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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Monday 16 May 2011**

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# HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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§ *Members of the Government listed under more than one Department*


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# THE PARLIAMETARY DEBATES

## OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT OF THE  
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND  
[WHICH OPENED 18 MAY 2010]

SIXTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF  
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 528

NINETEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2010-2012

### House of Commons

*Monday 16 May 2011*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

#### PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

#### BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

##### NEW WRIT

*Ordered,*

That the Speaker do issue his Warrant to the Clerk of the Crown to make out a new Writ for the electing of a Member to serve in the present Parliament for the constituency of Belfast West in the room of Mr Gerry Adams, who since his election has been appointed to the Office of Steward and Bailiff of Her Majesty's Manor of Northstead in the County of York.—  
(*Mr McLoughlin.*)

### Oral Answers to Questions

#### DEFENCE

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

##### Royal Navy (Libya)

1. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): What assessment he has made of Royal Navy requirements in the context of the military action in Libya. [55354]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Peter Luff):** Before answering my hon. Friend's question, I am sure the whole House will want to join me in paying tribute to Warrant Officer Class 2 Graham Bean

of 73 Engineer Regiment (Volunteers) who died on 3 May while serving in Cyprus on Operation Tosca with the United Nations peacekeeping force based in Nicosia. He had a long and successful career in the British Army for over 35 years. Our thoughts and prayers are with his friends and family. Our thoughts are also with the family and friends of the Royal Marine from 42 Commando who was killed by an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan yesterday. More information will be released shortly after the period of grace requested by his family.

Our assessment of the Royal Navy's requirements was set out in the strategic defence and security review. Events in Libya have confirmed the review's recognition of the need to retain naval forces at high readiness for operations.

**Miss McIntosh:** I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the recently fallen; we will remember them.

Will my hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to the ship's company of the frigate HMS Cumberland, with whom a number of us were able to stay as part of the armed forces parliamentary scheme? Will he take the opportunity to update us on the question of which frigate has replaced HMS Cumberland for the essential duties she has so far performed in assisting off the coast of Libya?

**Peter Luff:** Speaking as someone who has done two tours of duty with the armed forces parliamentary scheme, I know how deep are the bonds of loyalty that can be formed with ships' companies after such experiences. HMS Cumberland and her crew performed superbly in the initial stages of the Libya operation, evacuating British and other foreign nationals from Benghazi and undertaking enforcement operations in support of UN Security Council resolution 1973. She has now been withdrawn from service and her role off Libya has been taken up by the destroyer, HMS Liverpool.

##### Libya

2. **Grahame M. Morris** (Easington) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the security situation in Libya; and if he will make a statement. [55356]

3. **Mr William Bain** (Glasgow North East) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the security situation in Libya; and if he will make a statement.  
[55357]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Dr Liam Fox):** While NATO's airstrikes have been successful in reducing Colonel Gaddafi's ability to attack his people, he continues to target civilians in clear contravention of UN Security Council resolutions and international law. The UK has 23 aircraft and two naval vessels committed to the NATO-led operation. These continue to provide vital capability in support of UN Security Council resolution 1973.

**Grahame M. Morris:** I would like to associate myself and my hon. Friends with the remarks made by the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire (Peter Luff), about those brave service personnel who sadly lost their lives in service of their country.

On the Secretary of State's answer, in view of concerns expressed, not least by the joint chiefs, about the affordability and sustainability of the UK's continued military operation in Libya, will he advise us of what further diplomatic efforts are being pursued to find a non-military solution to the current conflict?

**Dr Fox:** There is a very clear non-military solution to the current conflict: Colonel Gaddafi could stop attacking the civilian population in Libya. Until he does so, the international community will continue the military action, which we believe to be affordable and sustainable at the present time.

**Mr William Bain** (Glasgow North East) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State share the assessment of Lady Amos that the bombardment of Misrata and the western mountain regions has led to an unacceptable situation in which aid convoys are unable to get the water, medicine and food that the people of these areas need? What further pressure can be put on the Gaddafi regime to stop this intolerable bombing and shelling?

**Dr Fox:** I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support. In recent days, we have made it very clear through NATO that we intend to continue to degrade Colonel Gaddafi's command and control capability, including his intelligence network. The regime needs to understand loud and clear that the international community is very resolute: it will continue its military activity as long as this absolutely unacceptable slaughter of the civilian population continues. I hope that the whole House will also be resolute in sending out a very clear message on that front.

**Mr Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, notwithstanding what the Chief of Defence Staff said over the weekend, our mission in Libya is humanitarian, and is about seeking a ceasefire and not about regime change?

**Dr Fox:** Security Council resolution 1973 authorised the use of force for three different purposes: enforcement of the arms embargo, enforcement of a no-fly zone over Libya, and the protection of civilians. Those are the clear delineations of our mission, and all the

activities in which we have engaged, including our target sets, have fallen within the requirements of resolution 1973.

**Richard Ottaway** (Croydon South) (Con): The Secretary of State is reported to have endorsed, over the weekend, General Richards's call for an enlargement of the number of targets in Libya to include infrastructure targets. Has he received a legal opinion that that conforms with resolution 1973?

**Dr Fox:** I confirmed over the weekend that NATO is continually reassessing the target sets within the targeting directive, which itself follows from resolution 1973. We believe that at all times the target-setting has been well within the requirements of that resolution, and I take responsibility for the setting, observation and implementation of targets very seriously indeed.

**Mr Jim Murphy** (East Renfrewshire) (Lab): The Secretary of State will know that we are committed to a bipartisan approach on Libya. I join the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire (Peter Luff), in his condolences and prayers for the family of one officer, Graham Bean, and the as yet unnamed Royal Marine.

The men and women of the Royal Navy and the Royal Air force have done remarkable work in and around Libya. However, may I ask the Secretary of State about the comment by the First Sea Lord that if operations around Libya were to last longer than six months, a significant "challenge" would be created? Does the Secretary of State agree with that assessment, and what military advice has he received about maintaining the current UK tempo of military activity beyond those six months?

**Dr Fox:** I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's support, but, as he is well aware, contingency planning goes on because we do not know how long Colonel Gaddafi will continue his resistance to international opinion and in the face of international law. We will continue to look at the range of contingencies, but we all hope that Colonel Gaddafi will recognise that the game is up either sooner or later—hopefully sooner—so that the cost, in terms not just of money but, more important, of lives, is minimised in the months ahead. We will look at all contingencies, but it is important to recognise that we are resolute and that the work of the international community, whose military leaders met at the weekend, will not cease until the task is properly carried out.

**Mr Murphy:** I welcome that response, but today's newspapers report further MOD cuts and the fact that the MOD is undertaking a three-month internal spending review. The Secretary of State says, "We will look at all contingencies", but in the light of those reports, the events in Libya and the rest of north Africa, and the further events that are spreading across the middle east, should he not finally agree with Lord Ashdown, General Dannatt, the Army Families Federation and most members of the defence community that now is the time to reopen the rushed and increasingly discredited Government defence review?

**Dr Fox:** Those who wish us to reopen the strategic defence and security review, and who are looking at the same real world and at the same financial constraints, need to tell us whether they would provide a larger defence budget. If they continue with the same assumptions in the same real world but do not increase the budget, they will see the same outcome because they will be under the same constraints. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will finally tell us whether Labour intends to retain the same defence budget or to reduce the defence budget, because that is the key element in the equation.

### Defence Procurement

4. **Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): What his policy is on the use of defence procurement to support and stimulate advanced manufacturing. [55358]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Peter Luff):** Advanced manufacturing industry in the UK makes such an important contribution to defence and the armed forces. We have recently concluded public consultation on the Green Paper “Equipment, Support and Technology for UK Defence and Security”, in which we make it clear that the purpose of defence procurement is to deliver the capabilities that the armed forces need, now and in the future. We will set out our future policy on the issue in a White Paper later in the year.

**Chi Onwurah:** Last month BAE Systems announced 100 job losses at its plant in Scotswood, Newcastle. As well as devastating families, those job losses will reduce our advanced engineering skills base. What specific measures is the Minister taking to ensure that procurement supports skills that are essential to our national infrastructure, and how do they sit with the Government’s policy of buying off the shelf without taking industrial needs into account?

**Peter Luff:** The hon. Lady tempts me to pre-judge the outcome of my own consultation, which I must not do, but let me say this: I share her passion for advanced manufacturing and I again pay tribute to its role in defence. We are committed to both a vigorous promotion of exports and boosting UK defence companies in the UK, and to boosting the work of small and medium-sized enterprises, which are innovative and bring new ideas and skills to defence. We are also committed to maintaining the science budget, as called for in response to our consultation by all those advanced manufacturing companies of which she spoke. We are doing a lot to help advanced manufacturing, but the hon. Lady will have to be a little more patient and wait until the White Paper is published.

**Mr James Arbuthnot** (North East Hampshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that Government spending on defence research and technology is absolutely essential for maintaining the battle-winning edge for our armed forces in 25 years’ time? Does he also agree that if there is a reduction in defence research because of short-term budget pressures, the long-term effect will be very great indeed?

**Peter Luff:** My right hon. Friend will not be surprised to hear that I could not agree more. I can confirm what I have said to him in the past: the budget for science and technology will increase in cash terms over the comprehensive spending review period. However, I share his enthusiasm about ensuring that we maintain future capabilities as well. It is very important that the science budget is not simply focused on current operations. It must be forward looking, too, to ensure that we have the capabilities that we need.

**Michael Dugher** (Barnsley East) (Lab): The Minister will be aware that there is considerable concern that the Government might be planning to announce an extremely limited definition of what constitutes sovereign capability in their forthcoming White Paper, meaning that in many important sectors the Government will retreat to their default position and, to quote the Government’s Green Paper,

“to buy off-the-shelf where we can”.

Will the Minister assure the House that the White Paper will be an opportunity to set a clear strategy to use defence procurement to support our manufacturing base, in particular the intellectual property here in the United Kingdom, thus recognising the contribution that defence makes to the wider economy?

**Peter Luff:** I cannot give the hon. Gentleman that specific assurance. Defence money is for defence purposes, but I share his enthusiasm for the defence industrial base. I understand exactly what he says. We will be scrupulously honest with the British people and UK defence companies. I am afraid that although the previous defence industrial strategy was immensely popular, it did not have the money to match its promises. We will deliver what we promise.

### Council Tax Rebates

5. **Alun Michael** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Whether he has discussed with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government the merits of a council tax rebate for members of the armed forces who are serving overseas. [55359]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Andrew Robathan):** The Government recognise the value of council tax rebates for many members of the armed forces. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will make an announcement to the House on this matter later today.

**Alun Michael:** I am grateful to the Minister for that response. One constituent who raised the question with me was not looking for blanket discretion for all deployments, but said that there was some resentment among those deployed to places such as Afghanistan and Iraq when they found that different local authorities exercised their discretion in different ways. Will the Minister encourage consistency and generosity in this matter?

**Mr Robathan:** I am delighted to be able to agree with the right hon. Gentleman. We would encourage consistency. I will not pre-empt what the Secretary of State will say at 3.30 pm. [Interruption]. I will not pre-empt what the Secretary of State will say at 3.30 pm. However, if

people are in receipt of the deployed welfare package, they get council tax relief, which is paid for by the Ministry of Defence. What local councils do at the moment is up to them. We encourage them to give due discretion where possible and to assist our members deployed on operations overseas.

### Security Situation (Pakistan and Afghanistan)

6. **Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): What discussions on security and defence issues he has had with his counterparts in the US Administration, Pakistan and Afghanistan following the death of Osama bin Laden.  
[55360]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Dr Liam Fox):** I regularly discuss a number of security and defence issues with my counterparts in the United States, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The death of Osama bin Laden is a positive development in terms of our counter-terrorism effort, but it does not change our strategy in Afghanistan. We remain committed to our military, diplomatic, and development work to build a stable and secure Afghanistan.

**Mr Hanson:** The head of the snake may have been removed, but the bombings in Pakistan at the weekend show that there is still considerable al-Qaeda activity in the region. Does the Secretary of State share my concern that the Prime Minister's potential announcement of early withdrawals of troops in the summer is of concern, particularly given the fears expressed publicly by defence staff for the safety of British residents at home and abroad as a result of that policy?

**Dr Fox:** We are committed to maintaining the level of troops that we need for our main effort in the southern part of Afghanistan. The number of combat troops that we have had in Helmand has been at a consistent level, our force densities have improved and we intend to make no changes to those numbers until we see an improvement in the security situation there.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Is it not rather depressing that after everything that has happened in Afghanistan and, in particular, to the former Taliban regime there, people in the Taliban have not learned their lesson that al-Qaeda is poison to them? That was shown by the demonstrations against the death of bin Laden on the part of the Pakistani Taliban. If the Taliban want to be part of a settlement, is it not time that they realised how poisonous the al-Qaeda connection has always been?

**Dr Fox:** My hon. Friend makes a truly excellent point. We need to recognise that al-Qaeda involves violent political extremism that will guarantee no country and none of its people's safety and security. The quicker that those who have previously dallied with the Taliban recognise that that cannot be a route for peace and reconciliation in the long term, the better.

**Mr Russell Brown** (Dumfries and Galloway) (Lab): Further to the question raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson), I fully agree that any troop withdrawal should be based on sound military advice and that the lives of our brave servicemen and

women, and civilians, should not be put at risk by any kind of premature withdrawal. Will the Secretary of State confirm that he will resist the temptation to make any announcements about early withdrawal that may coincide with the visit of President Obama?

**Dr Fox:** As I have pointed out in the House before, we maintain a core force of some 9,500 troops in Afghanistan. The number has risen to as high as 11,000 over the past year, partly due to temporary surges. It is a normal part of the process in Afghanistan that that number will rise and fall but, as I said, the important element in respect of that number is that we maintain our core commitment to the south of Afghanistan and our combat force there.

### Armed Forces Day 2012

7. **Oliver Colville** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): When he expects to make a decision on the location of events to mark the 2012 Armed Forces day for the nation.  
[55361]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Andrew Robathan):** Plans for the national event to mark Armed Forces day 2012 are being considered and a decision will be announced as soon as possible. In the meantime, I look forward to this year's Armed Forces day on Saturday 25 June, including the national event, which will be hosted by Edinburgh.

**Oliver Colville:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply and for all his care and diligence in deciding on the location. Is he able to share with us the criteria that will be used in making that decision?

**Mr Robathan:** On the subject of honouring our armed forces, I think that the whole House would wish me to remind everyone that today is Albuhera day—the Middlesex day. Today is the 200th anniversary of the battle of Albuhera, and that explains the naming of Middlesex day. The Middlesex Regiment subsequently became known as the Duke of Cambridge's Own Regiment, which is particularly fitting this year.

In answer to my hon. Friend's question about Armed Forces day, I can say that there are no set criteria. However, I have heard at great length his pleas on behalf of Plymouth and I shall certainly bear them in mind.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): May I urge that one criterion might be that the area sends a lot of young men and women into the armed forces? That would enable the Minister, next year or in a future year, to consider using not just the major cities or the major places where people are based, but an area such as the south Wales valleys, which sends a very large number of people into the armed forces—that is, as long as he has not made the wrong decision about 160 Brigade being based in Brecon.

**Mr Robathan:** I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I have made no decisions about 160 Brigade. Of course the main national event for Armed Forces day was in Cardiff last year. It is the responsibility of local authorities to deal with the infrastructure and the work involved in the Armed Forces day celebrations. If people in the

south Wales valleys say that they will arrange a great event there that could be the national focus, I am sure that we would listen to that sympathetically as well.

### Middle East

8. **Mel Stride** (Central Devon) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the implications for his Department's policies of the security situation in the middle east. [55362]

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Nick Harvey):** Recent events in the middle east have demonstrated that the central finding of the strategic defence and security review—the need for the UK to adopt an adaptable posture with flexible forces—was appropriate. Given the vital importance of the region to the UK's long-term interests, we will continue to monitor the still evolving situation before drawing conclusions on if and how it could influence the Department's policies.

**Mel Stride:** Does my hon. Friend agree that our allies in the Gulf play a vital role in ensuring security and stability in the region and that it is imperative that our Government continue to engage constructively and positively with them, particularly in these uncertain times?

**Nick Harvey:** I agree with my hon. Friend that the Gulf states are key partners in the battle against international terrorism and more widely. That said, we are concerned at events in some of the Gulf states. We urge all Governments to meet their human rights obligations, to uphold political freedoms and to recognise that those things do not run contrary to security but are in fact integral to longer-term stability. We believe that dialogue is the way to fulfil the aspirations of all, and we urge all sides, including opposition groupings, to engage.

**Mr Denis MacShane** (Rotherham) (Lab): The Government, rightly in my view, are calling for Colonel Gaddafi to be referred to the International Criminal Court. Does the Minister agree, therefore, that the President of Syria, Bashar al-Assad, should be similarly referred because he is killing and torturing just as many people in Syria as Gaddafi is in Libya?

**Nick Harvey:** I understand that Gaddafi has already been referred to the court and that that decision was taken internationally at the ICC. I entirely see the comparison that the right hon. Gentleman is drawing and it would seem to me that the international forces that reached the conclusions they did about Gaddafi are highly likely to arrive at a similar conclusion.

### Improvised Explosive Devices (Afghanistan)

9. **Jack Lopresti** (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): What assessment he has made of the adequacy of equipment provided to the armed forces to counter improvised explosive devices in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [55363]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Peter Luff):** An impressive range of capabilities is in service to counter the threat from IEDs that our armed

forces in Afghanistan face; our personnel are trained and equipped to apply a range of tactics, techniques and procedures. Defeating the threat is a vital part of the counter-insurgency campaign, and the equipment we are fielding against these sordid devices is widely recognised as being better than ever. However, as demonstrated by the weekend's tragic news, which I reported to the House earlier, we are up against a determined enemy and must continue to invest in this area.

**Jack Lopresti:** I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. Is he satisfied that we have sufficient equipment levels in place to train Afghan national forces to counter IEDs and that progress is being made in this area?

**Peter Luff:** My hon. Friend speaks with great authority as a gunner who served in Afghanistan two years ago. He certainly knows what he is talking about. I can reassure him that equipping and training the Afghan national security force is a crucial part of NATO's common counter-IED strategy. It is of course the job of the international security assistance force, which has the lead for training and equipment. I can assure him that the UK comfortably meets its responsibilities in this respect, but it is a challenging task and one to which we are fully committed because it forms the foundation for our eventual withdrawal from Afghanistan.

**Mr Bob Ainsworth** (Coventry North East) (Lab): Will the Minister assure the House that the review and the spending difficulties that the Department has will not affect in any way his commitment to the speed of manufacture, and the number of vehicles manufactured, of the light protected patrol vehicles that are so badly needed in Afghanistan?

**Peter Luff:** As the right hon. Gentleman knows, I hold him in very high regard and personal esteem, and with some affection. I gently remind him that it is not a problem we have but a problem we inherited, and we are dealing with it. I can, though, give him the categorical assurance that he is seeking that those matters will have no impact on the operations in Afghanistan.

### NATO

10. **James Morris** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): What steps he is taking to seek the modernisation of NATO. [55364]

17. **Graham Evans** (Weaver Vale) (Con): What steps he is taking to seek modernisation of NATO. [55371]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Gerald Howarth):** The UK is playing a leading role in the push to modernise NATO through the reform of its supporting agencies and improving its financial management and programming. The UK is also a leading proponent of important work to streamline NATO's command structure. We hope to reach final agreement at a meeting of NATO Defence Ministers next month, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be attending.

**James Morris:** The role and purpose of NATO has changed radically over the past 20 years. Does the Minister agree that NATO needs to concentrate on

reviewing its strategic purpose as well as finding new ways of interacting with other international institutions in a world that is radically different from that of the cold war?

**Mr Howarth:** My hon. Friend makes a very important point, but I suggest to him not only that article 5 is absolutely central to NATO's mission but that since 1989, as Afghanistan, the anti-piracy operations in the Arabian sea and the Libyan operation have shown, NATO has already developed remarkable flexibility and is working with other institutions, most notably the European Union, where we are seeking to ensure there is no duplication.

**Graham Evans:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that NATO remains the cornerstone of the UK's defence, and will he resist any attempt by the EU to challenge that position?

**Mr Howarth:** I am very happy to give my hon. Friend that categorical assurance on behalf of the entire Government.

**Mr David Crausby** (Bolton North East) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that any modernisation of NATO should ensure that those member nations who have the troop numbers and resources, such as Germany, should pull their weight in the same way that we do in NATO operations such as those in Afghanistan and Libya?

**Mr Howarth:** I am very happy to agree with the hon. Gentleman. As I have said in response to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), a number of NATO countries seek to take advantage of article 5 and the other protections that NATO gives them without divvying up the membership fee. That is certainly something that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is working on—showing other countries that if they want the protection of NATO, they have to contribute to its funding.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister assure the House that there will be careful analysis of what went wrong in the early days of the Libyan encounter? Ever since the United States seems to have pulled back on its operational activity, we seem to have been much less effective at defending innocent people in that country.

**Mr Howarth:** I think that the hon. Gentleman is being slightly churlish. I was extraordinarily impressed by the speed with which NATO responded. After all, there was a United Nations resolution and no mechanism by which it was going to be implemented. It is hugely to NATO's credit, and particularly to the credit of its Secretary-General, that he and it made those structures available to enable support for the Libyan people to be provided not only by NATO but by many other countries. I am sure there will be a review about how successful everything has been in due course.

**Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that despite the programme of modernisation, which is very welcome, and NATO's extremely effective and speedy response over Libya, the question of NATO's transformation is proceeding not

nearly fast enough? Does he agree that it would be a pity if the Ministers' meeting at NATO did not come up with a really substantial reform in that department?

