain up and down the country. This announcement is good news for the UK

shipbuilding industry. It will strengthen and secure the UK shipbuilding enterprise as set out in the national shipbuilding strategy.

[HCWS369]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

COP27 Biodiversity Day: UK Action to Support Nature and Climate

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey): Today, I am making a number of announcements on biodiversity day at COP27. This builds on the leadership the UK has shown throughout our COP26 presidency. We brought nature to the heart of COP for the first time in Glasgow—with more than 140 world leaders, representing 91% of the world's forests, committing to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030. The UK Government are continuing to demonstrate international leadership on nature and climate by:

Committing £30 million of seed finance into the Big Nature Impact fund, a new public-private fund for nature in the UK which will unlock significant private investment into nature projects;

Pledging an additional £12 million to the Ocean Risk and Resilience Action Alliance to mobilise investment in coastal and ocean natural capital;

Committing a further £6 million to provide capacity building support to developing countries to increase commitments to nature and nature-based solutions;

Announcing a new UK climate finance contribution of £5 million toward the Inter-American Development Bank's (IDB) multi-donor trust fund for the Amazon to help tackle deforestation through community-led projects, while providing sustainable business opportunities to indigenous people whose livelihoods depend on them;

Spotlighting the vital importance of mangroves and their role in coastal resilience by endorsing the Mangrove Breakthrough led by the UNFCCC high-level champions and the Global Mangrove Alliance;

Highlighting the climate benefits of blue carbon through continued support for the new Global Ocean Decade Programme for Blue Carbon (GO-BC), which has now launched a new global graduate scheme for early career blue carbon researchers.

Global momentum is now behind plans to halt nature's decline. I will be urging countries to build on progress at COP27 to renew action on nature and come together to agree a robust global plan for tackling nature loss at next month's meeting of the United Nations convention on biological diversity (CBD) in Montreal.

[HCWS370]

ORAL ANSWERS

Wednesday 16 November 2022

| | <i>Col. No.</i> | | <i>Col. No.</i> |
|--|-----------------|--|-----------------|
| PRIME MINISTER | 648 | SCOTLAND—continued | |
| Engagements | 648 | Floating Offshore Wind | 646 |
| SCOTLAND | 639 | Public Expenditure and the Cost of Living | 644 |
| Devolved Finances | 639 | Scotland's Role in UK Defence and Security | 648 |
| Energy Bills: Support for Households in Scotland . | 647 | Trust in the UK Government | 645 |

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Wednesday 16 November 2022

| | <i>Col. No.</i> |
|--|-----------------|
| DEFENCE | 17WS |
| Shipbuilding Update | 17WS |
| ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS. | 18WS |
| COP27 Biodiversity Day: UK Action to Support | |
| Nature and Climate | 18WS |

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CONTENTS

Wednesday 16 November 2022

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 639] [see index inside back page]

Secretary of State for Scotland
Prime Minister

Migration [Col. 661]

Answer to urgent question—(Robert Jenrick)

Iran [Col. 676]

Answer to urgent question—(David Rutley)

Missile Incident in Poland [Col. 686]

Statement—(James Cleverly)

Social Housing Standards [Col. 697]

Statement—(Michael Gove)

Teenagers (Safety and Wellbeing) [Col. 719]

Motion for leave to bring in Bill—(Alex Norris)—agreed to
Bill presented, and read the First time

National Security Bill [Col. 722]

As amended, considered; read the Third time and passed

Algeria: 60th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations [Col. 796]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall

West Balkans: Council of Europe [Col. 265WH]

Family Law Terminology [Col. 288WH]

Male Primary School Teachers [Col. 295WH]

Energy Price Support: Northern Ireland [Col. 309WH]

Conflict in Ethiopia [Col. 318WH]

General Debates

Written Statements [Col. 17WS]