**Mr Howarth:** As ever, my hon. Friend puts his finger on the point. He is absolutely right and we are absolutely determined. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be pressing ahead with transformation. We have led the way on this and we are determined not to let the issue lapse because if NATO is not efficient, lean and modern, it will not be able to deliver what we all seek.

### Nuclear Test Veterans

11. **Mr Steve Brine** (Winchester) (Con): When he expects to receive the findings of the independent health needs audit of British nuclear test veterans; and whether he plans to publish a response to the study. [55365]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Andrew Robathan):** The findings of the health needs audit are expected this summer. The study will document veterans' self-reported experience of ill health and their experience of health and social care services, and it aims to provide practical, forward-looking recommendations on how health and social care services for this group could be improved. We intend to share the outcome of this work with other relevant areas, such as the Department of Health, and we will publish the report's findings and any response.

**Mr Brine:** I thank the Minister very much for that response. Like many Members, I look forward to the Secretary of State's statement on the armed forces covenant shortly. One could argue that the duty of care it entails is also relevant to Britain's nuclear test veterans. What action is the Minister able to take after so many years—it has been many years now—properly to recognise the sacrifices of our nuclear test veterans and to bring some much-needed closure to survivors and their families?

**Mr Robathan:** I think the whole House would join me in paying tribute to those who served in the armed forces in the 1950s. Most of those involved were national servicemen and were doing their duty, as it was explained to them, by witnessing the nuclear explosions. We provide war pensions to anyone who suffers from an ailment that is linked to the service they underwent, such as watching nuclear tests, but it is necessary that we provide pensions and compensation only to those who were harmed by their service.

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that this is a sad and sorry business? Those people suffered grievously many years ago and successive Governments have prevaricated and obfuscated on the matter. The nuclear test veterans need help, support and compensation, and above all they need an apology from successive Governments for the way they have been treated.

**Mr Robathan:** I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. He says that people suffered grievously. Some people are of course ill, and some are ill because of their service. It is important that the Government should

look to that. The previous Government did, as we do, through the war pensions system. However, there is no study showing that people who witnessed those nuclear tests have more cases of cancer than their cohort groups. We must base our response and expenditure of taxpayers' money on evidence, not on emotion.

### Basing Review

12. **Elizabeth Truss** (South West Norfolk) (Con): When he plans to publish the recommendations of his Department's basing review. [55366]

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Nick Harvey):** As I have said before, the Ministry of Defence will make an announcement as soon as we are in a position to do so, and that will be before the summer recess. But as I have also said, this is a complex piece of work and we will take the time necessary to make sure we reach the right conclusions.

**Elizabeth Truss:** On Friday I attended the disbandment parade of 13 Squadron at RAF Marham, which was a moment of both pride and sadness. Given the additional commitments taken on by the RAF in Libya and the statement by the Chief of the Air Staff that our air force is heavily stretched, will that have an impact on the basing review?

**Nick Harvey:** That will not have an impact on the basing review, but I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to everybody involved with 13 Squadron, which was involved in the early stages of the operation in Libya and has a proud history going back 96 years, including distinguished service in the second world war and later in the no-fly zone in Iraq and Operation Telic. The name will live on next year when a new squadron of reaper, the remotely piloted aircraft, will take on the number 13, and I am pleased to say that most of the personnel involved have been found other roles elsewhere in the Tornado force.

**Angus Robertson** (Moray) (SNP): At the time of the strategic defence and security review, the Secretary of State told me that the basing review affecting RAF Lossiemouth would be concluded before the end of December 2010. That was put back to the end of February 2011, and we are still waiting. The delays are causing uncertainty and economic damage in Moray and, I am sure, likewise in Fife, Norfolk and elsewhere. Does the Minister agree that the least that service communities should expect is a definitive date and no more delays?

**Nick Harvey:** As I said a moment ago, this is a complex piece of work. The Army coming home from Germany happens only once, and the future lay-down of the Army and the basing of the British Army for the future is something that we have to get right. It is necessary to take the time to get those decisions right. I understand the impact that waiting for a decision has on local communities, but it is more important that we get this right than that we do it fast. As I said a moment ago, we will make an announcement by the summer recess.

**Sir Menzies Campbell** (North East Fife) (LD): My hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that the professionalism and commitment of the men and women who serve at RAF Leuchars, which he saw for himself earlier this year, continue, notwithstanding uncertainty about the future of the base. What view does he take of the kind of speculation that we saw last week, apparently originating from within the House, which appears to suggest that decisions affecting RAF Leuchars have already been taken?

**Nick Harvey:** I am pleased to hear that the professionalism of those serving at Leuchars, which I saw for myself recently, remains unaffected. There has been some ill-informed and unhelpful speculation in the media. In particular, last week there was a routine meeting to discuss all aspects of defence reform. It was absolutely not the case that there was ever any prospect of decisions being taken at that meeting, nor was there any proposal to that effect on the table. This is important work, and there is more work ongoing. I categorically assure my right hon. and learned Friend that no such decision has been taken, and we will come to the House as soon as we are in a position to do so.

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): Last week the Chief of the General Staff told the Defence Committee that substantial investment in accommodation and training facilities will be needed if the Government are to be able to meet their challenging target of withdrawing half the troops currently based in Germany by 2015, let alone withdrawing the rest by 2020. What assessment has the Minister made of the cost of this policy and will it come out of the current departmental financial settlement?

**Nick Harvey:** The Chief of the General Staff was absolutely right to say that the accommodation that the British Army will need must be of the highest standard. What that will cost will depend entirely on the decisions that are taken on where the Army will go and the state of readiness of any facilities into which we might propose to move them. The figures will emerge when we know where we are sending them and what will have to be built in readiness to receive them.

### Military Covenant

13. **Mrs Mary Glendon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): What steps the Government plan to take to fulfil the Prime Minister's pledge to enshrine the military covenant in law. [55367]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Dr Liam Fox):** The Prime Minister's pledge is being fulfilled through the Armed Forces Bill, which recognises the armed forces covenant in statute for the first time. I will make a further announcement to the House shortly.

**Mrs Glendon:** What assurance can the Secretary of State give the House and members of the armed forces, such as my constituent, 19-year-old Private James Kenny of C company, 3rd Battalion the Parachute Regiment, who has recently returned from active service in Afghanistan, that an independent panel will be set up to report on the Government's performance in relation to the military covenant?

**Dr Fox:** I have said repeatedly in the House, in answer to similar questions, that I want the widest possible consultation and the widest possible transparency. If the hon. Lady will permit me, I will set out the details shortly.

**Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con):** Is not today an important day of justice for the honouring of the armed forces after the disgraceful neglect of the past 10 years?

**Dr Fox:** I think that the whole House, in fact the whole country, will want today to rally behind the Government's proposals, which I believe represent a wide consensus across those with different political views and those with none.

**Gemma Doyle (West Dunbartonshire) (Lab/Co-op):** I have not had the misfortune of getting into a lift with the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Mr Robathan), but I have spent many hours debating the military covenant with him. I was therefore very surprised to learn at the weekend that he has performed not only a U-turn on the matter, but a double U-turn. He had said previously that he did not believe that a veterans ID card was necessary. What does the Secretary of State think?

**Dr Fox:** I am not sure what a double U-turn looks like. Again, I will be outlining the proposals, which will be available in the documents that will be published and available to the House, very shortly.

### Afghanistan

14. **Patrick Mercer (Newark) (Con):** What plans his Department has to reinforce troops in Afghanistan over the summer campaigning season. [55368]

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Nick Harvey):** Following the increase in troop numbers as a result of the international security assistance force surge in the second half of 2010 and the continuing increase in both the size and capability of the Afghan national security forces, I am confident that there are sufficient forces in Afghanistan to meet the insurgent threat over the coming months. For that reason, there are no plans to increase the UK's endorsed force levels.

**Patrick Mercer:** I am grateful to the Minister for his reply, but there are a considerable number of troops in Afghanistan, a considerable number of forces operating in Libya, and I have no doubt that further military operations will be required in other parts of north Africa. I understand that defence cuts need to be made, but can he assure me that those currently being discussed will not include any further cuts to combat forces?

**Nick Harvey:** I am not aware of the discussions to which my hon. refers, but I can absolutely assure him that there will be no reductions in the number of front-line fighting troops for the very reasons he gives.

**Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab):** The justification for dismantling improvised explosive devices, rather than blowing them up, is that those who made them can be identified and captured. As this has resulted in the

deaths of many of our brave soldiers, should we not alter the policy, particularly now that the prisoners are escaping in such huge numbers?

**Nick Harvey:** It is certainly not the case that we always go for the option of dismantling IEDs, as some of them are destroyed, but as part of the ongoing effort to counter the IED threat it is absolutely vital that we have an understanding of how they are made and who is making them. It is absolutely essential intelligence to us—to garner that information on occasions—and we have no intention of changing that approach.

### Defence Equipment

15. **Paul Uppal (Wolverhampton South West) (Con):** What progress has been made on his Department's consultation on equipment, support and technology for UK defence and security. [55369]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Peter Luff):** My colleagues in the Home Office and I are very pleased with the results of the public consultation, which ended on 31 March, on the recent Green Paper. We used a number of mechanisms, notably conferences, regional visits and a dedicated website, to encourage wide participation, and we received 143 separate written reports from individuals, companies and organisations, as well as more than 200 comments on the website. We are now analysing the information received and will publish a summary of the consultation responses later this year, alongside the planned White Paper.

**Paul Uppal:** Given the value of the defence sector to our economy, what steps are being taken to ensure that prosperity can continue to flourish, and that the whole UK economy can benefit?

**Peter Luff:** I strongly agree with my hon. Friend. Ministers in the Department are committed to the Government's policy of export-led growth, whereby the Government are making radical steps to ensure that responsible defence exports are actively promoted. This year I have visited India, Japan and Turkey on precisely that mission, and all members of my ministerial team have made similar such visits to ensure that the outcome my hon. Friend rightly seeks is achieved.

### Service Family Accommodation

16. **Alison Seabeck (Plymouth, Moor View) (Lab):** What plans he has for the future of service family accommodation; and if he will make a statement. [55370]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Andrew Robathan):** In the strategic defence and security review published on 19 October last year, we announced that we will undertake a detailed review of our approach to accommodation with the aim of meeting the aspirations of service personnel for affordable and good-quality housing. Work is now under way and we will report in the summer of 2012.

**Alison Seabeck:** I draw the House's attention to the entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests of my right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and

Woolwich (Mr Raynsford), for reasons that I have put on the record on a number of occasions already this Session.

All the evidence is that constant moving, perhaps every couple of years, between homes and schools for service personnel and their families is extremely destabilising and not good for family life. Has the Minister therefore made any representations to the Department for Communities and Local Government about the impact of the flexible tenure proposal in the Localism Bill, and about the effect that it will have of perpetuating the cycle that such people currently experience?

**Mr Robathan:** The hon. Lady is quite right: service personnel can be disadvantaged in many ways by the many moves that they make. As it happens, not two hours ago I was at a meeting at the Department for Communities and Local Government with the Housing Minister to discuss that among other matters. Unfortunately, I left before that matter came up on the agenda in order to come to the House, but I can assure the hon. Lady that we are looking at the issue very carefully and we did have that conference this lunchtime.

### Topical Questions

T1. [55394] **Phil Wilson** (Sedgefield) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Dr Liam Fox):** My departmental responsibilities are to ensure that our country is properly defended now and in the future; that our service personnel have the right equipment and training to allow them to succeed in their military tasks; and that we honour the armed forces covenant.

**Phil Wilson:** Following the First Sea Lord's comments that he wished he could revisit the Government's position on the Ark Royal and the Harrier jets, and that if the UK had an aircraft carrier it would be deployed in Libya, will the Minister consider reversing the decision on the Ark Royal and explore ways of closing the carrier strike-capability gap?

**Dr Fox:** What is important in Libya is the fact that we are able to project our air power in an effective and timely manner, and we are able to do that because we have no problems with basing or with over-flight, which is exactly the analysis that we made in the strategic defence and security review.

T3. [55396] **Penny Mordaunt** (Portsmouth North) (Con): I welcome the historic decision to enshrine the armed forces covenant in law, but what else is being done to ensure that ex-service personnel are not discriminated against, especially when they set up a home?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Andrew Robathan):** My hon. Friend is quite right, and as I said just now we had a meeting at DCLG just a couple of hours ago. We are determined that armed forces personnel, be they serving or just leaving the services, which is often when they want to buy a house, are not discriminated against by mortgage providers or, indeed, by credit reference agencies.

T2. [55395] **Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State agree with the Prime Minister that legislation that protects reservists' employment is red tape, or does he agree with me that scrapping it would jeopardise recruitment and morale? Will he therefore guarantee to protect it?

**Dr Fox:** I am very grateful to be able to welcome the hon. Gentleman to the House personally, and I look forward to the expertise that he will bring to Defence questions. He will be aware that we are undertaking a very detailed review of reservists, not just the number and structure of the reserves, but the framework within which they operate, including for example the issues relating to employment, so that this country can make proper use of our reserves and maximise the benefit that they can bring to the armed forces, as happens already in many other countries.

T5. [55398] **Mr Aidan Burley** (Cannock Chase) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend share my recognition of the critical importance of defence diplomacy to UK interests around the world? Will he update the House on what progress he has made on making amends for the decade of Labour neglect in this area?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Gerald Howarth):** I can assure my hon. Friend that since taking office we have set a new and vigorous pace to make up for the deficiencies of the previous Labour Administration. As my 1924 map of the British empire should remind everybody, the United Kingdom enjoys extensive historical ties with a large number of countries, giving us an unrivalled position. It is our policy to build on that strength through defence diplomacy, and we are doing so.

T4. [55397] **Mrs Linda Riordan** (Halifax) (Lab/Co-op): The original White Paper for the Trident replacement programme estimated a figure of £11 billion to £14 billion in 2006 prices, but in a recent letter to my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Katy Clark), the Minister stated that

"the combined cost of the Concept Phase, totalling approximately £900 million, and the Assessment Phase, totalling approximately £3 billion at outturn prices is consistent with the departmental guidance that programmes should spend approximately 15% of the total costs before Main Gate."

It appears that this would put the cost of the whole programme at £26 billion. Will he confirm that that is an accurate projection?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Peter Luff):** As I previously explained in an Adjournment debate, all the costs that we are using are entirely consistent with the original projections. I will be delighted to spend some time with the hon. Lady explaining to her in detail exactly why that is the case.

T6. [55399] **Nigel Adams** (Selby and Ainsty) (Con): I am grateful to the Minister for writing to me regarding the restructuring of the provision of elementary flying training at RAF Church Fenton. What plans does the MOD have for the future of Church Fenton?

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Nick Harvey):**

The hon. Gentleman is quite right that in order to rebalance flying training in the light of the new requirements, there will be no further intake of elementary flying training students at RAF Church Fenton. That is because the requirement is reduced from 155 to 105 pilots a year, and the last course, which is currently under way, completes in August. I understand that that will create considerable concerns for local people in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. No decisions have yet been taken about the future of RAF Church Fenton, although the Yorkshire university air squadron, which incorporates No. 9 Air Experience Flight, will continue to use the station, and it will continue to act as a relief landing ground for RAF Linton-on-Ouse.

T8. [55401] **Alison Seabeck** (Plymouth, Moor View) (Lab): Post the very welcome announcement on the future base porting of the Type 23 frigates, will the Minister—I am sure he will forgive me for not letting the paint dry on this one—tell us at what stage are the strategic discussions about the future of the Type 26?

**Mr Gerald Howarth:** I was very pleased to confirm, on behalf of the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Peter Luff), that the seven Type 23s are to remain based at Plymouth. The Type 26 global combat ship is in the assessment phase at the moment, and we are working extremely hard to see whether we can build it in partnership with other nations. I cannot go into too much detail at the moment, because much of it is commercially sensitive, but I can assure the hon. Lady that as part of our defence diplomacy initiative, it appears to be going rather well.

T9. [55402] **Charlie Elphicke** (Dover) (Con): So often the House focuses on our armed forces in theatre and in conflict, but is it not also important that we celebrate our armed forces at home? I hope that the House will forgive me if I celebrate in particular the work of the armed forces recently at the royal wedding, where they were so brilliantly turned out.

**Nick Harvey:** I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. After the service that so many have given on the front line, including in Afghanistan—some of those involved that day were involved on the front line in Afghanistan—it was very good, with the eyes of the world looking at us, that the contribution of the armed forces was able to be celebrated in that way and that they gave such a good account of themselves with everybody watching.

T10. [55403] **Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): Has the Department reflected on the concerns of the Royal British Legion and the other place over the post of chief coroner? If so, what representations has it made to other Departments about the necessity of keeping the post?

**Dr Fox:** I share the concerns of the Royal British Legion and the right hon. Gentleman about the importance of this issue. I am having ongoing discussions with the Ministry of Justice to determine the best way to ensure that the skills required in this specialist area are available, that access is improved and that the distances that families have to travel to attend are minimised.

**Bob Russell** (Colchester) (LD): Further to oral Question 16, does the Minister understand that soldiers who have returned recently from Afghanistan are living in family accommodation that is not up to the right standards, while across the road, former Army houses have been modernised at a cost of millions of pounds of public money? If the Government can find money for that side of the road, why can they not find it for our soldiers' families?

**Mr Robathan:** The hon. Gentleman is quite right. I have driven along that particular road and seen the situation. [*Interruption.*] I hear somebody shouting from a sedentary position, "It's your Government!" Actually, the houses were built under the last Government, and the houses that have not been done up were not done up under the last Government. We are trying.

**Sandra Osborne** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Lab): What assessment have the Government made of the proposition put forward at the weekend by the Scottish National party, that in an independent Scotland, armed forces bases could be shared?

**Dr Fox:** It is tempting to make light of the nonsensical ideas that tend to come from the Scottish National party, but now that it is in such a strong political position in Scotland, we have to take these issues more seriously. It is extremely worrying that the SNP has previously had a posture that is anti NATO and anti the nuclear defence of this country. It is time to engage in a serious debate on issues that ought to worry all those who believe in the United Kingdom, and in sound defence for the United Kingdom.

**Mr David Davis** (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): In a television debate on the BBC on 6 April, the Minister for the Armed Forces asserted that this country did not have the capability to fly Harriers off aircraft carriers even before the defence review, and that we had not flown them off aircraft carriers since 2003. The truth is that they flew off Ark Royal as late as November 2010 in difficult sea conditions. I am sure that he did not intend to mislead the British public. Will he put the record straight now?

**Nick Harvey:** I am happy to correct what I said in that TV interview. I had thought that from the context it was clear that I was talking about flying in combat operations. The 2003 date was the last time that we had flown Harriers off carriers in combat operations. Of course, the right hon. Gentleman is right to say that Harriers continued literally to fly off carriers after that. Indeed, the nation watched the valedictory flights off Ark Royal back in December, as he said. I apologise for any confusion that my remarks may have caused.

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Could the Minister give an assessment of the financial cost of the conflict in Libya so far? Does he recognise reports which state that if the conflict lasts six months, the cost could reach £1 billion?

**Peter Luff:** I do not think it will get to that. This is necessarily a complex subject, and I cannot give a straightforward answer. There are costs that would be

incurred anyhow by the armed forces operating in Libya. There are additional costs that are specific to the campaign. We would also have to establish the precise value of the assets deployed or used in the campaign. All I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that the House will be informed in the usual way of the precise costs in the winter supplementary estimates.

**Jane Ellison** (Battersea) (Con): Can Ministers update the House on the provision of mental health support for our service personnel, in particular those who have returned from theatre? As we know, such problems can take many years to emerge.

**Mr Robathan:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this issue, because we take it very seriously. She will know of the report by my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) entitled “Fighting Fit”, which is extremely valuable. We are taking forward its proposals. For example, there is already a helpline for those who have concerns, and I have phoned it to check that it works. We continue to be concerned and are working with Combat Stress to ensure that people who have concerns or who may have mental health problems can raise those issues with the authorities. Along with Combat Stress, we will ensure that they have the best possible care.

**Mr David Winnick** (Walsall North) (Lab): May I tell the Secretary of State that his earlier answer on Libya will cause a great deal of anxiety? Is it now the policy of the British Government, despite the denials, to take Gaddafi out by one means or another and bring about regime change? Would that not be totally outside Security Council resolution 1973?

**Dr Fox:** The policy of the Government is not regime change, which would be outside resolution 1973. It is Government policy, as it is NATO policy, to do everything possible to protect the civilian population, who would be considerably better off if Colonel Gaddafi and his regime were not there.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): When we were in opposition, we were critical of the former Government for not having enough helicopters. In the SDSR it was confirmed that we needed helicopters and planned to purchase them. Can the Minister confirm that the 14 Chinooks will now be ordered?

**Peter Luff:** I am happy to confirm to my hon. Friend that the position in relation to the Chinooks is exactly as was set out in the SDSR. Indeed, I will be visiting the Boeing production site very shortly to see the production line for myself.

**Mr Iain Wright** (Hartlepool) (Lab): Given today’s reports in *The Times*, and following Ministers’ responses earlier this afternoon, it appears that the Secretary of State has some stark choices. He can restrict the capacity for British military capability and influence by cutting personnel and equipment still further, or he can secure a better deal from the Treasury. Which option does he prefer?

**Dr Fox:** It was always clear to those who followed these matters that following the SDSR, there were a number of very important second-order issues to address, such as the basing review, the reserves review and the changes made under the defence reform unit. It is also essential that we put the armed forces’ finances on a firm footing for the years beyond the current spending settlement, which runs from 2014-15 to 2020. That is the exercise upon which we are currently embarked, because we are determined that we will not get the defence budget into the shambles that it was in when we inherited it from Labour.

**Joseph Johnson** (Orpington) (Con): Would the Minister like to take this opportunity to welcome the news that India has just put the European Typhoon, made by BAE Systems, on a shortlist of just two for the hugely valuable multi-role combat aircraft tender, one of the biggest defence orders on the horizon anywhere in the world?

**Peter Luff:** The simple answer is yes. That is an extremely successful outcome, and we are delighted with it. A lot of effort has been expended by the four partner nations. I was at the Bangalore air show myself in February pursuing the cause, and I am delighted by the outcome. We must now pursue the campaign to a successful conclusion.

**Katy Clark** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (Lab): What discussions has the Secretary of State had about the future servicing and storage of complex weapons systems? In particular, what assurances can he give about the future of Defence Munitions Beith, in Scotland, which stores such systems?

**Dr Fox:** I cannot give the hon. Lady a precise answer about what discussions have taken place lately on that subject. If she will forgive me, I will write to her with the details.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Have Ministers had a chance to consider the imaginative scheme to retain HMS Ark Royal for the nation as a heliport facility in conjunction with the Homes for Heroes project, bearing in mind that this year is the centenary of the first naval aviators being taught to fly and bearing in mind the importance of keeping aircraft carriers in the forefront of our minds until they resume their rightful place in this country’s armoury?

**Dr Fox:** I doubt whether my hon. Friend, or many other Members, would believe some of the suggestions that we have had for the future use of Ark Royal. Its use as a heliport is one of them, and although I find it particularly attractive in some ways, I am not sure whether the residents where it might be placed would think exactly the same. Its use is subject to a range of issues, not least planning considerations but also a range of financial ones. As ever, however, he makes a welcome and creative contribution to the debate.

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): It is true that the nuclear deterrent renewal will pass its initial gate this week? Why the delay over the past year?

**Dr Fox:** It has been essential to ensure that all the issues involved are agreed on, including, as the hon. Gentleman is well aware from his constituency interest, those to do with the safety of nuclear propulsion. I will make a statement to the House in the very near future.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I appeal to anybody leaving the Chamber to do so quickly and quietly, because we await with interest and anticipation the statement by the Secretary of State for Defence.

## Armed Forces Covenant

3.34 pm

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Dr Liam Fox):** With permission, Mr Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the armed forces covenant. The Government have no higher duty than the defence of the realm, and the nation has no greater obligation than to look after those who have served it. The men and women of the three services, regulars and reservists, whether they are serving today or have done so in the past, their families and those who have lost a loved one in service, all deserve our support and respect. That obligation is encapsulated in the armed forces covenant.

The ties between the nation, its Government, and its armed forces are not the product of rules and regulations, nor of political fashion. They are much deeper than that. They have endured for generations and they go to the heart of our national life. The armed forces covenant therefore does not need to be a long and detailed charter. It should be a simple and timeless statement of the moral obligation that we owe. We are therefore publishing today a new version of the covenant, written for the first time on a tri-service basis.

The covenant is enduring, but it will mean different things at different times. The expectations of today's servicemen and women are, rightly, different from those of their predecessors. Alongside the covenant we have published guidance on what we believe it means in today's circumstances. It sets out a framework for how the members of the armed forces community can expect to be treated, and the aspirations and expectations that we believe are implicit in the covenant.

The covenant and the guidance do not, however, describe what the Government are doing to put that into effect. That is why I am also publishing a paper, entitled "The Armed Forces Covenant: Today and Tomorrow", that sets out the practical measures we are taking to support the covenant. The paper brings together the commitments we have already made with the new measures that I am announcing today.

A number of those measures take forward the ideas of Professor Hew Strachan, who led an independent taskforce on the covenant last year. I should like to record the Government's thanks—and, I imagine, the Opposition's thanks—for his extremely valuable work. Today, we are also publishing the Government's full response to his report.

One of Professor Strachan's most important recommendations was the introduction of a community covenant. That will strengthen communities and build new links between them, local government and the armed forces. I can today announce that we are allocating up to £30 million over the next four years to support joint projects, at a local level, between the services or veterans groups and the wider community.

The Armed Forces Bill, which the House will shortly have a further opportunity to consider, contains provision for an annual report on the armed forces covenant, which is designed to strengthen this House's ability to scrutinise how we are fulfilling our obligations. In that way, the existence of the covenant is being recognised in statute for the first time, as promised by the Prime Minister last year.

In deciding how best to recognise the covenant in law, the Government have had to maintain a careful balance. On the one hand, we do not want to see the chain of command undermined or the military permanently involved in human rights cases in the European Courts. On the other, we must ensure that the legitimate aspirations of the wider service community, the armed forces charities and the British public for our armed forces are met.

We believe that a sensible way forward—one that will give the right kind of legal basis to the armed forces covenant for the first time in our history—is to enshrine the principles in law, provide a regular review of the policies that will make them a reality, ensure that Parliament has a chance to scrutinise that review through the annual report, and ensure that the report itself is widely informed, consultative and transparent. I believe that it is right for the Government to be held to account on delivering the principles underpinning the covenant by this House, and not by the European Courts. That is what our approach will ensure.

I want to highlight two important aspects. First, the Government will set out on the face of the Armed Forces Bill the key principles that we believe underpin both the covenant and any report on its implementation. Ensuring that members of the armed forces community do not suffer disadvantage as a result of their service, and that where appropriate they receive special treatment, are at the heart of the armed forces covenant. I can tell the House this afternoon that the Government will bring forward amendments before Third Reading to require the Secretary of State to address those principles in preparing his report to Parliament, and to recognise the unique nature of service life.

Secondly, I made clear to the House on 10 January our commitment to consult stakeholders on the annual report. We intend to consult widely in its preparation, and prior to laying it before the House will give external reference group members from outside Government the opportunity to comment on it. We will also publish any observations alongside it.

We are working with the external reference group to update its terms of reference in line with its significant new role. The Government place great importance on maintaining our dialogue with bodies such as the service families federations and the major service and ex-service charities, which tell us what is happening on the ground, and I pay tribute to the invaluable contribution they make to the welfare of the armed forces community. In particular, I pay tribute to the contribution to this debate of the Royal British Legion, which continues to do such outstanding work in support of our armed forces.

The armed forces covenant is not just about words; it is about actions. The men and women of our armed forces judge us by what we do to improve their lives and those of their families. Since taking office, the coalition Government have taken a series of important measures to rebuild the covenant. I shall mention just some of them: we have doubled the operational allowance; we have included service children in the pupil premium; we have introduced scholarships for the children of bereaved service families; and we have taken action to improve mental health care. These measures are especially impressive when set against the background of the dire economic situation in which the Government must operate as a result of the previous Government's legacy.

[Dr Liam Fox]

There is much still to do, however. I have always been clear that our commitment to rebuild the covenant is a journey that we are beginning, not something we can do overnight, and I believe that the British people understand that. We are continuing to take action, however, and I am today announcing additional measures that will tackle some of the problems experienced by serving personnel, their families and veterans. I have already mentioned the new community covenant grant scheme. However, we are also setting up a new fund of £3 million per year over and above the pupil premium arrangements to support state schools catering for significant numbers of service children. We will also launch a veterans card that will allow access to discounts and privileges.

Furthermore, in helping injured personnel, we will guarantee that veterans suffering serious genital injuries have access to three cycles of IVF, wherever they live. We will also increase the rate of council tax relief for military personnel serving on operations overseas from 25% to 50%. In addition, between now and the summer recess, I expect there to be further announcements that will again underline that this is a priority across the whole of Government, and not just for Defence. Today Ministers are chairing a meeting with key stakeholders to discuss and agree ways to improve access to housing for our service people. The Health Secretary and I are looking forward to the report by my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) on how to improve further the supply of prosthetics for injured personnel. Also, we will consider how to ensure that the guaranteed income payments made under the armed forces compensation scheme are not required to be used to pay for social care provided by the public sector.

The obligation we owe to our service men and women, set against the commitment and sacrifice that they make, is enormous. In the current financial climate we cannot do as much to honour that obligation, or do it as quickly, as we would like, but we can make clear the road on which we are embarked. Our understanding of the covenant will change over time, as will the way in which the Government and society meet it. The framework we have set out today provides the necessary flexibility to ensure that not only the Government but all of society can fully pay the enormous debt they owe to our armed forces, their families and our veterans. I commend it to the House.

**Mr Jim Murphy** (East Renfrewshire) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement, and for my advance sight of it. I would also like to place on record the Opposition's appreciation of Professor Strachan and his sterling work.

Today we are reminded of our armed forces and the sacrifices that they make in defence of our country. They and their families are in all our hearts. Their actions overseas make Britain's streets safer, and we not only honour them, but celebrate their immeasurable professionalism and bravery. In that context we support the headline measures announced in today's statement, which can improve the well-being of service communities.

However, in the military covenant it appears that the Government are doing the right thing for entirely the wrong reason. The Armed Forces Bill is currently going through Parliament, and was meant to be debated just

last week. The Government faced concerted pressure in Parliament—along with enormous concern in the country—to amend the Bill and enshrine the military covenant in law. However, at short notice and in the face of almost certain defeat in Parliament, that was delayed so that Ministers could organise this retreat, which they are announcing today.

As someone who has been open in saying that we should have gone further in the past to take the covenant out of the cut and thrust of party politics and put its principles in law, I congratulate all who played a part in the campaign. However, the Secretary of State today finds himself in the peculiar position of announcing a policy that he recently voted against. In February my colleagues and I tabled an Opposition day motion that called for

“establishing in law the definition of the Military Covenant, in so doing fulfilling the Prime Minister's pledge”.

The Secretary of State, his Front-Bench team and the entire Cabinet voted against the motion.

The Minister responsible for veterans has been the principal covenant-denier. In February he said in Committee that to “write down” the covenant and

“try to codify it by statute would be, frankly...surprising.”

He continued:

“The covenant is a conceptual thing that will not be laid down in law.”—[*Official Report, Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill*, 10 February 2011; c.20-21.]

Those were the words of Ministers in February. Although today's announcement is welcome, it is not an action of conviction by the Government, but an act of submission to the parliamentary arithmetic that was building against them.

In the few minutes that I have, let me turn to the other measures in today's statement and strike a more bipartisan tone. Many of the announced measures appear to have their roots in the 2008 Command Paper on service personnel. We will want to look at the detail of today's proposals. Let me ask the Secretary of State some specific questions and invite him to offer the House, and forces families, direct answers. Can he say what criteria will be used to identify those qualifying for council tax relief, and whether they will be the same as for those receiving the operational allowance? Will those currently serving in Libya or Afghanistan benefit from the policy?

The announcement on concessionary travel is welcome. The Secretary of State will know that the Command Paper announced that the bus concession in England would be extended to include service personnel and veterans under the age of 60 who were seriously injured. Can he share with the House whether his announcement today is the implementation of that policy, or whether it is an entirely new announcement?

On housing, can the Secretary of State say whether today's announcement is in addition to or supersedes the introduction by the previous Government in January last year of the shared equity armed forces home ownership scheme? How many forces families will benefit from the scheme announced today? He has said that a new veteran's card will be introduced. We strongly welcome that, but again, the Minister responsible for veterans said in February that

“the Government still have no intention of introducing a veterans card,”

adding:

“I do not think that a veterans ID card is necessary, even in relation to access to commercial discounts.”—[*Official Report, Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill*, 17 February 2011; c. 102.]

What role will the veterans card have if it is not to be used for commercial discounts? Will the Secretary of State say who will pay for the card and how much it will cost?

My final specific question is to invite the right hon. Gentleman to tell the House whether he would consider exempting the seriously injured and war widows from the impact of recent pensions and benefits indexation changes, which will lead to enormous financial loss on the part of those who have given so much to our country. I am sure that the House and the British people would like to know his thoughts on that matter.

I have asked a number of questions in response to direct announcements made today by the Secretary of State. We will support today’s announcement, but we will scrutinise it. We will want to know which of the announcements are genuinely new and involve new investment. However, the Government are entitled to widespread support in on setting out to enshrine the military covenant properly in law. If they set out to achieve what they have announced today, the Opposition will strongly support them in that.

**Dr Fox:** I am grateful for the welcome—the basic welcome—that the right hon. Gentleman has given. Yes, it is perfectly true that the Opposition raised some of the issues in a recent debate—except that they would not define what they meant, nor would they tell us what rights they might create or how they would pay for them, yet they expected us to take them seriously. The reason why we have taken time to produce these reports and responses to detailed work is that we want to get the policies right and do the right thing for our armed forces, their families and their personnel.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the doubling of council tax relief. As I said, this will be 50% for personnel on eligible operations overseas. It will go to all those who currently get the 25% discount, which is a wider definition than that used for the operational allowance, but not to all those serving overseas—for example, in Germany. He also asked about the launching of the veterans card. It will be used to access commercial discounts or privileges, and we will consider how to expand it to include service families. It is linked to the relaunch of the defence discount scheme next year. It is not an ID card, for the reasons that we consistently gave in Committee and in the House.

On indexation, when the change was made from RPI to CPI, none of us in the coalition Government wanted to see anyone in the public sector disadvantaged—but may I remind the Labour party that it left us with a £158 billion deficit, which has to be addressed? We will spend more on debt interest next year than on defence, the Foreign Office and aid put together. That is the scale of the problem, and it is the deficit deniers who are now on the Opposition Benches who put this country at risk. They had 13 years in office, yet they now have the audacity, after 12 months, to tell us that we are doing things at the eleventh hour. No credibility!

**Mr James Arbuthnot** (North East Hampshire) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement, and Professor Strachan on his outstanding work. Does

my right hon. Friend agree that members of the armed forces are the only people in the country who face competition between having enough ships, aeroplanes and bullets, and having decent accommodation and health care? What can we do about that competition?

**Dr Fox:** My right hon. Friend raises an important point, which we have grappled with in our approach to the covenant. The reason why equipment is not in the military covenant today is that the covenant for the welfare of our personnel involves a pact not just between the Government and the armed forces but between the whole nation and the armed forces. That includes local government, communities, charities and private individuals. The provision of the right equipment for our armed forces is a duty of the Government, and it should primarily be seen as the duty of the Government rather than of the wider national community. It is the Government who should properly be held to account for that.

**Mr Bob Ainsworth** (Coventry North East) (Lab): The Secretary of State’s congratulations to the Royal British Legion are well deserved, because it was its campaign more than anything else that forced this most welcome retreat by the Government. He will know that what wound the Royal British Legion up more than anything else was the attempt to water down the involvement of the reference group in the monitoring system set up under the Command Paper on service personnel. He appears to be saying that that is now to be restored, and that that role will be fully implemented in the proposed reporting mechanism. Can he confirm that there is to be no watering down of the involvement of the reference group—the stakeholders and the service personnel charities, including the Royal British Legion itself—in the ongoing reporting of the covenant?

**Dr Fox:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for asking for clarification on that point, and I can give him this assurance, which, as he knows, I have given the House on a number of occasions. I have wanted to see a maximising of transparency on this, and I have therefore decided that the external reference group will be able to see the Secretary of State’s report in advance and comment on it, and that we will publish those comments and any other representations at the same time as we publish the report of the covenant to Parliament.

**Sir Menzies Campbell** (North East Fife) (LD): I understand my right hon. Friend’s attempt to draw a distinction between Government and community obligation, but is not the Government’s responsibility also a moral one? For that reason, should we not recognise that the Government have a duty not to expose our armed forces to unnecessary risk, always to provide equipment that is fit for purpose, and to ensure that the operations that our men and women are obliged to take part in are always proportionate and legal?

**Dr Fox:** Legality has to be a foregone conclusion in this House if we are to take our appropriate place in the international family of civilised nations. As to the Government’s duty in sending our armed forces into combat, I would say that they have two clear duties: one is to ensure that we maximise the chance of success of their mission; the second is ensuring the minimum risk to them in carrying out that mission. Both those duties

[Dr Fox]

imply that the armed forces must be properly equipped for any task that any Government ever send them to carry out.

**Ms Gisela Stuart** (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): I particularly welcome the Secretary of State's announcement about three cycles of IVF for the injured when they come back. He will know that that is virtually the first thing that the young men who return to the Queen Elizabeth hospital from Afghanistan will ask about. He also mentioned prosthetics. When it comes to rehabilitating soldiers, we are doing things with them—and doing them better—that are not yet happening in the NHS. What work is the Secretary of State doing to ensure that what we learn from the treatment of our veterans can be translated back to the NHS and the wider population?

**Dr Fox:** The hon. Lady makes two valuable points. As regards the first, on IVF, it is bad enough that we often deny mobility and life chances to individuals, but to deny them the chance of producing another generation is worse, particularly when it is something that we can avoid. We should avoid it, and doing so sends out an important signal about the pastoral care that we are willing to give to our armed forces. Today's announcement is a key one, which I think will be welcomed across the whole country.

On the hon. Lady's second point, I think many of us will celebrate the fact that the care we give our armed forces is so much better than others might receive in the NHS that parity is being demanded. That is not a bad position for a country to be in, in terms of the care it gives to service people. The work we are undertaking with the Department of Health will set out to see what lessons the NHS can learn from the treatment of those who have been injured in military action—which I believe is a very proud moment for the country.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on making his statement and on its contents, and Professor Hew Strachan on his excellent work. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the “no disadvantage” enjoiner within the military covenant establishes a floor and not a ceiling, and that the men and women of our armed forces will particularly welcome the special provisions that he has announced even more than the commitment to establish the covenant and its principles on a firmer footing, which has so exercised the Opposition?

**Dr Fox:** May I take this opportunity—I hope on behalf of the whole House—to thank my hon. Friend and congratulate him on the work he has done, particularly on mental health and prosthetics, which the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) mentioned? I am sure that his words will be much appreciated. It is important to set out these two provisions whereby there is no disadvantage to our armed forces, their families or our veterans in pursuing a military career, and whereby, if necessary, the rest of society accepts that special measures might have to be taken to recompense our armed forces personnel for the risks that they are willing to take for the safety and security of the rest of us.

**Mr Brian H. Donohoe** (Central Ayrshire) (Lab): I have always believed that how people are treated is very important, but that how our armed forces are treated is of paramount importance. The Navy personnel in my constituency are concerned about their future with regard to air traffic control, and also HMS Gannet. What progress has been made on the contract, and will it be placed at Prestwick?

**Dr Fox:** I am afraid that I cannot make an announcement on that today, although the hon. Gentleman will know that it is part of our wider considerations. I appreciate that the delay brings uncertainty, but it is important to get the wider defence decisions correct overall. As soon as I have any news on HMS Gannet, I will make sure that the hon. Gentleman is informed in the first instance.

**Mr Julian Brazier** (Canterbury) (Con): On Thursday we had the homecoming parade of the Argylls—the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, 5th Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland—who are based in my constituency. I met its last commanding officer, Colonel Richmond, who is at the end of a three-year recovery from a very severe wound to the leg. May I share with the Secretary of State the observation that he made, not on his own behalf but on behalf of others—that it really is crucial that we deliver on the commitment that wounded service personnel, for their subsequent treatment further down the line, do indeed get priority in NHS hospitals?

**Dr Fox:** If we are to honour the military covenant fully, it is essential for those who are injured in action to receive the acute care that they require—and I think the whole House would acknowledge that the level of acute care given to our armed forces personnel is of a world-beating standard—but there are often complaints about the follow-up care, chronic care, continuity of care and collocation of care that are also essential. We will need to take all those issues into account. Along with the Department of Health, we are trying to establish where we can collocate care so that individuals need not travel to six, seven or even eight places to receive the full range of care that the complexity of their injuries may require, as has happened in recent years.

**Angus Robertson** (Moray) (SNP): The Secretary of State is aware of the interest in veterans' affairs taken by my right hon. Friend the Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Mr Llwyd). He is attending a conference on the subject at present, and was unfortunately unable to be here for the statement.

Many, if not all, of the issues involved in the covenant are devolved, and the re-elected Scottish National party Government have an excellent record of delivering for veterans in Scotland. Given the realities of devolution, why did it not even warrant a mention in the statement?

**Dr Fox:** When the hon. Gentleman reads the documents, he will see that there is ample mention of it. This involves all forms of government in the United Kingdom. I fully understand the position of the right hon. Gentleman and the interest that he normally shows in these matters. We want to work with the devolved Assemblies to ensure that provision that is based in England today is available to all service personnel, families and veterans throughout the United Kingdom. Individuals who serve

under the Crown deserve to be treated equally, and we will want to work very closely with the Scottish and Welsh Assembly Governments to ensure that equal benefits are received throughout the UK.

One of the problems with the whole concept of putting rights into law is the potential for a constitutional clash between the Westminster Government and the devolved Governments, and we sought to avoid that. There was no basic disagreement with the RBL; it was simply a question of how we could best put what it wanted into law.

**Stephen Gilbert** (St Austell and Newquay) (LD): I welcome the historic step that the Government are taking today to honour the unique commitment that British service personnel offer our nation. However, may I press the Secretary of State to tell us what steps will be open to service personnel to redress the position when we fall short of the terms of the covenant?

**Dr Fox:** I hope that there will be no shortfall in our ability to honour the covenant, but the whole point of making the process as transparent as possible is to ensure that any future Government are fully exposed if they do not honour it. We are involving the external reference group to ensure that there is external pressure for that to happen, and to ensure that it is not simply a Whitehall-driven process. Ultimately, it will be for Members of Parliament in the first instance, representing their constituents in the armed forces, to detect whether, in their view, the Government have in any way fallen short of the standards that we have set ourselves today.

**Mr David Hamilton** (Midlothian) (Lab): For decades many members of the armed forces have felt betrayed by Governments of all colours, so this is not a party-political issue. I am glad that the Secretary of State is going to take a line from Midlothian council, which has always held priority housing for those who leave the armed forces. I welcome his conversion, and the fact that he has finally taken that need on board. However, may I raise the issue of post-traumatic stress, with which many of us are only just coming to terms? Would it not be helpful for everyone who leaves the armed forces to be given an annual check-up, all the way to the grave? Post-traumatic stress can arise five, 10, 15 or 20 years after the event.

**Dr Fox:** Again, I note the ingenuity of Members. The hon. Gentleman has raised two very good points.

There are clearly instances of best practice from which we can learn in relation to access to public housing. When it comes to access to the private housing sector, one of the problems is an inability to acquire a mortgage. That applies particularly to those who have served overseas and have been out of the country for some time. We are examining ways of dealing with the problem, and the Minister for Housing and Local Government is looking into it at the moment.

The issue of post-traumatic stress disorder is crucial. One reason why we have introduced routine mental health screening into the medical examinations of those about to leave the armed forces is to try to identify best those who may require additional follow-up. As scientific and medical evidence develops to help us with profiling, we may well be able to have programmes that allow

follow-up for a longer time. We are working closely with the United States on building up a profiling picture. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct to say that this may take some years to develop, at least in terms of the symptomatology, so we will need to look at ways of better predicting the effects, and identifying and following up individuals. We might have to identify them, because self-identification in mental illness is notoriously difficult.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): I very much welcome the establishment of the military covenant in law. On 6 December, it will be 29 years since 33 soldiers in my company were wounded. We often tend to forget soldiers and servicemen and women who were wounded a long time ago. I hope that the military covenant in law will increase Government responsibility to care for those who were wounded, regardless of which war or conflict they served in.

**Dr Fox:** I agree with my hon. Friend, who, of course, has considerable experience in this area. First, I would echo the point made by the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr Hamilton) about mental health care being one aspect of long-term care. The Government have given a high priority to that, because the invisible wounds of war are just as damaging as those that we can see. I do not put the blame on any one particular Government, but as a society we have been too slow to recognise that. We are increasingly recognising it now, however. Secondly, medical care will improve in certain areas. Prosthetics, for instance, have come a long way. Individuals are having to be reassessed in the NHS, given the new capabilities that prosthetics may bring and the new lease of life that they may give to individuals, including those with long-term injuries relating to service in the armed forces.

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Armed forces pensioners are disappointed that the Government have introduced CPI instead of RPI in relation to pension increases. Will the Secretary of State seek to include long-term housing costs as part of the pensioner deal for war widows and badly injured service personnel?

**Dr Fox:** As I have already said, changes in respect of RPI and CPI apply across the public sector. Many of us would like not to have to make such changes at all—we have no desire to do so—but we were forced to make them because of the financial situation that we inherited. I understand the sincerity of the hon. Gentleman's point, but it does not matter how much Opposition Members mean it, because there is no money to do the things that they want. Do they propose that we raise more taxes or borrow more money to fill the hole? If the Labour party is serious, it will fulfil what it was asked to do by its own leadership, which is not to make any spending pledges whatsoever, unless agreed by the party's leadership. So I ask, is the reversal of the CPI/RPI change now Labour policy?

**Kris Hopkins** (Keighley) (Con): I welcome the statement and the leadership offered by the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister. I recognise the contributions by groups such as my local British Legion, which has sought to secure the covenant through its very active campaign. Does the Secretary of State agree that the incorporation of the covenant in law begins to address

[Kris Hopkins]

the gross betrayal of our British forces and their families by the previous Labour Government, who sent troops into war without the right equipment?

**Dr Fox:** Some of those equipment issues from the past have been well rehearsed in the House and the House has decided where some of the blame lies. It is very important that we try to take today's announcement in a non-partisan way and to build on it with a national consensus, because the public out there will welcome this irrespective of their politics and, indeed, even if they have no politics at all. The way in which this has been done, the compromise that we have reached on the complex difficulties that we face and the balance that we have tried to obtain will be welcomed by the service charities and the armed forces. I think that the whole country should take pride in the fact that we are, as a nation, putting a covenant between the whole nation and the armed forces into law in this way.

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): Recalling the second Iraq war and the Helmand incursion, should not the first line of the covenant read, "This Government will never put in deadly peril the lives of our armed services in conflicts that are avoidable or vainglorious"?

**Dr Fox:** I know well the hon. Gentleman's reservations about the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and possibly about any conflict imaginable in any part of the globe. Our armed forces are primarily there to protect the security of this nation. We are very fortunate that we have people willing to volunteer—every one of them is a volunteer—to put life and limb at risk for our security. Governments do not lightly send our armed forces into combat; they are answerable for their actions in this House of Commons and to the wider electorate. We should be grateful that this country still has those who are willing to make those sacrifices for us.

**Mr Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I very much welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and look forward, with interest, to reading his proposals for improving the mental welfare services for ex-servicemen in this country. May I just ask him to make an awkward clarification? I am sure that he has an answer to this question. This military covenant strengthening is clearly intended to bring an uplift to the services available to our veterans and this will have to be funded from within the defence budget. Will the extra resources have to be found from within the existing defence budget or can he assure us that they will be provided by the nation as a whole, by the Exchequer?

**Dr Fox:** My hon. Friend, again, makes an important point. Some of the costs will be met directly by the Treasury, for example those relating to council tax relief. Some money, such as the funding above the pupil premium, comes from the funding we earmarked within planning round 11, and some comes from other Departments, for example, the Department of Health. It is very important that we recognise that the military covenant is not just an issue that relates to the Government, the nation and the armed forces; it is also a cross-government effort, which does not begin and end inside the Ministry of Defence.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State clarify something? The council tax relief increase from 25% to 50% applies to second homes where service personnel live in MOD properties or in their first homes where they are living in other properties, but is that mandatory for all local authorities in England or does this apply in England, Wales and Scotland? Would it not be better to make the figure 100%, because it is up to the local authority to make that provision if it wants to, and some local authorities in Wales are now doing that?

**Dr Fox:** As I said, the increase will go to all those who currently get the 25% discount and they will now be eligible for the 50% rate. I am sure that some councils may wish to go further but, given the current financial environment, I doubt very much that they will be able to do so.

**Claire Perry** (Devizes) (Con): Many of the details of the covenant will be warmly welcomed in my constituency, which is home to more than 10,500 serving armed forces personnel, including Sergeant Gavin Harvey, who two years ago lost substantially his entire lower body in a land mine incident. He is very concerned about the future supply of not only prosthetics, but wheelchairs and mobility aids. Can the Secretary of State assure me that that will be included in the review and can he tell us when we might expect to hear more about that later this year?

**Dr Fox:** I am aware of the individual mentioned by my hon. Friend. Some extraordinarily severe injuries have been sustained by our armed forces personnel and it is testament to the skill of the medical profession that many of our personnel have been able to survive their injuries. Those of us who have visited Selly Oak, for example, will have marvelled at the medical capabilities and at what they have been able to do. There is, however, another side to this medical skill, which means that more people are able to survive these injuries than previously would have been the case and there are more severe disabilities as a consequence than there would otherwise have been. Part of the work we have been doing not just with prosthetics but with wider health care is to tackle that. This is emerging science and the House must understand that this is cutting-edge medical science. We, along with other countries such as the United States, are pioneering medical techniques to enable those individuals to live as full a life as medical science makes possible.

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): I am sure it was a slip in the heat of the moment, but in responding to the question from my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) during Question Time, the Secretary of State neglected to guarantee that reservists would get continuation of employment and that that would not be considered as red tape by the Government. May I give him another opportunity to do so?

**Dr Fox:** I was not evading the question; I said that it is part of the wider review of reservists. My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr Brazier) is a member of that review and we want to ensure that we consider all the issues relating to reserves—the basing, the functions,

the funding, the relationship with the regular forces and so on—including how issues of employment are tackled. We have been very keen to look at the experience in this country and overseas and will make an announcement, I would have thought, before the summer recess.

**Mr Marcus Jones** (Nuneaton) (Con): I welcome the statement from my right hon. Friend. With about 2,800 veterans currently in UK prisons, to date support for our armed forces veterans has clearly been inadequate. Will my right hon. Friend assure my constituents that enshrining the covenant in law will give our brave servicemen and women far more support both during and after their service, which will lead to far fewer of our brave veterans winding up in prison?

**Dr Fox:** As my hon. Friend knows, there is considerable debate about the numbers of the armed forces as a proportion of the prison population. I think we can say that for many of those who end up in prison, particularly those who have been homeless or who have been subject to drug and alcohol problems, it represents a failure of other systems to provide a suitable safety net. As a country, when we consider issues such as mental health we need to ensure that we do not allow those who are potentially vulnerable to fail to be picked up by the services that might prevent them from ending up in an inappropriate institution such as prison.

**Sandra Osborne** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Lab): I am fortunate to have Combat Stress in my constituency. What funding mechanism will be used to distribute the £30 million and will it be open to charities such as Combat Stress to apply?

**Dr Fox:** It will. It will be settled by bids coming to the Ministry of Defence and any funding project that a community might undertake will be eligible for that. I am sure that the hon. Lady, knowing her, will be one of the first in the queue.

**Simon Hughes** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (LD): Tributes have rightly been given to the Royal British Legion, whose UK headquarters are in my constituency, for its fantastic campaign, which has led us to today. Will the Secretary of State assure us that the implication of his announcement on the covenant is that those leaving active service and leaving the services will be entitled thereafter to housing, if they do not have it, and to prompt and continuing health care, particularly mental health care, from the time that they are discharged?

**Dr Fox:** We cannot give guarantees on housing because the Government do not make direct provision of housing, but we will want to work with local authorities to ensure that the aspirations set out today are put forward in as practical a way as possible. On health care, I have made the point on innumerable occasions. I am pleased that so many points have been made about mental health care, because 10 years ago they would not have been made in this House of Commons; there is a shifting societal view of it. It is very important that we get timely health care. As I said in response to the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr Hamilton), it is important that we try to profile, where we can, those who might be the most vulnerable so that we can give them the closest

follow up. As is true in mental health generally, those who suffer from mental health problems might be the last to recognise that it is a problem and therefore be one of the last to present. We must try to ensure that we have a mechanism to identify them rather than depending purely on self-identification.

**Richard Drax** (South Dorset) (Con): As a former soldier, I fully support the military covenant, but does the Secretary of State have any doubts about whether enshrining even the principles in law could lead to bitter disputes in court with devastating consequences for the relationship between Government and the armed services?

**Dr Fox:** My hon. Friend makes an important point that is key to this whole debate. As I said earlier, we had a duty to try to get a balance between, on one hand, wanting to preserve the chain of command and, on the other, the legitimate interests of the wider service community, charities and the public. We did not, therefore, want to create a set of rights that could have had the armed forces tied up in European courts for ever, which would have been an utterly inappropriate use of their time and funding, but we did want to set out in the law of this land the principles about where there should be no disadvantage and where there should be special care, if required. It will be against those principles that future Secretaries of State for Defence will be judged and I think the balance is appropriate. We have looked at all the legal implications in great detail over a very long time and we believe that this is an appropriate balance to strike.

**Dan Byles** (North Warwickshire) (Con): As another former serving soldier, may I, too, warmly welcome the Secretary of State's announcement today, particularly the very clear message that this is about more than just the MOD? Does he agree that if we are going to make this work, it might be time to review the way in which other Departments, such as the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department of Health, manage the way in which they deal with soldiers, veterans and reservists?

**Dr Fox:** I must tell my hon. Friend that the Prime Minister has made it very clear to all my Cabinet colleagues that the military covenant does not apply just to the Ministry of Defence, but is entirely a cross-departmental responsibility. All members of the Government—indeed, all Members of Parliament—have a duty to ensure that what we are putting in place today is applied equally across all parts of the United Kingdom and across all parts of government.

**Conor Burns** (Bournemouth West) (Con): It is generally accepted that more members of the Falklands campaign committed suicide after that campaign—

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): Not true.

**Conor Burns:** Or may have committed suicide after that campaign than died in active service. Has my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—[*Interruption.*] These are very serious matters. Has my right hon. Friend had time to see the figures from Combat Stress indicating that further to our activities in Iraq and Afghanistan,

[Conor Burns]

some 48,000 veterans may suffer from some form of mental health problem in the years ahead? May I say that his commitment today that the unseen scars of war will be treated as seriously as the physical ones is to be warmly welcomed?

**Dr Fox:** I used those figures myself in opposition, but may I say to my hon. Friend that there is dubiety about the actual numbers? However, let us cast that aside because the important point is that if any of those people who suffer from mental illness ultimately commit suicide, we have failed them. It is therefore very important to try to identify individuals who could be at risk, because the loss of someone's life, at their own hand, after they have survived the rigours of combat is a tragedy not just for that individual but collectively for the country.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): I do not wish to denigrate the legal profession as a whole, but does my right hon. Friend accept that there is a certain type of lawyer who specialises in persuading victims to bring court cases that otherwise might not, and indeed ought not, be brought? Is he satisfied that there will be enough safeguards to prevent that sort of abuse from happening as a result of putting into law the military covenant?

**Dr Fox:** I have a sister who is a doctor and a sister who is a lawyer. My father used to say we had the best of both worlds—the licence to steal and the licence to kill—but I have never taken such caricatures as necessarily being the honest truth. I will not be tempted down the road where my hon. Friend tries to tempt me, except to say that in striking a balance in the legislation, we have sought to minimise the risk of the kind of behaviour that he mentions, while trying to ensure that we honour our responsibilities and give a sound legal basis to the covenant that we are putting forward.

**Bob Russell** (Colchester) (LD): The coalition Government can take pride in the fact that in our first year we have introduced legislation to enshrine in law the armed forces covenant. I pay tribute to the Royal British Legion for what it has done. I am delighted that the Secretary of State has told us that in Cabinet there is cross-departmental support. With that in mind, will he give me an assurance that the need for funding to improve and modernise the family accommodation of our brave service personnel will be put on the agenda?

**Dr Fox:** I am grateful to acknowledge the long-running support that my hon. Friend has given on these matters. He will be extremely pleased today that we have managed to achieve what we have. With regard to the speed at which we can make some of the improvements to accommodation, we are limited by budgetary constraints. We will want to go as quickly as we can. We fully recognise, as we have set out, what our responsibilities are. We also have, as I hate to point out, a wider responsibility to be fiscally conservative, to bring our budget back within affordability and to restore the nation's economy to health, because that gives us the ability in the longer term to make the investments that we all want to see.

**Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): In Harlow recently, we had a special service to remember those fallen since the second world war, particularly in recent years. Their names are inscribed on the memorial. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the military covenant helps facilitate the remembrance of soldiers fallen since the second world war, and that some of the grant that he mentioned is used to help communities put those names on memorials throughout the country?

**Dr Fox:** I refer my hon. Friend to the community covenant grant that I mentioned. I will want to see whether we can widen the scope of that to include the sort of issue that he mentions. The remembrance of those who have given their lives for the security of this country should not be kept only within the generation in which it occurred. We should constantly remind every generation of it.

**Mr Robert Walter** (North Dorset) (Con): Many thousands of both serving and retired military personnel and their families in my constituency will welcome today's statement. Among the several thousand service men and women serving at Blandford Camp are a number of soldiers from Commonwealth countries who have enlisted in the British Army. Can the Secretary of State confirm that the military covenant includes soldiers and their families from Commonwealth countries?

**Dr Fox:** In so far as they have the same rights as anyone else to access public facilities, yes, it will. For some there are complex issues relating to nationality, but as I said, we are setting out today a cross-governmental arrangement. I want to consider some of the complex issues relating to those from Commonwealth countries. In particular, I want to ensure that we fully recognise that those who make the sacrifices share in the benefits.

**John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Will he indicate his willingness to examine how compensation is paid to members of the armed forces who are injured? Currently, many of those who are badly injured and rightly receive many hundreds of thousands of pounds are at great risk of exploitation when inadequate or no financial advice is available on how to invest that money so that it is available in the years ahead. What relevance has today's announcement for that?

**Dr Fox:** My hon. Friend makes a very interesting point. I will undertake to have some work begun in the Department to see where we are on that subject. It is obviously crucial for the long-term welfare of those who receive such payments that money is invested in a wise way that can maximise return over the longest period. He raises a crucial point and I will ensure that further work is done. I will report back to the House on that on a future occasion.

**Christopher Pincher** (Tamworth) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement of the practical measures to give effect to the armed forces covenant. Is he aware that such varied voices as those of the Adjutant-General, the deputy Chief of the Defence Staff, the Second Sea Lord and Bryn Parry of Help for Heroes all made it clear in evidence to the Armed Forces Bill Committee that they much prefer a flexible covenant of

principles enshrined in law, rather than a set of prescriptive measures that might see our soldiers marching off to court as regularly as they march off to war? Does my right hon. Friend not think that their measured and sensible approach is the right one?

**Dr Fox:** Indeed I do; that is reflected in the balance we have set out today. There was something of a false debate between the Government and the service charities, especially the Royal British Legion, but they were always very clear that the outcome would be right for our armed forces. It was simply a debate about the best mechanism to achieve that. I think that we have achieved that balance properly in the proposals we have set out today. I hope that it will be widely welcomed by the service charities, which have given a great deal of impetus to the campaign and deserve credit for today's outcome.

**Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con):** What the Secretary of State has said today will be welcomed by many, particularly those in the Nelson and District branch of the Royal British Legion, whom he met and discussed the matter with when he last visited Pendle. Of particular concern to many is how the Government can help servicemen and veterans with housing. I was wondering whether he could say more on that today.

**Dr Fox:** For obvious reasons, I well remember that visit to Pendle. As I have said in response to earlier questions, we are looking at how we can best improve access to housing, in the public sector by looking at best practice across the country in conjunction with local government, and by considering how we can remove some of the impediments that armed forces personnel might face in trying to get on to the housing ladder in the private sector. It is important that they can share in the prosperity of a property-owning democracy.

**Mark Reckless (Rochester and Strood) (Con):** We have an unusually high proportion of veterans in the Medway towns, and one of our concerns is that too often they fall between the cracks when it comes to mental health services. I am delighted by what the Secretary of State has said about plans for proactive follow-up for cases of post-traumatic stress disorder; it might help those who might not otherwise present with symptoms. Is there more we can do to work with GPs to ensure that they consider whether someone coming into the surgery might be ex-forces and suffering from PTSD?

**Dr Fox:** My hon. Friend makes a useful point. We have, of course, been trialling our new website and are looking at examinations at the point when personnel leave the armed forces. One issue that I failed to mention and ought to have done is the need to get better information to GPs. I remember practising as a GP and having absolutely no education—[*Interruption.*] I meant in the specific, not the generic. I remember that when I first worked with the armed forces as a doctor it came as a surprise to me how little specific training I had had on their particular needs. I hope that that is now being

redressed by the British Medical Association and the Royal College of General Practitioners, because if the doctors do not know what to look for, they are far more likely to miss the problems.

**Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con):** Today has been a great day for parliamentary scrutiny. We had an Armed Forces Bill before Parliament. We had a campaign by the Royal British Legion. We had MPs on both sides of the House concerned about the issue. We had a Secretary of State and a Prime Minister who were willing to listen. This seems to me to be the way forward. Will the Secretary of State confirm whether he will accept the amendment to the Bill tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone), or will he bring forward his own amendment?

**Dr Fox:** As I said in my statement, we will bring forward Government amendments to put into effect what I have set out in my statement.

**Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con):** The Secretary of State and his ministerial team should be congratulated, as should the Royal British Legion on its role, but, if an authority does not meet its obligations under today's statement and the subsequent legislation, what consideration has the Secretary of State given to a swift and informal process at the most basic level to ensure consistency throughout the United Kingdom and redress?

**Dr Fox:** I understand why my hon. Friend makes the point that he does, but first it will be up to the Government to try to persuade the other elements of government—local government and the devolved Governments—to make the same provision as we want to set out in the covenant; and then, ultimately, it will be up to the public, as they are part of the covenant, to ensure that whatever the level of government, it lives up to its promises. I hope that one of the ways in which the British public will honour the covenant is by putting pressure on those who deliver services to ensure that they deliver them fairly, throughout the country and throughout government, for all service personnel, their families and veterans.

**James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con):** I welcome the statement and, in particular, the comments on community-related issues. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is important that local authorities and community groups work with local legions to find appropriate solutions for our veterans?

**Dr Fox:** Again, that is one of the essential parts of the covenant. It is not just about what government does for the armed forces, but about what the nation does for our armed forces. That applies to central Government, to devolved Government, to local government, to no government at all, to charities and to the private sector. Everybody, including individuals, has a role to play, and I hope that if one thing unifies the House and the country it is that we are making a pact in law, and setting it out today in this House of Commons, between all of the country and the armed forces—something that never again should be broken.

## Points of Order

4.37 pm

**Helen Jones** (Warrington North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In a recent debate in Westminster Hall, the Minister of State, Department of Health, the right hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr Burns), suggested that one way of solving the problems of Whiston hospital would be a merger with another trust. Given that the obvious trust for a merger is North Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust, that suggestion has caused widespread concern in my constituency about a possible loss of jobs and services from Warrington hospital. Is there any way in which you, Mr Speaker, can urge a Minister to come to the House and make a statement about their plans for health services in the area? So far, they have failed to address the concerns that my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens North (Mr Watts) raised about Whiston and are now causing real concern about the future of Warrington hospital.

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order, but I fear that she invests me with mystical powers that I do not possess. She is a very experienced and indefatigable Member, who will be well aware of the avenues open to her to pursue such matters—and of which I feel sure she will shortly take advantage.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Earlier, the Secretary of State for Defence said in his statement, “I can tell the House this afternoon that the Government will bring forward amendments”. He is completely and utterly delusional, because he was not announcing anything to the House; it was announced in the national newspapers for all and sundry to see on Saturday and on Sunday. Indeed, I understand that the Prime Minister was expressly going to make the announcement on Sunday, only to be beaten to it by the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Mr Robathan), who on the record gave quotations to *The Daily Telegraph*. I understand that he was given the hairdryer treatment, but is it not time that you, Mr Speaker, gave the hairdryer treatment to Ministers who keep on doing this, week in, week out?

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful that the House has had the opportunity to question Ministers on the statement made today. I note what the hon. Gentleman has said, and I saw the newspapers myself over the weekend. I think that the Secretary of State has left the Chamber, but if a Minister from the Ministry of Defence, possibly the right hon. Gentleman to whom reference has just been made, wishes specifically to respond, he can do so.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Andrew Robathan):** Thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing me to respond. If the hon. Gentleman cares to read what was in the newspapers, he will discover that what he has said is not in fact in any way correct.

**Mr Speaker:** We must leave it there for today.

**Jim Dowd** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I, for one, certainly do believe you have mystical powers. May I seek your guidance in relation to the next item of business? I think the whole House is aware of the rules relating to sub judice when matters are put before the courts and are under consideration by them. The next item of business could easily become a matter for criminal investigation; indeed I, for one, believe that it should become one. Could you offer any guidance as to whether that imposes a similar constraint on what might be said in the debate on the next item?

**Mr Speaker:** The issue that the hon. Gentleman raises is, at this stage, a hypothetical matter, and it would be very unwise for the Speaker to speculate on a hypothetical situation. I know that the hon. Gentleman would not expect me to do so, and I will not. What I would say to him and to the House is that whether or not there are to be police inquiries into any particular matter is not a matter for the Chair. Unless a criminal charge has been brought, the matter is not sub judice. Today is the opportunity for the House to debate any matters covered by the report of the Standards and Privileges Committee. I am genuinely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order, and I hope that he found the response helpful.

## Standards and Privileges

4.41 pm

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Sir George Young):** I beg to move,

That this House—

(1) approves the Fifteenth Report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges (House of Commons Paper No. 1023);

(2) endorses the recommendation in paragraph 39; and

(3) accordingly suspends Mr David Laws from the service of the House for a period of seven sitting days, beginning on Tuesday 7 June.

It is always regrettable when the House finds it necessary to suspend an hon. Member, as it does today. The facts of the case are set out in detail in the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards' report to the Standards and Privileges Committee. The Chair of that Committee may catch your eye in a moment, Mr Speaker, so I will not rehearse them.

This has been a lengthy inquiry, not least because the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Laws) invited the commissioner to examine every aspect of his claims for additional costs allowance over an eight-year period. The commissioner has completed his inquiry as quickly as is consistent with the need for absolute rigour, and a complete chronology is set out at paragraphs 29 to 34 of his report. On behalf of the House, I would like to express our thanks to the Committee and to the commissioner and his team for their fair, diligent and impartial work in this case, and indeed in other cases. It is clear that the Committee has considered the commissioner's findings carefully and has taken into account all the circumstances of the case in arriving at its recommendation of a seven-day suspension.

The House will recall press speculation in the days before the report was published. The question of whether this was a result of premature disclosure of the Committee's report and, if so, by whom, is a matter for the Committee itself to consider, and I understand that the Chair of the Committee has announced an inquiry into this.

It has been the practice of this House to endorse the findings of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, and I invite hon. Members to do so this afternoon.

4.43 pm

**Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab):** May I begin by echoing the thanks of the Leader of the House to the Commissioner for Standards and to the Committee on Standards and Privileges? The nature of the matters that they had to investigate required a detailed investigation by the commissioner and careful scrutiny by the Committee, and the whole House is grateful to them for their diligence.

The matters under consideration that have led to the motion on today's Order Paper are extremely serious ones that concern breaches of the rules over the very long term. No one should underestimate their seriousness. The commissioner found that from 2001 the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Laws) submitted lodging agreements that gave a false impression of his relationship with his landlord and of their shared use of successive London properties. The commissioner found that he claimed higher rent for the use of two London properties

than was justified either under the terms of the lodging agreement or as a reflection of the arrangement that he had for living with his partner in those properties.

The commissioner also found that the right hon. Gentleman wrongly claimed for building work on the second property that should have been covered by the rent. In addition, he dealt with the separate matter of wrong claims for phone bills, which, as Members who have been here for some time will know, were not claimable under the additional costs allowance.

I think it fair to remind the House that the commissioner reached his conclusions based on the standards expected at the time, and not under a retrospective reinterpretation of the rules. *[Interruption.]* A Member on the Government Front Bench is saying that that is not right, so perhaps I can clarify the matter for him. Claims for phone bills in Somerset and for a mobile phone were judged by the commissioner not to be claimable under the additional costs allowance, because the ACA related to a London property. Those were the rules at the time.

In considering the report, the Committee made it clear that it agreed with the commissioner that from 2005 onwards the right hon. Gentleman's main home was, as a matter of fact, in London, not in Somerset. The rules at the time made it clear that any hon. Member who was in doubt about which property they should declare as their main home should have sought advice. The right hon. Gentleman failed to do so.

The Committee endorses many of the commissioner's conclusions. It makes clear the seriousness of the breaches in agreeing with the commissioner's conclusion that while the arrangement for the first property may have represented a good deal for the landlord, it did not represent a good or even a reasonable deal for the House. The Committee also makes it clear that the breaches in relation to the second property were even more serious, because the right hon. Gentleman had made a significant financial contribution to the purchase and upgrading of the property.

The right hon. Gentleman has said that he was concerned to preserve his privacy. However, it has always been the rule of the House that when personal interests and the public interest conflict, matters should be resolved in favour of the public interest. Sadly, we therefore have to conclude that, because the breaches were serious and took place over a long period, the penalty that the Committee proposes of a suspension from the House is the right one. The Opposition therefore support the motion.

4.47 pm

**Mr Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab):** May I ask the Leader of the House two questions that arise from the report? First, how does the Committee on Standards and Privileges go about its business to ensure that one judgment is consistent with another? The second question relates to how long it takes for inquiries to be completed in the way that the Leader of the House has described.

On the first question about equity between Members, we are not in a position to know how many Members from the previous Parliament will end up in court. I therefore do not wish to cite examples of Members from the previous Parliament whose record of claiming moneys from the public purse was, on the face of it, pretty appalling. However, so far, some of those Members

[Mr Frank Field]

have not even had their knuckles rapped with a ruler, let alone been the subject of a report of this nature, which is handed into the House for it to comment and vote on. Will the Leader of the House tell us something about how the Committee goes about its work to ensure that in judging one Member it bears in mind the behaviour of and the judgment it has come to on another Member?

My second question relates to the length of time the inquiry has taken. Many Parliaments ago, I was asked to chair the Social Security Committee. One of our tasks was to look at the Maxwell theft of pension funds. We confronted layer upon layer of deceit. We completed our task, made our recommendations, suggested the shape of a new pensions Act, and were invited by the then Secretary of State to shape that pensions Act within a year—less time than it has taken to undertake this inquiry and report back to the House. I would be grateful if the Leader of the House addressed whether the speed, thoroughness and consistency of the commissioner's work is appropriate.

4.49 pm

**Mr Kevin Barron** (Rother Valley) (Lab): I will pick up a couple of points that my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field) has just made, but I first wish to say something about the leaks that have occurred. There have been two types of leak in connection with the report. First, from Sunday 8 May onward, there has been a steady trickle of comment on the memorandum of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards to the Standards and Privileges Committee, which was, as is customary, sent to the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Laws) for his comments as well as to Committee members and to the Attorney-General, whom Standing Orders make our adviser. My first impression was that that comment could well have been based on informed speculation, but I no longer hold that view, because on Wednesday morning the Committee's recommendation was leaked to the media. We immediately instigated a leak inquiry, and it is not appropriate to say more at this stage, as that inquiry is now ongoing.

I will pick up two issues raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead. One is the length of time taken. He will see from reading the report that it goes far wider than the allegations that were made against the right hon. Member for Yeovil in the media last May, and I suspect that that was one reason for the time taken. However, I say to my right hon. Friend that the timing is wholly in the hands of the commissioner, who reports to the Committee and publishes a memorandum when he is ready to do so. The evidence that he takes is entirely a matter for him.

The other issue that my right hon. Friend has mentioned concerns the comparison of one case with another. I will mention in my speech the circumstances of this particular case and why we have come to the recommendations before the House. I have not commented on the matter before, because I believe it is for the House to judge, not the media or commentators. The extent of reporting of what the commissioner and the Committee would say, and what it would mean for the right hon. Member for Yeovil, has been unfortunate. It meant that the press have perhaps not looked as carefully as they might have done at what we actually said.

The Committee has been attacked from one side for being too severe and from the other for being too soft. It would be complacent to say that we got it about right, but I wish to set out what the report says and why we said it. First, I urge those who say that the Committee has been too severe—many of them are in this House or in another place—to examine what the Committee actually found and the way in which that compares with other breaches.

From 2006 onwards, the arrangements of the right hon. Member for Yeovil were simply and explicitly against the rules, because he rented from a partner. He has said that he did not regard his landlord as his partner for the purposes of the Green Book. In 2007, he gave his landlord £99,000, which was a free gift but which was put towards the purchase of a London property that the two shared. He also contributed to building work. As the report states:

“Mr Laws had made significant financial contributions to the purchase and upgrading of the property. Such commitments are unusual between landlord and tenant, or even between friends. In consequence he should have had no doubt that he and his landlord were ‘partners’ for the purposes of the Green Book.”

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will have seen the volume of appendices to the report, which includes evidence from Mr Laws such as a rental agreement, which states at item 5:

“The Lodger will be responsible for any damages or breakages caused by him/her”.

How could the claim of £2,000 for renovation work be covered by that? There is no other reference in any of the agreements to any contribution that the lodger should make to any major renovations of the property.

**Mr Barron:** That is true. The commissioner commented on that claim in his memorandum, and it was taken into account when we came to make the recommendations that are before the House.

The right hon. Member for Yeovil was in breach before the financial contributions that I have described, by wrongly claiming that his main home was in Somerset rather than in London. It is clear that he was not the only Member who designated the wrong property. When the pattern of nights spent at two properties were changing, it would be easy to assume that the main property was the one on which a mortgage was held. If that were the main issue in the period up to 2006, it might easily have been put right, but the problem was that the right hon. Gentleman's conduct was designed to hide his real circumstances, which formed a pattern with his later breach of the rules.

There has been a great deal of press comment on this case, much of it before the Committee reported. It has been suggested that the right hon. Gentleman saved the public money, and that that makes his conduct all right. It is certainly possible that other, proper arrangements might have been more expensive. Clearly, there could have been substantial claims against the Somerset property, but they were not made, so we cannot know precisely what would have been approved. We must judge the arrangements that were actually in place, not arrangements that might have been made. As the report says:

“Mr Laws contends that the payments were lower than they would have been had he claimed on his Somerset home, or made other permissible arrangements. In our view, it is inappropriate to

judge whether the claims on property A are appropriate by reference to potential payments on another property, which is not in fact claimed for.”

**Mr Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): The Committee has dealt with the false representation allegations—the appropriateness of the penalty, which hon. Members are here to judge, does not matter—but my submission is that it has not dealt adequately with the quantum of claim, other than by saying that the rent was above the market rent and that there were “contributions towards building repairs and maintenance”.

The Committee and the commissioner did not go into the fact that the rent was up to 50% more than the market rent, or that sums of up to £100 a month were being charged for each of council tax, utilities, parking the car in the driveway, maintenance repairs and the purchase of capital equipment. Why has the Committee not dealt with those sums on aggregate? That is a huge amount of money for a lodger to pay to his landlord.

**Mr Barron:** My hon. Friend may wish to comment on that further, but I wish to make my comments on behalf of the Committee.

What is clear is that the rents charged to the public purse were excessive, and that charges were made for repairs that would not have been included in any normal rental arrangement. It is impossible to tell exactly how much more was charged than should have been, but that is because of the right hon. Gentleman’s desire for secrecy.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr Barron:** No—I shall just carry on for a few minutes, if my hon. Friend does not mind.

The commissioner’s report suggests that the public purse was overcharged by between £80 and £270 per month, even in comparison with assured shorthold tenancies. Property advisers considered that the rent in the right hon. Gentleman’s lodging agreement was between £209 and £370 a month higher than the market price.

The right hon. Gentleman and his supporters say that he acted to preserve his privacy. Extensive press briefings suggested that the breach would be somehow less blameworthy if that were the case, but the commissioner expressed his sympathy for the right hon. Gentleman, and the Committee recognised his motivation. However, there were other ways to preserve privacy. He could have refrained from claiming. Alternatively, he could have designated his main home properly, which would have meant that there would be no need to conceal receipts that might have identified his landlord.

The right hon. Gentleman instead took the decision to preserve his privacy by concocting a rent agreement and, wherever possible, claiming below the receipts threshold. He told the commissioner:

“After the receipts threshold changed I reduced my claims below the threshold.”

Ultimately, as the report says, this case is about the fundamental principles of the code of conduct, which says, and has always said:

“Members shall base their conduct on a consideration of the public interest, avoid conflict between personal interest and the public interest and resolve any conflict between the two, at once...in favour of the public interest.”

As the Committee said:

“We consider the rental agreements submitted between 2003 and 2008 were misleading and designed to conceal the nature of the relationship. They prevented any examination of the arrangements that in fact pertained over the entire period.”

That is why this case is worse than many others in which the commissioner has found there has been a breach of the rules of the additional costs allowance. In many of those cases, the Members concerned had consulted the department of finance and administration, and in some cases both the department and independent valuers, so there was no intention to deceive. In one case, the Member’s circumstances changed, so that arrangements that were expected to be temporary lasted longer than expected.

In contrast, the case before us involved a deliberate attempt to conceal the Member’s real living arrangements that continued for many years. It is clear that he recognised the potential conflict between the public interest and his private interest. By omitting to seek advice, however, he made himself the sole judge of whether that conflict was properly resolved. It was inappropriate for him to be judge and jury in his own case. As the commissioner commented, it can never be acceptable to submit misleading documents to those charged with overseeing public finances. As this case shows, the right hon. Member’s desire for secrecy led him to act in a way that was not compatible with the standards expected of an MP. Whatever the motive, I do not think that is acceptable.

Now I will address the concerns of those who think that we have been too lenient. Since the Committee reported, the hon. Member for Dunfermline and West Fife (Thomas Docherty) has asked the police to investigate. There is a protocol between the police, the commissioner and the Committee providing for liaison between the commissioner and the police, if either of them has concerns. The police will not comment on individual investigations, and the commissioner is also understandably reluctant to comment on such matters, even to the Committee. However, the fact that the commissioner has reported to us suggests the Member’s behaviour is unlikely to have been criminal.

I have already explained why we felt this case was more serious than others, but there were mitigating factors. As we stated in the report:

“Not only has Mr Laws already resigned from the Cabinet, his behaviour since May 2010 has been exemplary. He quickly referred himself to the Commissioner, has already repaid allowances from July 2006 in full, and has cooperated fully with the Commissioner’s investigation. This behaviour has influenced our recommendation.”

**Jim Dowd** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): The Committee said that the right hon. Member’s behaviour had been exemplary since the matter became public knowledge, and the commissioner himself, in paragraph 324 of his report, stated that it was to his

“considerable and personal credit that, when his living arrangements came to public attention”

he referred himself. Did the Committee calculate what he might have done had it not come to public attention?

**Mr Barron:** No, it did not.

The repayment was one of the mitigating circumstances. The voluntary payments went further than the circumstances at the time required. The outstanding amount related to rent that might or might not have

[Mr Barron]

been over-claimed and not to expenses claims that were wholly wrongly based, as in other cases that sadly have come before the House. As in other cases where Members have over-claimed, we have clawed back the overpayment. Given the uncertainty over what a true comparator should be, we calculated the maximum overpayment, and it was only because it was within the amount that had been paid back, over and above housing claims, that we made no further recommendation.

It has been suggested that recommending that the suspension should begin after the recess is part of a plot to reduce the right hon. Member's fine. It was not put in, as one of the Sunday papers suggested, by political partisans on the Committee. The Committee considered carefully and decided that a suspension of seven days was appropriate. It would have been arbitrary and unfair to have extended the suspension simply because a recess fell during the period. In 2007, the Committee recommended that George Galloway's suspension should start after the summer recess for precisely the same reasons. In that case, he got himself named in the House and suspended in the last week of sitting, so he lost his salary for the entire summer recess plus the 18 days that the Committee recommended. In this case, we felt that it would have been wrong to have started the suspension today—if that is what the House agrees—because we knew that we are entering a short recess. It would have been unfair and resulted in a longer suspension than the one recommended in our report. If the motion is agreed to, approximately £1,500 of salary will be withheld as a result of the right hon. Member's suspension. I recommend the report to the House.

5.5 pm

**Jim Dowd** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): I will not detain the House too long. I realise that we have immensely important business to discuss later, and we should get on to it as soon as possible. However, this matter is not unimportant. Judging from the number of Members seeking to take part in the debate on the report, I fear that it would otherwise slip quietly into parliamentary history. We have realised over the past few years just how tainted this House's reputation has become vis-à-vis not just the conduct of some Members, but how the way in which we deal with them is perceived.

I do not want to go into extreme detail about what the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Laws) has done—or not. The commissioner has conducted a characteristically scrupulous and systematic investigation of the events, and the Committee and all its members have followed in the same vein. I will not seek to divide the House on the recommendation, which I am sure will be agreed. However, I fear that the way in which the case has been dealt with and the conclusion that the Committee has presented create the danger of emphasising the idea that, superficially at least, there is one rule for some Members of this House and other rules for others. Some are taken before the courts—and, indeed, imprisoned—for their conduct; some get barely a slap across the wrist; and others escape scot-free.

I accept that the speculation around this case is nothing to do with the right hon. Gentleman personally, but so much of the comment outside this place—I accept, too, that neither this House nor any Member is

responsible for such comment—is about how much time he should serve not before he is brought before the courts or sent to prison, but before he is brought back into the Cabinet. That changes the aspect and the proportion of this case entirely. The report makes it plain that there has been a systematic, calculated and flagrant pattern of behaviour by the right hon. Gentleman, which, describe it as we might—deceit, deception, fraud—amounts to dishonesty. If this House is to rebuild its reputation we need not only procedures that are, to quote an oft-repeated phrase in the report, “above reproach”, but systems that are seen to treat each and every Member of this House in the same fashion. I do not think that we have that at the moment—I do not criticise the report; I am sure that we will pass it and move on—but it is for the authorities and the Committees in this House to ensure that one simple procedure applies to everybody.

As the Chair of the Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr Barron), has said, this matter is now under investigation by the police because somebody has referred it. [Interruption.] I am told that he did not say that, in which case, we need to refer it. However, it is equally true that in other cases, the police have not waited for a referral for matters to be investigated, but have taken it upon themselves to investigate whether there was any criminal or corrupt element in Members' behaviour. Indeed, matters that for a while fell within the purview of the commissioner were passed on, because the police had commissioned investigations into whether criminality and wrongdoing had taken place. There are those who have said that Members found guilty of serious wrongdoing should resign and leave this House, triggering a by-election—so much so, indeed, that the current Deputy Prime Minister said in his first address to the Liberal party conference that he wanted to add a “Derek Conway” clause.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The right hon. Gentleman, the Chair of the Standards and Privileges Committee, made a passing reference—it was not, if I remember correctly, an evaluative one—to the police. Of course the hon. Gentleman is perfectly at liberty to make clear to the House his view about the merits or demerits of the report and its recommendations. However, I urge the House to focus on the specifics of this report alone and not to engage in what might be called a Second Reading debate about the differential treatment of particular cases, and we certainly cannot get into a general discussion about whether or when the police are involved.

**Jim Dowd:** I accept that, Mr Speaker, and I will abide by your ruling. I asked for your guidance before the debate, because I fear that the niceties and technicalities of parliamentary procedure might reduce common sense to zero in this case, and that the public at large will not understand the import of events.

I accept the report, but I still think that we need a procedure that is open and that has clear stages, regardless of whether the matter in question is in the hands of the House authorities, of Members' Committees or of officials, or of whether it has entered the domain of a public investigation. We have not got the balance right in the report not because of any failing by the Committee, but because our procedures are still ineffective. We have tried to overhaul the expenses system, which was the

genesis of this case, but I do not believe that we have got our administrative arrangements right in this House. The Committee continues to do a good job, as does the commissioner, but we must concentrate on creating a system that not only treats everyone fairly and equally but that is seen to do so.

5.11 pm

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham West and Penge (Jim Dowd), I have concerns about the question that the report raises of consistency in dealing with individual cases. It would be wrong if we did not raise these matters on the Floor of the House, because the concerns—certainly those of Labour Members—about how these reports are dealt with must be addressed if we are to deal with similar issues in the future. I make no criticism of the Committee, the commissioner or anyone else.

The conclusion was reached that the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Laws) had behaved in an exemplary fashion since being placed under investigation, but I hope that any Member of this House would behave in that way and co-operate fully in such circumstances. Having spoken to some hon. Members who have been under investigation, I received the impression that they did exactly that.

I have one or two questions about consistency, which is all that I am bothered about. I understand that at least one case went to the Committee with the recommendation that it be referred to the Metropolitan police. What criteria were used to reach that judgment? I do not understand that, and I want to understand, because I am concerned about how these reports are written and how different Members are dealt with. What criteria does the commissioner use when he decides whether a case should go to the Metropolitan police?

Also, how many Members have claimed expenses without submitting receipts up to the £250 limit? I understand that some Members who have been investigated by the Metropolitan police and taken to court have been prosecuted for breaching that rule. How many of them, when found to be in breach of that rule by the commissioner, have been allowed to pay the money back?

**Mr Kevan Jones:** The report states that Mr Laws stopped claiming when the rules relating to the maximum amount changed. Did my hon. Friend find it strange that the reason he gave for not putting in receipts was to disguise this relationship with his landlord, even though the landlord's name was on the tenancy agreement?

**Clive Efford:** I hear what my hon. Friend is saying, but if he will forgive me, I do not want to get drawn into the detail of the case against the right hon. Member for Yeovil. The concerns that the report has raised for me are general ones about how we should deal with everyone who comes under investigation, because, let us face it, any of us could come under investigation if someone made a complaint against us, and we would all want to be dealt with under the same rules.

Who has been allowed to pay back money and on what criteria? On what criteria have they been referred to the Metropolitan police, and on what criteria have they been dealt with by the Committee and had a penalty imposed on them, as recommended to us today? Does the fact that Members offer to pay the money back make a difference? This report refers to the fact that the right hon. Member for Yeovil paid money back, which seems to have been taken in his favour. Have other Members made such offers and, if so, has that affected how they have been dealt with?

I have read the report, and I have highlighted several passages that appear to be inconsistent. I find it difficult to understand, for example, how someone can be a lodger in a house to which they have contributed £100,000 for its purchase and can then state to the Committee that they have no financial interest in that house and that the financial interests of the landlord and the lodger are completely separate. I find that sort of thing very confusing and very inconsistent, and I want to know what criteria are being applied to MPs when these matters come before the commissioner and the Committee. There are serious inconsistencies in what is happening here, and I believe that they are worthy of further investigation.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan

5.16 pm

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr William Hague):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of the Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Our security and prosperity in Britain are indivisible from those of other countries. We cannot seal ourselves off from dangers in other countries or prosper fully alone, and it is against our values—as, indeed, it is against our interests—to stand by while conflict and instability develop. That has been shown to be true time and again in the regions that we are debating today.

Britain could not turn a blind eye when Colonel Gaddafi turned his forces against innocent civilians in Libya, shelling crowds of peaceful protestors and even hospitals crammed with victims, and launching a ferocious campaign of arbitrary detentions, torture and summary executions. This is a country on Europe's southern edge, and a regime that threatened to “exterminate like rats” the people who had risen against it. The Arab League clearly called for help and intervention, which is one of the reasons why we have taken a strong lead in calling for, securing and implementing UN Security Council resolutions 1970 and 1973. Other reasons include the effect on Libya's neighbours and the consequences for migration, terrorism and our own national interest if a pariah state had emerged in north Africa. Our action in Libya has a compelling legal and moral basis, strong regional and international support and a clear objective, and it continues to make progress.

**Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP):** The Secretary of State is aware that a great many people view it as very important that this has been a UN-mandated mission from the start. Will he update us on developments within the United Nations to ensure the maximum protection for civilians in Libya and to bring hostilities to the earliest possible end?

**Mr Hague:** Yes, the hon. Gentleman is quite right. The fact that we are acting on a United Nations resolution made an enormous difference to the scale of the vote in this House in favour of the action we have taken and, of course, to the maintenance of international support. The UN Secretary-General attended the London conference that I hosted at the end of March and a meeting of the contact group. The UN continues to be represented at those contact groups. The UN special envoy, Mr al-Khatib, visited Tripoli yesterday, and we are waiting to hear what he found on that visit. The UN remains fully engaged and has offered to lead the stabilisation effort that will follow the conflict in Libya; support across the UN for the implementation of the resolutions remains very strong.

**Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con):** There is evidence that NATO's insistence that Gaddafi be removed is prolonging the civil war, and that civilian casualties are mounting as a result. Would the Foreign Secretary consider asking a third party—someone independent, such as Kofi Annan—to mediate, without

preconditions, for the purpose of a desperately needed ceasefire, if this is after all an intervention based on humanitarian need?

**Mr Hague:** The United Nations envoy to whom I referred is such a third party, and he has just been to Tripoli. Other third parties have made efforts as well, some of them on the basis suggested by my hon. Friend. A high-level African Union delegation visited Tripoli, without the insistence that the Libyan opposition and we have on the departure of Gaddafi, but that did not lead to a successful mediation. Indeed, however one looks at it, it is impossible to see a peaceful or viable future for Libya without the departure of Gaddafi.

**Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green):** Does the Secretary of State agree with the comments made at the weekend by the Chief of the Defence Staff about increasing the number of targets that we can hit, with specific reference to infrastructure? What discussions has he had with NATO colleagues about the apparent change of focus to regime change rather than the protection of civilians?

**Mr Hague:** I do agree with the comments of the Chief of the Defence Staff, but they did not relate to regime change; they related to implementation of the UN Security Council resolutions. It will be evident to the House that over the last few weeks the regime forces have tried to adapt to what we have done to implement the resolutions. They have made themselves look like the forces of the other side, and have fought in a more asymmetric way. In such circumstances it is legitimate for NATO to increase the proportion of targets that are the command and control systems of the regime forces who are harassing and threatening the civilian population. That is what the Chief of the Defence Staff was referring to.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Hague:** I will take a couple more interventions, and then make some progress.

**Simon Hughes (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (LD):** The Foreign Secretary will, of course, appreciate that there is a desire for conflict resolution that will lead to a democratic opportunity for Libya. Will he accept from one who represents many people from north Africa, and many from the Arab and Muslim world, that the intervention that we made is extremely respected and appreciated by those communities here? They want us to continue to uphold the transformation in the Arab world to more democratic countries, because one of their reasons for being here is their inability to exercise their freedoms fully in the countries from which they have come.

**Mr Hague:** That is absolutely true. We responded to the call from the Arab League, and I discussed the situation in Cairo two weeks ago with its secretary-general, who remains supportive of what we are doing. As my hon. Friend rightly says, that is representative of opinion not just across the region but among many people in this country.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Hague:** I will take just one more intervention for the moment, but I am not leaving Libya for a while.

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): On previous occasions the Foreign Secretary has told us that the Attorney-General is giving advice to the Cabinet. Can he assure us that if there is an increase in the scope and range of the targets that we will hit, that advice will be made available to the House?

**Mr Hague:** I cannot give an assurance that we will provide a running commentary on legal advice, but I can give the assurance that the Attorney-General is always included in such discussions. He is always included in the decisions about targeting, and indeed in our general discussions about policies. The National Security Council on Libya met earlier today to discuss the increased tempo of the military campaign, and the Attorney-General took part in that discussion. Retaining what we have had from the beginning—a clear legal authority to do what we are doing—is very important. However, although the Government can give it consideration, I cannot undertake to give a running commentary on legal advice.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Hague:** I will take one more intervention, from the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, but then I must make a bit of progress, or there will be too few other speakers.

**Richard Ottaway** (Croydon South) (Con): The Foreign Secretary said that General Richards had been referring to the command and control structure, not the infrastructure. It seems to be agreed that command and control is an acceptable target. However, General Richards said in *The Sunday Telegraph* that he

“wanted the rules of engagement changed so that direct attacks can be launched against the infrastructure propping up Gaddafi’s regime.”

That suggests that he was calling for a change of policy, and I should be grateful if the Foreign Secretary could say whether he has a legal opinion that would support that change of policy.

**Mr Hague:** That would, of course, have to be discussed with our colleagues, partners and other members of NATO, as all targeting is discussed in NATO. But certainly it is our opinion that it comes within the scope of United Nations Security Council resolution 1973 that if particular items of infrastructure are particularly supporting the military effort and the regime’s effort to make war against civilians, those would also be legitimate targets.

The Gaddafi regime is now isolated and on the defensive. It has lost control of large swathes of Libya already. The regime’s military capability has been significantly degraded and £12 billion of its assets have been frozen in this country alone. NATO has conducted more than 6,600 sorties and more than 2,600 strike sorties since 31 March, destroying ammunition stores, armoured and other vehicles and surface-to-air missile launchers, while at sea 20 ships are now patrolling the central Mediterranean under NATO command to enforce the arms embargo.

Scores of senior figures have abandoned their positions in the regime, including Ministers, generals, ambassadors, bankers and senior officials. Many of these defectors are actively supporting the opposition national transitional council. We welcome the announcement today by the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court that he has requested judges to issue arrest warrants for Colonel Gaddafi and two other members of the regime wanted for the deliberate killing of unarmed civilians. This should leave the regime in no doubt that crimes will not go unpunished and that the reach of international justice will be long.

**Mr Denis MacShane** (Rotherham) (Lab): May I say that in recent weeks the Foreign Secretary has conducted his part of the campaign with exemplary skill and force? As the International Criminal Court seeks the arraignment of Colonel Gaddafi for all the things he has done, what difference is there between those and the terrible cruelty, killings and torture by President Bashar al-Assad in Syria? Does the Foreign Secretary agree with the Minister for the Armed Forces, who said in Defence questions an hour ago that he believed that Syria’s President should also be put before the International Criminal Court?

**Mr Hague:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for, unusually, paying me a compliment. There are important differences, of course, in the level of international support and concern about Syria. I spoke a moment ago about the importance of our legal and international authority. So far, the Arab League position on Libya has been different from its position on Syria. Our ability to pass a resolution at the United Nations Security Council is very different on Syria from what it is on Libya, so if we believe that it is important to operate with legal and international authority, we must recognise that we are in a different situation in respect of Syria than we are in respect of Libya. I will return to Syria in the course of my remarks.

**Mr Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): Is my right hon. Friend aware that many of us are worried about what the Chief of the Defence Staff said at the weekend, because he seemed to be implying that in order to resolve a stalemate that we ourselves have created, we should constantly widen the envelope of what we attack? We want a firm assurance that we will attack only military targets that directly target civilians, and that our mission is humanitarian and designed to achieve a ceasefire and peace.

**Mr Hague:** My hon. Friend can certainly be assured that we will stay within the scope of the UN resolution, with legal advice, but he must bear in mind that as the situation changes, what is targeted and the methods necessary to achieve our objectives will sometimes have to change. It would not be effective to say that we are only ever going to target the same things. Many different parts of the apparatus of the regime in Libya that are engaged in prosecuting a war against its own civilians have not actually been targeted yet.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend reassure us that there will be no change in the mission—no mission creep? A no-fly zone can be successful in preventing civilians from being

[Dr Julian Lewis]

massacred—that is why I voted for it—but what would the Government do if it became clear that the air raids have succeeded in preventing that and that Gaddafi is desisting from threatening to massacre whole swathes of his own people, but that he is staying in place? Would we then call off the campaign because the threat of massacre had been reduced to the point that it did not need to concern us any more, or would we say, “As long as Gaddafi is in place, the campaign goes on”? That is where we might find ourselves in legal difficulties?

**Mr Hague:** Of course it is open to Colonel Gaddafi to comply with resolution 1973, to end violence against civilians and to have a genuine ceasefire. President Obama and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it clear at the beginning what he would need to do in order to do that; he would need to disengage from battles in places such as Misrata, to cease using his forces against civilians who try to protest in Tripoli, and so on. So it is open to him to do this. It would certainly not bring to an end the enforcement of a no-fly zone, the arms embargo and so many parts of the UN resolution, but in that situation the position—the need to protect civilians from attack—would be different. However, Colonel Gaddafi does not do this, presumably because if he did he would no longer be able to maintain himself in power, as he relies entirely on force to keep himself in power. That is why the question of his being there and remaining in power is, in practical terms, intimately bound up with resolving the conflict.

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): Any innocent person listening to the Foreign Secretary’s speech would assume that the whole policy that has been conducted by NATO, with the support of the UK, is one of regime change, and that they are just hiding under this fig leaf of its not being regime change. When does this become regime change in fact? Would he do the same in Bahrain, Syria or any other country? Clearly, that is the direction of travel at the moment.

**Mr Hague:** Those countries are all in different situations. I wish to discuss those different countries later, but Libya’s is the one case where we are dealing with a clear call from the Arab League and a United Nations Security Council resolution, and that makes it very different from all the other situations that we are dealing with. The hon. Gentleman should support the fact that Britain is acting on that basis, with that international authority. The purposes of our military action are exactly as set out in the resolution but, for the reasons that I have just been explaining, it is hard to see us achieving those objectives, or any peaceful solution being arrived at among the people of Libya, while Colonel Gaddafi remains in power. We have to recognise that, and it is why most of the world, including people across north Africa and in the Arab world, want him to go.

This House and our country should be confident that time is not on the side of Gaddafi; it is on our side, provided that we continue to intensify the diplomatic, economic and military pressure on his regime. The tempo of military operations, which some of my hon. Friends have been asking about, has increased significantly in recent weeks, and we are now targeting not just deployed military assets, but the fixed military command

and control facilities which the regime uses to threaten the civilian population. That action is within the constraints of the Security Council resolutions, and we are increasing the regime’s diplomatic and economic isolation at the same time.

At the contact group meeting in Rome on 5 May, which I attended, all members agreed to reject diplomatic emissaries from Tripoli unless the regime shows serious willingness to implement a real ceasefire. We also agreed to explore action to prevent the regime from exporting crude oil and importing refined products for non-humanitarian use, and to clamp down on states and entities supplying arms and mercenaries to the regime. We are also working with our partners to stop satellite or state support for the broadcasting of Libyan state television, and the whole House will welcome the Arab League’s decision yesterday to request a ban on Libyan state-owned TV from broadcasting on the Arabsat satellites. We also welcome the mediation role of the UN special envoy, as I have said.

In parallel with that pressure, we are increasing our support for the Libyan national transitional council, which we regard at this moment as the legitimate representative of the people of Libya. In Rome, the contact group agreed terms of reference for a temporary financial mechanism which will aid the provision of basic services in eastern Libya, as well as efforts to stabilise its economy. The first meeting of the steering board for the mechanism is due to take place today in Doha, and up to \$180 million has already been pledged by the Gulf states.

The British Government were also one of the first to provide humanitarian support to Libya, including medical supplies for 30,000 people and basic necessities for more than 100,000. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development will want to expand on this when he winds up the debate.

**Sandra Osborne** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Lab): On the subject of the national transitional council, on a recent visit to the US the Select Committee on Defence was told at a high level that we do not know who the rebels are. Is the Secretary of State confident that it is appropriate to give them official recognition when we do not really know the details of where they are coming from?

**Mr Hague:** We have not given them official recognition; we recognise states, not Governments. We recognise the state of Libya. We say for now—at this moment—that they are the legitimate representatives, as Gaddafi has lost legitimacy, and we have invited them to open an office but not an embassy here in London. We know a lot about who they are—after all, we have met a lot about them. I have met their principal leaders and we have a diplomatic mission in Benghazi that is working with them daily. They have published their vision of a democratic Libya and, as I shall explain, have gone on to set out their own transition plan for Libya, which tells us quite a lot about what they intend.

The hon. Lady brings me naturally to what I was going to say next. Last Thursday, during a visit to London by its chairman Abdul-Jalil, the Prime Minister invited the council to open a mission in London. That will enable closer consultation. We welcome the road map for a democratic transition published by the council.

It pledges the establishment of an interim Government after the departure of Gaddafi and a ceasefire—an interim Government including council figures as well as technocratic figures from the regime—the convening of a national congress with balanced representation from across the country, the drafting of a new constitution and internationally supervised parliamentary and presidential elections within six months. Those are laudable objectives that show the right way forward, as proposed by the national council.

The Prime Minister also announced new support for the protection of Libyan civilians, including communications equipment, bullet proof vests and uniforms for the civilian police authorities of the NTC as well as support to improve the public broadcasting capacity. That assistance is designed to help ensure that the NTC administers territory under its control to international standards. In the coming weeks we will also increase our diplomatic presence in Benghazi. We have appointed a permanent special representative to the national transitional council based there, and we are sending development specialists who will form the core of an international team to advise the council on longer-term planning.

**Mr Bob Ainsworth** (Coventry North East) (Lab): Is the Foreign Secretary not glossing over the significance of what the Chief of the Defence Staff said? I think that the Chief of Defence Staff is worried about stalemate. We are doing enough to keep the operation going but not enough to finish it off, and we are turning our backs on the opportunities for negotiation, to the extent that they exist, yet we are not going far enough to finish this. He is worried about war and misery without end as well as ongoing cost and stretch. He is saying something different from the Government, is he not?

**Mr Hague:** No. I have called at successive meetings of the contact group and in this House for a steady intensification of the military, diplomatic and economic pressure on the regime. We have always been clear that it would require intensification and the Chief of the Defence Staff is certainly talking about the next stage of that intensification. That is not at variance with what the Government have said. It might contain more detail than what we have said before, but it does not vary from the approach the Government have taken. We have always been clear that such intensification is necessary to avoid a stalemate, but we need diplomatic and economic, as well as military, intensification.

We are doing all we can to implement the UN Security Council resolutions on Libya. We should be fortified by the knowledge that our action has already saved countless people from the risk of death, injury or certain repression. I hope the House will join me in paying tribute to the brave men and women of the armed forces and to British diplomats and aid workers on the ground in Libya. The contact group will meet again in Abu Dhabi in early June, a meeting that I will attend, and I will keep the House closely informed of developments. The Gaddafi regime's efforts to cling to power are in stark contrast with the largely peaceful transition that has taken place in Libya's neighbours, Egypt and Tunisia. Tunisia continues to lead the way in the transition to Arab democracy. Despite many complex challenges, a great deal of progress has been made since the revolution

in January. A new broad-based interim Government including independent figures and opposition parties has been formed, media censorship has been removed, formerly banned parties have been legalised and an election date has been set. The challenge now is to ensure that reforms are fully implemented and that all arrangements are in place for free and fair elections. I spoke to Tunisia's Foreign Minister last week to discuss those things. Through our Arab partnership initiative, we are helping to produce the first media code of conduct for Tunisia's elections, to build domestic observation capacity for Assembly elections in July and to strengthen legislation protecting freedom of expression. Further British support for political and economic reform is being agreed and we are also working at the EU and with other international bodies to look at assistance for Tunisia as part of a broader approach to democratic reform in north Africa.

I visited Cairo at the beginning of the month. Egypt has many challenges to overcome before democratic reform is assured, including the need to stabilise the economy and create confidence for investors. I met senior members of the transitional authorities and representatives from across the spectrum of groups of Egyptian activists who participated in the revolution. Such engagement is vital if we are to understand and influence decisions by such groups in the future. In my meetings with Field Marshal Tantawi and Prime Minister Sharaf, as well as welcoming the progress that has been made so far, I raised Britain's concerns about the Egyptian authorities' current use of military courts, rather than civil legal mechanisms, and about the rise of sectarian tensions in Egypt, which is gravely concerning.

Violent clashes between Salafi Muslims and Coptic Christians left up to 15 dead and more than 250 injured in Cairo earlier this month. Peaceful demonstrations about those events were attacked by gunmen on Sunday and 78 people were injured. We condemn that violence and call on both sides to find a peaceful resolution to their differences in the spirit of the unity shown in Tahrir square. The rights of Christian minorities in Egypt and across the middle east must be protected and we welcome the fact that many in Egypt are clearly appalled by those actions. Many in the House will be deeply concerned if we begin to see in Egypt signs of the dreadful attacks against Christians or any other minorities that have taken place in Iraq and elsewhere in the region.

None of us should be under any illusion about the scale of the transition still required in Egypt. The success of the Arab spring will largely be judged on what happens in the Arab world's largest nation. The UK is offering technical assistance ahead of crucial elections in September. Last week, we hosted the Egyptian team who are responsible for the elections and gave them an overview of the electoral process in Britain. We are also discussing what assistance Britain can offer through our Arab partnership initiative to strengthen political participation and the rule of law, including anti-corruption efforts, but the international community must rapidly accelerate its assistance to Egypt.

We are arguing in the European Union, the United Nations, the G8 and international financial institutions for a transformative new relationship with the countries of the middle east and north Africa. We have put forward our proposals in Europe for a reformed

[*Mr Hague*]

neighbourhood policy that offers market access and trade in return for reform, leading eventually to a customs union and free trade area. We hope that the G8 summit in Deauville next week will mark the start of a new approach to the region and to co-ordinated and expanded financial assistance. Offering a new hand of friendship and a new partnership is the right response to the aspirations of the people in the region, but it is also manifestly in our own long-term interests. The response of Europe in particular must be as bold, ambitious and historic in its scale and nature as these events themselves.

**Keith Vaz** (Leicester East) (Lab): I hope that the situation in Yemen will also be raised during those discussions because, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, a mass demonstration is planned for tomorrow at which thousands and thousands of people will be marching on the presidential palace. Ways in which we can help are through mediation, by trying to persuade the sides to come together, and by giving the financial assistance that is absolutely vital because Yemen is facing a humanitarian problem.

**Mr Hague:** I shall come to Yemen in a moment, if the right hon. Gentleman will allow me to keep a semblance of order to my remarks, but he is quite right to raise that important issue.

The experiences of Egypt and Tunisia reveal an important lesson from the Arab spring—that an immense economic challenge goes hand in hand with the political opening up of those societies. Two other lessons should act as a warning in the region to those who might be tempted to think that legitimate aspirations can be ignored.

The first is that demands for political and economic freedom will spread more widely and by themselves, not because western nations advocate these things, but because they are the natural aspirations of all people everywhere. The second is that Governments who set their face against reform altogether are doomed to failure. Simply refusing to address legitimate grievances or attempting to stamp them out will fail. Reform is not a threat to stability; it is the guarantor of it over the long term. It is not credible or acceptable for any country in the region to repress now and suggest that reform will only follow later, nor is it sustainable to promise economic reform without steady political development.

This is our message to Syria, alongside our utter condemnation of the violence. Only meaningful reform that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people can provide peace and stability for Syria in the long term. The alternative—ever more violent repression—simply stokes up anger and frustration that will spill over in the future. On the point raised by the right hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr MacShane), the European Union has already imposed a travel ban and assets freeze on 13 individuals in the Syrian regime, and on Friday we informed the Syrian ambassador to London that if the violence does not stop immediately, the EU will take further measures, including sanctions targeted at the highest levels of the Syrian Government.

Alongside this action in the EU we are seeking a response from the UN Security Council in New York, where we are working to convince others that the

Security Council must send an unequivocal message of condemnation of the situation and call for urgent political reform.

**Malcolm Bruce** (Gordon) (LD): The Foreign Secretary is making a perfectly correct and robust case, but does he agree that the emergence of protest right across the middle east changes the dynamics of the middle east peace process and the mood of the Palestinians, and that we need to ensure that the international community secures a response and that they do not feel that they are stuck in a time warp when things are changing all around them?

**Mr Hague:** My right hon. Friend is right. That is changing the dynamics and it is important for all to understand that this increases the urgency of the middle east peace process, rather than meaning that it can be put off. The remaining opportunity to breathe new life into it must now be taken. I shall say more about that in a moment.

**Hywel Williams** (Arfon) (PC): What steps is the Foreign Secretary taking to encourage Turkey to take a democratic lead in the region, which would also include ending the persecution of legitimately and democratically elected Kurdish politicians? That would give great succour to Kurdish people in Syria, who are the subject of murderous repression by their own Government.

**Mr Hague:** Turkey is taking a lead in the region, in particular in trying to persuade the Syrian authorities to go down the route of reform, rather than the route of repression. We very much welcome the highly active role—not yet a successful role, but a highly active role—played by the Turkish Government in that regard. Of course, we look to Turkey, particularly as an aspirant nation for membership of the European Union, always to set a strong example itself.

While condemning so many things that have happened in some countries, we should welcome the fact that in some other countries of the Arab world Governments are setting out plans for reform. In March, the King of Morocco announced a package of reforms, including putting the national human rights body on an independent footing and constitutional changes that will be put to a referendum. Jordan has announced committees on national dialogue and constitutional and economic reform, and we look forward to those reforms being agreed and implemented.

In Yemen, the economic, security and humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. More protesters were killed only last week by Government forces, in violence that the whole House will deplore. The United Kingdom supports the Gulf Co-operation Council's initiative to resolve the deadlock, which requires the President to step aside and a new Government to be formed who include members of the Opposition. We are in close contact with the GCC about the progress of negotiations, we have supported those negotiations, and we are in close contact with the United States and our partners in Europe about our wider approach to the country.

Instability in Yemen has serious implications for the terrorist threat from that country, and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has demonstrated the intent and capability to attack western targets inside and outside

Yemen. Britain and our allies are working around the clock to counter this threat and we will continue to do so. The arguments about the need for reform and dialogue apply to all countries in the region. Although each country is different, we will make the case to all that steps to reverse freedoms and curtail human rights are wrong and counterproductive.

We welcome the announcement in Bahrain that the state of national emergency will be lifted on 1 June and look forward to this commitment being met. We remain very concerned by the restrictions on freedom of speech and the reports of human rights abuses, including the widespread arrest of political activists and the severe charges brought against a number of doctors and nurses by a Bahraini tribunal. The Government of Bahrain must meet their human rights obligations and uphold political freedom, dialogue, equal access to justice and the rule of law. We also call on opposition groups in Bahrain to be prepared to enter into genuine dialogue.

**Caroline Lucas:** Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

**Mr Hague:** I have given way to the hon. Lady once already, but as she is the only representative of her party, I will give her a second go.

**Caroline Lucas:** That is very kind; I look forward to making many more interventions on that basis. Does the Secretary of State share the concern that Bahraini opposition activists will not receive fair trials and, if he does, does he think there is a role for the UK mission to send observers to witness those trials?

**Mr Hague:** We certainly expect and will demand fair trials, and I have discussed that situation with Bahrain's Foreign Minister in recent weeks, so it is very clear where the UK stands. We will send observers as necessary. Our embassy in Bahrain has been highly active for years in raising human rights concerns there, before the recent trouble, and in maintaining contact with opposition groups and good relations with the Government. We will keep that going.

Serious challenges also remain in Iraq. The formation of a national unity Government between Iraq's major political blocs remains incomplete, the security situation is fragile and political tensions have risen. In recent months there have been a number of high-profile attacks and targeted assassinations by al-Qaeda and insurgent groups, but we judge the Iraqi security forces to have the necessary capabilities to prevent a wholesale return to violence. With its young democracy, oil reserves and economic potential, Iraq can become an important stabilising influence in the region and a key contributor to global energy security. Compromises must be made to end the stalemate and tackle the many grave problems the country faces.

The Arab spring remains in its early stages, in my view, and has caused uncertainty as well as optimism, but the middle east peace process must not be allowed to become a victim of that uncertainty. Delay leaves a vacuum of leadership which can be exploited by extremists or lead to increased violence. We are deeply concerned by emerging reports that up to 17 people were killed and many more injured over the weekend in violence in Israel and the occupied territories. We call on all parties to exercise restraint and protect civilian life.

The House will join me in paying tribute to the efforts of the UN special envoy, Senator Mitchell, who will step down from that position this week after two years of tireless efforts to restart talks. We believe that the parties must return to direct negotiations as soon as possible, on the basis of clear parameters for a two-state solution. We hope that the announcement of reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas will lead to a Government who reject violence and pursue a negotiated peace. President Abbas has reaffirmed his commitment to a negotiated two-state solution based on 1967 borders. A new Government have yet to be formed, but when that happens we will judge them by their actions and their readiness to work for peace.

**Mr David Burrowes** (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): Today, when hon. Members from both sides of the House have joined in celebrating the 63rd anniversary of the independence of Israel, will the Foreign Secretary offer an assurance that the Government will not provide any support for organisations such as Hamas, which threatens not only Israel's independence, but its very existence?

**Mr Hague:** We have not changed in any way our policy on Hamas. That is why I am making this statement about judging a future Palestinian Administration by their actions and readiness to act for peace.

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): Further to that point, will the Foreign Secretary make clear the central importance that the Government place on the Quartet principles and state that no organisation, particularly Hamas in this instance, may genuinely be part of the peace process while it remains committed to Israel's destruction?

**Mr Hague:** Securing peace in the middle east must of course be done on the basis of the Quartet principles, which is why we will judge any Palestinian Administration by the conditions I have set out. As I have often said, we look to Hamas to make concrete movement towards the Quartet principles, which remain of central importance.

**Mr David Winnick** (Walsall North) (Lab): I have lost count of the number of Foreign Secretaries who have told us that every effort would be made to bring about a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Time and again that promise has been made, and I am sure with every genuine wish that it should be brought about, but it has not been. The situation of the Palestinians remains precisely what it has been since the occupied territories were taken in 1967. Is there any possibility that the United States—to a large extent it is the United States alone that will decide this—will move more than it has done so far, which in fact has not been much?

**Mr Hague:** It is no discredit to my predecessors that they have worked hard on this, and it would be wrong to desist from doing so just because we have not been successful so far. I believe that President Obama will make a major speech this week on these matters, including the middle east peace process. The United States of course plays a central role in pushing this forward.

**Sir Gerald Kaufman** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): Could the Foreign Secretary explain how negotiations can take place and be successful in the new situation of

[*Sir Gerald Kaufman*]

a reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, which is exceptionally important, if Hamas is to be excluded in some way from peace making? Does he not remember Abba Eban, the former Israeli Foreign Minister, saying that one makes peace by talking to one's enemies?

**Mr Hague:** In this situation the interlocutor for Israel remains President Abbas. He insists, I understand, that he is available to negotiate with Israel on the same basis as before, that the Government he has formed will be ready to do that and that Hamas will not have changed the Government's policy. I hope that a return to negotiations will be possible, notwithstanding all the difficulties the House can see.

**Mr Stewart Jackson** (Peterborough) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for being generous in giving way. On the point made by the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), does my right hon. Friend recognise the concern shared by many Members that until Hamas repudiates its stated position, which is that the state of Israel should not exist, it cannot come to the table? Furthermore, does he agree that unilateral declarations of statehood, rather than round-table discussions without conditions, are not the best way forward and that the latter are?

**Mr Hague:** Negotiations on statehood are certainly the best way forward, but it is when those negotiations get nowhere that discussions about unilateral recognition get going in the world. That has to be recognised by all concerned. Yes, it is of course important for any peace in the future that all concerned recognise Israel's right to exist, forswear violence and recognise previous agreements.

I am conscious that at this rate of progress mine might be the only speech in this debate and that I am yet to touch on Pakistan and Afghanistan, so I am going to be a little less generous in giving way and I will shorten what I was going to say about Iran.

The same urgency must apply to our efforts to address Iran's nuclear programme, which remains a vital international issue. Tackling Iranian nuclear proliferation will remain at the centre of our approach to the region. We are seeking to intensify, including through the EU, the impact of existing sanctions in order to slow down Iran's acquisition of material and finance for its nuclear programme and press the Iranian Government to reconsider their position. The people of the middle east aspire to a better future. Iran's nuclear ambitions are a threat to that future, as are the continued efforts of terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

No country has suffered more from the scourge of terrorism than Pakistan. In the 10 years since 9/11, more than 30,000 of its civilians have been killed and many more maimed or injured, including the 80 people killed in a suicide attack last week. Osama bin Laden's death is therefore a blow against the forces undermining the Pakistani state and an opportunity for Pakistan, working with Britain and its allies, to redouble the fight against violent extremism. Pakistan should certainly address the many serious questions surrounding bin Laden's likely support network in Pakistan. We welcome Prime Minister Gilani's announcement of an investigation,

which must be credible and thorough, but it is right that we support the Government of Pakistan in their efforts to defeat terrorism. More than 1 million people of Pakistani origin live in the UK and what happens in Pakistan directly affects us. As we help Pakistan today, we are also investing in our future security. The enhanced strategic dialogue that our Prime Minister launched with Pakistan last month strengthens our co-operation on many shared interests and supports that long-term goal.

We want the people of Pakistan to know that the UK seeks a long-term partnership with Pakistan for generations ahead. British development support is helping to tackle inequalities in Pakistani society, to get more children into school and to build communities that are more resistant to radicalisation. Whatever its concerns about sovereignty, Pakistan should use the opportunity of bin Laden's death to side unconditionally with all those aiming to defeat al-Qaeda, including Muslim countries. We hope that Pakistan will decide not to turn its back in any way on the west, but to take up the offer of partnership from us and the Americans and to use this moment in order to build long-term strategic partnerships.

Neighbouring Afghanistan remains at the top of the Government's priorities in foreign affairs.

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm the very welcome report last week that the Prime Minister intends to make an announcement this month on the repatriation of 450 British troops—a report that gave great hope to the loved ones of those soldiers?

**Mr Hague:** I am coming on to Afghanistan, and I will talk briefly about troop levels, but I will leave any such announcement for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

We have received news in the past 24 hours—the hon. Gentleman's remarks relate to this topic—of the death of a Royal Marine from 42 Commando Royal Marines, and the whole House will join me in paying tribute to that officer and in expressing our sincere condolences to his family.

Osama bin Laden's death will not mean the end of the security threat posed by the insurgency, or of the need to build up the capacity of Afghans to take charge of their own affairs. We remain committed to building a stable and secure Afghanistan that is able to prevent international terrorist groups from operating from its territory. Bin Laden's death presents a clear opportunity for the Taliban to break decisively from al-Qaeda and to participate in a peaceful political process.

I wish to spend the remaining few minutes of my speech—so that others can speak—updating the House on recent developments and on the Government's overall strategy, treating these remarks as our quarterly report to Parliament on progress in Afghanistan. At the close of this debate, the Secretary of State for International Development will inform the House of development progress.

The next four years in Afghanistan will be decisive. The Prime Minister has made clear that by 2015 our troops will no longer have a combat role or be there in the numbers they are in now. President Karzai and the international security assistance force coalition have

confirmed that, by then, Afghanistan will be in charge of its own security. That process of security transfer is already under way, and President Karzai announced in March the first group of provinces and districts where the transition will begin. Lashkar Gah district in Helmand is in that first group, confirming the progress that we have made in improving security in central Helmand. The National Security Council has approved our strategy that will support this transition over the next four years.

The momentum of the insurgency has been halted and, in many areas, reversed. Afghan and ISAF forces are now working to consolidate gains, which are not yet irreversible, and levels of violence have been relatively low in recent months, although a little higher than in the same period last year. In April there were a number of insurgent attacks, including the barbaric assault on a UN compound in Mazar-e-Sharif and an attack on the Defence Ministry in Kabul, and there was the escape of a large number of insurgent detainees from prison in Kandahar. Those incidents underline the need to continue pursuing our counter-insurgency strategy and our efforts to build Afghan security capacity, but they should also be seen as of limited wider impact when placed in the context of the campaign. In early May, Taliban leaders announced the start of their spring offensive, and we must therefore be prepared for such attacks to continue.

The UK's overall military contribution is well over 10,000 troops. In task force Helmand's area of operation, our focus is on maintaining momentum and retaining the tactical initiative in preparation for the end of the poppy harvest, when Helmand's fighting-age males, many of whom have in previous years turned to the insurgency for employment, must be encouraged not to do so again. We keep our force levels under constant review, and some reductions this year may be possible, to answer the question from the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn), dependent upon conditions on the ground and the implementation of the security transition.

If the transition of security responsibilities to the Afghans is to succeed and endure, we have to build up Afghan capacity, and we are making progress on that. Afghan security forces responded capably to the Taliban's co-ordinated assault on Kandahar city on 7 May. The numbers in the Afghan security forces continue to grow ahead of schedule, but just as important are the improvements being made in their capability and professionalism.

Some 95% of ISAF operations are conducted side by side with Afghan forces, and about 74% of Afghan national army kandaks and 75% of Afghan national police are now rated as effective with advisers or effective with assistance. Eleven out of 12 planned ANA branch schools are now open, teaching the soldiers the skills they will need to move from an infantry-centric force to a more self-supporting organisation.

Literacy rates in the army continue to improve, with 80,000 members of the security forces having now completed a period of literacy training and a further 60,000 in training at any one time. The NATO training mission estimates that in nine months more than half the Afghan security force will have completed basic literacy training, compared with just 15% today.

We continue to work with the Afghan Government and our international partners to support reconciliation in Afghanistan and to make progress towards a political

settlement. We want a durable and inclusive settlement that respects the interests and rights of all Afghans. I agree with Secretary Clinton, who said on 18 February that we must intensify our efforts on a political process. We need to take advantage of military and civilian gains to make 2011 a year of reconciliation and transformation in Afghanistan. We will work with anyone who genuinely shares the goal of a secure, stable and prosperous Afghanistan that is not threatening to its neighbours and who is not threatened by it, and we look to the Bonn conference later this year as an important opportunity for progress.

In all the countries and regions that I have discussed today, we have a strong national interest in both democracy and stability, and our country is playing a major role bilaterally through the European Union, the United Nations and NATO, including in Afghanistan, where we are the second largest contributor of international forces.

This year already stands out as a momentous year in foreign affairs—one that not only gives rise to great optimism about the potential for greater economic and political freedom in a part of the world that has known little of either, but that generates risks to the United Kingdom which we will work to anticipate and address, working with our allies to protect our nation's interests while standing up for the highest values of our society.

6.7 pm

**Mr John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): This debate certainly covers a vast number of countries of interest, but it does not include China, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Mr Alexander), the shadow Foreign Secretary, is visiting today, as he mentioned in last week's exchanges. It is also unfortunate that so much other business has been put on today's agenda, given what is clearly a timely, popular and well supported debate.

I accept that we are in somewhat uncharted territory, and we recognise the difficulty for the Government of making decisions in response to rapidly changing circumstances, but it is nevertheless necessary that those decisions are taken speedily and coherently and that they are implemented effectively. For Parliament to scrutinise the Government's performance properly, it is important that the Government share their thinking and the evolution of their doctrine in assessing options and that they ensure a firm grip on delivery.

I know that a considerable number of Members wish to speak, that they have an interest and considerable expertise in the subjects covered by the debate and that there is a time limit, so without more ado I will cover some, although not all, of the countries involved. Inevitably, given the dramatic death of Osama bin Laden, we must start with Afghanistan.

At the outset, let me make it clear that we believe that the allied forces were right to go into Afghanistan in response to 9/11, and that the UN was right to set up ISAF with the following mandate, which we should remind ourselves of today:

*“Stressing that all Afghan forces must adhere strictly to their obligations under human rights law, including respect for the rights of women, and under international humanitarian law,*

*Reaffirming its strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Afghanistan,*

[Mr John Spellar]

*Determining* that the situation in Afghanistan still constitutes a threat to international peace and security,

*Determined* to ensure the full implementation of the mandate of the International Security Assistance Force, in consultation with the Afghan Interim Authority established by the Bonn Agreement”.

That mandate, in its essence, remains relevant today.

The UK took the lead in the initial phase of ISAF, and our forces have played a prominent and—I am sure that hon. Members in all parts of the House recognise this—distinguished role since then. They show great skill, courage and determination in their operations, and some have made the ultimate sacrifice, including the Royal Marines sergeant mentioned by the Foreign Secretary. Others have suffered serious injuries that will affect their whole lives, as was highlighted in the statement made earlier. Because my constituency is very close to Birmingham, I recently talked to a nurse there who works at Queen Elizabeth hospital in Birmingham, who described how heartbreaking it is to see these once-fit young men who have desperate injuries but who remain enormously positive and resolute. We owe them a huge debt. The nation must honour the military covenant, and today’s statement is an important step in that process. I also join the Foreign Secretary in his tribute to aid workers in Afghanistan, a number of whom have died in trying to bring help to the people of Afghanistan. They have shown enormous dedication and courage.

We must look to the manner and timing of the handover of the governance of Afghanistan to the Afghan authorities, army and police. One of our key objectives was to prevent al-Qaeda from using Taliban-run Afghanistan as a base from which to launch terrorist attacks around the world. While Osama bin Laden’s death has not finished al-Qaeda, it has certainly dealt it a serious blow. It also confirms previous intelligence suggesting that nearly all of al-Qaeda has left Afghanistan. That probably means that Washington will start phased troop withdrawals in the next couple of months. We must be clear that the process is determined by the situation on the ground, not by the calendar, but also that it will start to happen shortly.

It is clear that intense internal discussions are going on in Washington, and some elements of those discussions are starting to emerge. Senator John Kerry, the chairman of the Senate foreign relations committee, last week described as “fundamentally unsustainable” the US’s current expenditure of \$10 billion a month on what he called a massive military operation with no end in sight. He made it clear that he was not advocating a “unilateral precipitous withdrawal”, but that the US ought to be working towards achieving what he described as the “smallest footprint possible”. The ranking Republican Senator, Richard Lugar, who also has huge experience on that committee, reinforced the message, saying:

“The question before us is whether Afghanistan is important enough to justify the lives and massive resources that are being spent there, especially given our nation’s debt crisis.”

The atmosphere in Washington shows that people feel that the death of bin Laden will have a significant effect on the setting of milestones and the pace and slope of the US troop withdrawal.

I hope that in his reply the Secretary of State for International Development will outline, as far as is prudent and possible, our plans in this regard and the

considerations that will shape the progress of the draw-down. Will he also, without being definitive, indicate the intended completion date, although we recognise that that will, of its essence, be tentative and might be varied in either direction? We all know that the British public are realistic and resolute, but it is also clear that they now want to see our boys, and increasingly our girls, starting to come home.

Will the Minister indicate what role he sees for the neighbouring powers—obviously Pakistan, but also Iran, Russia, China, India and possibly Turkey, as well as the various “stans”—in this process of a resolution for Afghanistan? They all have significant interests, which are not entirely geopolitical, and many also have kinship with ethnic groups within Afghanistan. However, their interests are not necessarily coincidental and will have to be carefully handled. It is in no one’s interests, neither in the wider world nor in the neighbouring powers, for Afghanistan once again to be a centre of instability and a haven for international terrorism. We need to decide what outcome is desirable and practicable and, together with the United States and the international community, move resolutely towards it.

In that context, what should be the basis of a settlement? First, there should be a new and more inclusive internal political arrangement in which enough Afghan citizens have a stake and the central Government have enough power and legitimacy to protect the country from threats within and without. Secondly, on which the first depends, there should be a new external settlement that commits Afghanistan’s neighbours to respecting its sovereign integrity, as outlined in the UN resolution that I have mentioned, and carries enough force and support to ensure that they abide by that commitment.

In the UN’s words, the internal settlement will require “a process by which the ex combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income”.

It will then require reconciliation, including ensuring that tribal, ethnic and other groups are represented and recognised. Parliament and parliamentarians should also be recognised and encouraged. Several Members of Parliament participated in the sessions with the group of Afghan parliamentarians who were over here last month and who are developing a vibrant approach to their democracy. That event was extremely welcome, and we congratulate the organisers, but a lot more needs to be done by us and by the international community to sustain the process. As has been self-evident in many exchanges about this in the Chamber, there must also be a sustained drive to cut corruption.

In many ways, we have been looking at events in what I will describe, in historical terms, as the north-west frontier region from the wrong end of the telescope. We are considering events in Pakistan in the light of their impact on Afghanistan, whereas the crucial issue is how Afghanistan will affect Pakistan, which is a country of 160 million people—it is the second largest Muslim country—with a significant military, including nuclear, capability. It is also, as the Foreign Secretary has rightly acknowledged on behalf of Britain, a country that has suffered considerable losses from fundamentalist terrorism, and it continues to do so even in recent days. We need to think very seriously about Pakistan’s concerns and prospects. This is not helped by some of the knee-jerk responses to the death of bin Laden that we have seen in the media, with too many people making facile assertions regarding

subjects about which they do not have, and may well never have, the full picture. Idle speculation on this matter is not helpful in forming an effective, considered judgment, and it is certainly not helpful in the internal politics of the region.

I therefore welcome the fact that the United States appears determined to continue to support Pakistan rather than to repeat the mistake that it made following the end of the Soviet invasion by cutting aid substantially and drastically. I note the welcome news in today's *Financial Times* that Senator Kerry is about to visit Pakistan. However, there is also a clear obligation on Pakistan, in terms of good governance, to improve its administration, especially in relation to tax collection; to improve educational opportunities, particularly in taking education away from fundamentalist madrassahs and thereby ensuring proper education for its young people; to enable and sustain a more pluralist society; and to engage in dialogue significantly to reduce tension with India, which occupies so much attention and resources in both countries.

**Malcolm Bruce:** Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that commentators in the British press who attack aid support for Pakistan and Afghanistan are missing the point in that if we do not deliver education, hope and livelihoods to those countries, the chances of reducing terrorism and disintegration are lower, not higher?

**Mr Spellar:** I certainly do. This is an argument that needs to be had right across the world. Recently in Australia, there was a big attack on the aid programme to Indonesia—again, it is substantial—which is designed to ensure proper secular, state-run education, so that youngsters do not only get their education in fundamentalist organisations. It is enormously important that we sustain that programme for the future of that country, the largest Muslim country, as it is for the future of Pakistan, the second largest Muslim country. That is essential not only for the long-term security of the region but for international security. I was encouraged by the comments of the Foreign Secretary on that subject, and I hope that the Secretary of State for International Development will enlarge on them in his response.

Turning to the middle east and north Africa, it has been rightly said that the death of bin Laden was a serious setback for al-Qaeda, but the most telling blow has been the Arab spring, with its demands for democracy and more open societies, and certainly not for al-Qaeda's dream of a return to mediaeval brutality. We should be realistic about the various elements that are involved in that movement and the possible course of developments.

I congratulate the Foreign Secretary on his Mansion House speech. I notice that he recycled quite a bit of it in his speech this evening. That is obviously part of the Government's commitment to be greener. However, the speech bears repetition. As he rightly said:

"Demands for open government, action against corruption and greater political participation will spread by themselves over time, not because Western nations are advocating them but because they are the natural aspirations of all people everywhere."

In that context, we should recognise that the events in the middle east and north Africa are not isolated. A tide has been sweeping around the world.

In spite of some disappointments, we should reflect on how much progress has been made around the world over the past couple of decades. Most countries in

south America have emerged from military dictatorship, are overcoming their ruthless, destructive guerrilla groups and are building a better future. Interestingly, in his famous Chicago speech in 1999, Tony Blair referred to the need for

"more effective ways of resolving crises, like that in Brazil."

Brazil is now a roaring economic power, and it has just celebrated the election of a new successive social democratic President. The countries of eastern Europe have returned to their European home, having thrown off the shackles of their corrupt, vicious, incompetent communist leaderships and the Warsaw pact. They have willingly joined NATO and the EU. Indonesia, which I mentioned in response to the right hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce), is the world's fourth most populous state and the largest Muslim state. In 10 years, it has gone from being a military-backed dictatorship to being a vibrant democracy with a rapidly expanding economy. It is now a G20 member and an effective partner against terrorism. There has been a seismic, historic shift in the international landscape, and we should recognise and welcome that.

That is why we fully supported and support the Government's decision to join international partners to enforce United Nations resolutions 1970 and 1973 in Libya. Those who query resolution 1973 and this country's rapid decision to act must consider how we would have felt, and how the world would have reacted, if Gaddafi's tanks and death squads had poured into Benghazi over that weekend and killed people, to use his words, "like rats". In this day and age, that would all have been carried out on 24-hour TV in real time.

While giving support, it is our responsibility, as a Parliament and as an Opposition, to scrutinise carefully the Government's conduct and effectiveness in fulfilling the task. We need from the Government a clearer and better articulated strategy. Frankly, we need them to explain how their self-imposed cuts to our expeditionary capability will enable them to implement the policy. The article that the Prime Minister wrote with the French and US Presidents in April said:

"So long as Gaddafi is in power, Nato and its coalition partners must maintain their operations so that civilians remain protected and the pressure on the regime builds".

It is incumbent on the Government to be clearer to this House and to the British people about how they propose to bring about such a resolution of this situation, especially in light of the comments over the weekend.

It was asked earlier, but I think it needs to be asked again, what is meant by "infrastructure targets". If it means command and control posts within a military structure, I understand that. I think it is arguable—I hope that the Attorney-General would back me—that that is perfectly within the bounds of the UN resolution. If, as some commentators have suggested, it means industrial infrastructure, and particularly electricity infrastructure, we have considerable doubts. Even in Kosovo, which was a major operation, the object was to immobilise the transmission systems not to destroy them, because after military operations are over, there is a need to reconstruct the country. It is difficult to do that without adequate electricity supplies. It is therefore important that we have clarity on what is meant by infrastructure. One meaning is perfectly within the current programme, but otherwise we have considerable questions and doubts.

[Mr Spellar]

It has to be clear that there is continuing international and regional support for our strategy. I can see no UN mandate for ground troops to move into Libya, and I think it is fair to say that there is no chance of getting such a mandate at the Security Council and no prospect of regional support. We must recognise that there is little appetite among the British public for such a course of action, and I suspect that the situation is similar in the United States and France.

I hope that the Secretary of State for International Development will update the House on the considerable efforts of his Department, with others in the international community, to assist the 750,000 people who are estimated to have crossed from Libya into neighbouring countries, and to get supplies to people in parts of Libya that are under siege from Libyan Government forces. I do not underestimate the task, but we need to know how we are tackling it, because it is substantial and urgent.

What are our realistic options across the middle east and north Africa? Although it is true that we are one of the few countries with the strategic capability to provide meaningful intervention, we must recognise the constraints imposed by our existing commitments elsewhere, the clear problems of overstretch, and the cuts made in the strategic defence and security review, which are increasingly seen as ill advised and outdated. Whatever action we take will be in conjunction with others, and not only our key strategic ally, the United States, but increasingly the EU, or at least key European allies. It has become clear, particularly in the last week or so, that a stretched United States has self-imposed limitations. Our European deliberations will have to consider that, and our response will have to be shaped accordingly. It is true that we could take a position of splendid isolation and say that those issues are nothing to do with us, but developments would continue in north Africa and the middle east. Although we should not overestimate our ability to shape events, we should not underestimate it either.

A key area is to develop capacity for the emerging democratic forces and parties in the countries concerned. It would be tragic if the principal beneficiaries of the new democracies were the remnants of the old dictatorial parties or underground fundamentalist Islamist groups. We should draw on the experience of eastern Europe, where post-communist parties were able to exert disproportionate influence because of their well-developed corrupt networks. I am sure all parties hope that the Westminster Foundation for Democracy will play a major role in building capacity for democratic parties.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I am listening with great interest to the right hon. Gentleman. I am slightly concerned that he may not have learned the lessons of the past, in particular with respect to Iraq, where a thoroughgoing programme of de-Ba'athification stripped out the whole of the middle class and political class, making reconstruction far more difficult than it might have been. Does he not think that we should be cautious about completely stripping out individuals who may have been associated in some small way with an unsavoury old regime?

**Mr Spellar:** The hon. Gentleman has misunderstood what I was saying. I fully agree that the de-Ba'athification programme and the disbanding of the Iraqi army

contributed substantially to many of Iraq's problems. I am turning that point around and saying that I do not want the established networks of the old corrupt parties or the well-organised networks of the Islamist groups, in particular the Muslim Brotherhood, to have a free field.

What I am talking about is not taking such people out of the structure but ensuring that emerging democratic forces, which by definition have been underground but are not organised in a Leninist fashion, can develop the capacity to compete on an equal playing field. They will then be able to play a proper role and not be outgunned—literally, sometimes, but certainly in finance and capacity—by other parties, which would have a detrimental effect. I am talking about building alternative capacity rather than moving along the route that the hon. Gentleman describes. That is the best prospect for the future of democracy in the countries in question.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Is my right hon. Friend aware that in Tunisia, there is serious concern about the resurrection of many of the security forces that existed under the Ben Ali regime, which are treating protests and demonstrations with great brutality and great force? They are breaking them up and seem to be trying to suppress the very voices of dissent that brought about the huge changes in February in the first place.

**Mr Spellar:** We certainly ought to be concerned about that; my hon. Friend highlights another significant concern. Because of the vast array of countries across a wide and diverse region, our debates focus on certain countries. Inevitably, today's debate will be focused primarily on Afghanistan and Libya, along with maybe one or two other countries. I am concerned that some of the countries that have been making some progress might start to slip off the radar, and it is important that we do not allow that to happen.

We must not allow our level of interest in the countries that are making progress to fall. Development there must be sustained, because there will not just be a steady path towards a democratic society. There will be pitfalls along the way. To make a comparison with eastern Europe again, the involvement of the secret police networks can be a considerable factor in the development of those countries, as I described earlier. We ought to be alert to that problem, but we should also take the positive way and build the capacity of democratic parties so that they can take the best advantage of democratic elections when they come.

I hope that Members of all parties will consider the role that the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and other such bodies can play in building capacity for democratic parties. The Foreign Secretary has announced substantial cuts in the Foreign Office programme—the sum will go down from something like £139 million to £100 million. We did not get details, but we need to know whether the cuts will have an impact on those organisations and their programmes.

In the Foreign Secretary's statement last week, he talked about increasing our presence in a number of missions across the world. Interestingly enough, only one of those, Pakistan, is in the area that we are discussing today. There was, understandably, mention of a reduction in Afghanistan and Iraq, but in none of the other countries concerned did it seem there would

be an increase in our local involvement despite the considerable interest that we need to be taking in them. On the face of it, that seems a slightly strange decision, and it would be helpful to have some explanation.

We have to recognise that not all of the liberation of eastern Europe went smoothly. Ethnic tensions rose to the surface, and in one case, Czechoslovakia, were resolved by a—fortunately peaceful—division of the state. Catastrophically, however, in Yugoslavia they led to vicious civil wars, appalling violence and the necessity of NATO intervention. Some states in north Africa and the middle east are fairly homogenous, but others are riven by ethnic differences and, in some cases, considerable and long-standing ethnic feuds. The international community must use all its endeavours to ensure that the outcome of the Arab spring is more like Poland than Yugoslavia. In that context, I welcome the Foreign Secretary's comments about Tunisia and hope, as I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), that we will not focus only on countries where there is conflict. We must also provide assistance to those that are making a more orderly transition.

I shall move on briefly to the middle east and the Israel-Palestine issue. I am sure that everyone in the House and internationally is frustrated by the failure to get engagement in substantive talks leading to the creation of a new Palestinian state, living peacefully side by side with Israel. We echo the Foreign Secretary's statement yesterday, which he repeated today, when he expressed Britain's concern about the violence on the border and the loss of life, and called on all parties to exercise restraint. We should be persuaders for peace, to ensure that Palestinian aspirations can be realised alongside Israel's equally legitimate desire for a peaceful existence within secure and recognised borders.

**Mr Winnick:** I certainly do not question Israel's right to exist—I have made my views about that clear over the years. It was brought into existence by the international community and has as much right to exist as any other state, but not in the occupied territories. How can Israel genuinely say that it wishes to bring about a two-state solution at some stage—not that it has put much emphasis on that—when so much of the occupied territories has had settlements built on it? On what site is the second state, the proposed Palestinian state, going to exist?

**Mr Spellar:** I say to my hon. Friend and near neighbour that in all the discussions on the middle east, and particularly on Palestine-Israel, there is a danger of what David Ervine of the Progressive Unionist party in Northern Ireland, who went from terrorist activities to a very significant role in the peace process, described as “whataboutery”. I could equally respond to my hon. Friend's valid points by asking, what about this, that and the other? What about the failure to implement the Camp David accord? What about the terrorist activities?

At the end of the day, the international community and the parties concerned have to get back to the basic fundamental principle of ensuring the establishment of a two-state solution on borders agreed internationally and between the parties, with the states living together in harmony. I cannot put it better than UN Security Council resolution 1850, which said that

“lasting peace can only be based on an enduring commitment to mutual recognition, freedom from violence, incitement, and terror, and the two-State solution”.

I very much hope, as I am sure we all do, that the visit of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to Washington this month will intensify that process and involve a relaunch of the peace initiative by the Obama Administration. I am sure we all look forward to the President's address on that subject.

**Dr Julian Lewis:** The right hon. Gentleman is speaking very sensibly on this subject. I have always supported a two-state solution. Does he agree that Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza strip, where there were many settlements, shows that if an agreement for withdrawal could be reached, settlements need not stand in the way?

**Mr Spellar:** Yes, and I presume that the hon. Gentleman would also have mentioned the fact that the Israeli army enforced those movements at the direction of Sharon. Pointing such things out is important, but it is equally important to get back to the fundamental need for talks and negotiation on the acceptance of a two-state solution. From many of the discussions that there have been, I do not believe that the sides are too far apart on the detail. We therefore look forward to the initiative that we hope the US Administration will take later this month, which we hope all parties will then pursue.

On Syria, we welcome the Foreign Secretary's comments about making approaches to the EU and the UN to step up pressure on the regime. At the moment, however, the regime seems well past his “fork in the road”, and I hope that the message is getting through to it clearly.

I am mindful of the time, Mr Deputy Speaker, and of the numbers who wish to speak in the debate, so I wish to raise only two other issues—and to do so briefly. First, on protecting our security and national interest, and ensuring stability in the region, the Foreign Secretary will be unsurprised if I once again raise the issue of piracy off the coast of Somalia. The problem now stretches right round the gulf of Aden and out into the Indian ocean, which has a considerable effect on countries in the region. Nearly 800 seafarers are being held hostage, often in appalling conditions. Some have been brutally murdered. More than 30 ships are being held—some are used as mother ships to extend the pirates' reach far into the Indian ocean. Ransoms totalling well over \$100 million were paid last year, and there are credible reports that the pirates have entered a deal with the al-Shabab organisation in Somalia, which is linked to al-Qaeda, for a percentage of the ransom.

Therefore, in effect, the shipping industry is directly funding terrorism. There has been some response, but I feel that it has been inadequate. I had a helpful response from an Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, but I was concerned when a Defence Minister told me that there had been no recent change in the rules of engagement. I recognise that there is no easy instant solution, but there is a danger that the crisis will continue to outrun and overwhelm the response. Piracy threatens not only lives but a vital world trade route. Incidentally, the unwillingness of crews and ships to go through the Suez canal and pay dues could have a damaging effect on the income of the emerging Egyptian democracy. Frankly, the Government need to get a grip on that. They must engage with other maritime nations and get commitments for sufficient ships and personnel, but there must also be a step change in the rules of engagement and operational tempo.

[Mr Spellar]

To pull those arguments together and put them in a broader context, we do not accept that if we intervene anywhere in the world, we must take action everywhere. Nor do we accept the converse—that if we cannot or will not take action in one country, we should be immobilised elsewhere. That is why the previous Labour Government, when I was a Defence Minister, intervened militarily in Sierra Leone, but were unable to take action against the brutally repressive Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe.

I also accept—the Opposition have supported the Government in this respect—that a range of factors must be taken into consideration, and that countries must be considered on a case-by-case basis. However, we would like evidence not only of more coherent planning, but of more rigorous analysis. Around the time of Kosovo both Tony Blair, in his Chicago address, and Kofi Annan, in his Ditchley lecture, extensively developed the doctrine of humanitarian intervention. They might have been controversial, but they helped to create a framework within which policy could be decided, and indeed scrutinised and criticised.

I have not detected the development of such a doctrine in the speeches of the Foreign Secretary, including his speech today. The Opposition support much in his policy, but we require the Government as a whole to get their act together on policy and to be more effective on delivery. In short, we believe that it is time for them to get a grip.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** Order. A time limit of eight minutes will be imposed, plus two minutes for injury time. However, I caution Members to frame a six-minute speech in their heads, because that is what they are likely to be allotted by the time they are called.

6.43 pm

**Sir Malcolm Rifkind (Kensington) (Con):** In the short time available, I shall concentrate my comments on two matters: first, the conclusions we should draw from bin Laden's demise, and secondly, the remaining challenges faced by the international community with regard to Libya.

Bin Laden's demise was of course an historic event. We should not underestimate the significance of the US special forces operation, or of the extraordinary intelligence operation that their achievement represented. The timing of the operation is significant in that it happened right in the middle of the Arab spring. What could better demonstrate the ultimate irrelevance of what al-Qaeda has to offer? There is reason to believe—a massive amount of evidence has emerged from throughout the Arab world—that the lure and attraction of, and the significance of and interest in, al-Qaeda are beginning to wane. Al-Qaeda not only does not feature in the demands of the hundreds of thousands of people who demonstrate throughout the Arab world for reform and change, but it has been positively rejected by many as they advance claims for universal values.

However, if we begin to believe that the attraction of al-Qaeda is waning in the Arab world, I caution the House against coming to a similar conclusion with

regard to Pakistan. We are in a very different time zone there when it comes to the possibilities of change. Bin Laden may have been of Saudi or Yemeni origin, but we should remember that ultimately the al-Qaeda movement originated in south Asia, not in the Arab world. We also know that that happened in the context of experiences in Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is perhaps significant and not irrelevant—I do not want to anticipate events—that the only revenge act so far in response to the assassination of bin Laden has come not from al-Qaeda or the Afghan Taliban, but from the Pakistani Taliban, who feel, and who have expressed sympathy for al-Qaeda and endorsed it.

That is significant for how we see developments in Afghanistan. There is a powerful argument for saying that if our original purpose for going into Afghanistan was the threat of al-Qaeda operating from within the country, that reason is now much less valid than it has been at any time in the past few years. However, the question of the timing and method of our withdrawal from Afghanistan must take into account not just the implications within that country, but to an even greater extent, the possible consequences for the destabilisation of Pakistan. Up to now, we have primarily worried about the consequences of al-Qaeda or the Afghan Taliban using the border as a refuge zone, but in some ways, things are now the other way around. As the right hon. Member for Warley (Mr Spellar) said, the problem in Pakistan is of far greater significance to the wider stability of the world, and it must be given priority. I hope that that is taken into account.

On Libya, I pay tribute to what has already been achieved. There is no doubt that Benghazi would have experienced an incredible massacre, and that Misrata would have been overthrown by Gaddafi, but for the efforts that have been made. However, those who have warned of the dangers of stalemate pose a real question. Without wanting to criticise the Government—I am aware of the international constraints on what they can do—there is a fundamental inconsistency in arguing that the mission is purely humanitarian at the same time as making it clear that it cannot be completed until we have, in effect, regime change.

The question, therefore, is this: how does one square that circle, and can it be squared in a way that does not breach the UN resolution? Whether we like it or not, that is the framework within which we must operate. As I see it, there are only three ways in which that stalemate can be broken over a reasonable period of time. First, implosion in Tripoli is quite possible. In the past few months, a significant number of leading Gaddafi adherents have defected. It is not impossible or inconceivable—it could happen next week or next month—that many of the senior adherents who remain, including generals and Cabinet Ministers, will simply fade away and disappear. I suspect that even Gaddafi's immediate family will eventually not wish to share his bunker. Saif al-Islam and some of his colleagues might prefer to be in the south of France rather than the quagmire that Gaddafi's regime could become.

That is one option, but we cannot count on it, and certainly not in any short time scale. The second option is a very slow process of gradual disintegration of the regime. That might be happening already because of the combined impact of economic sanctions and the fact that the oilfields are primarily in the east of the country, with very little utilisable refining capacity in

the west, plus all the other forms of political, diplomatic and other pressure that is being put on the regime. However, by itself, that will not deliver the outcome that we need to bring this matter to a conclusion for many months, and possibly for several years. It is a serious option, but do we want to contemplate that the international action will take that long?

That leads me to the third option. What do we do, and what can we do within the UN resolution, to help the insurgents who are struggling for freedom and the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime? We have had a crucial watershed in the past couple of weeks in how the British and other Governments treat those insurgents. This is perhaps the first debate in which they have not been described as rebels. For many months, that was the description used not just in this country, but elsewhere, but that is no longer the case. The insurgents have been invited to open an office in London, they are being treated as serious politicians, and they are rightly considered to have greater legitimacy than the Gaddafi regime, which I welcome. However, we also know that they do not have the military capability with which to achieve the result that we all want.

The question is whether that can be achieved within the terms of the UN resolution. If it requires us—I do not complain about this—simply to protect civilians, what happens if there is hand-to-hand fighting in Misrata or Tripoli? It could not be stopped by air power or an international coalition; it could be stopped only by the people on the ground. Only they could protect civilians in such a situation. Therefore, I argue—and I believe that some of the legal advice agrees—that if we could be satisfied that the provision of military assistance to the insurgents would help to protect civilian lives and deal with the threat to civilians in Libya, it would be consistent with the resolution. In those circumstances, that kind of help should be considered. In reality, of course, that sort of help is already being given. The French, the Qataris and several other countries are already providing it, whether or not they acknowledge it publicly.

Were that help to be provided—I am talking about training as well as weapons—two things would happen. First, those around Gaddafi would know that the game was up, and gradually, as the insurgents became more of a disciplined, trained military force, it would become obvious—in their view, as well as in ours—that the regime was finished. Secondly, Misrata and the east of the country would gradually be united under insurgent control, and Gaddafi's remaining power would be so restricted as to be insignificant. That is the real challenge, not just for the British Government, but for the international community, and I believe that we can respond to this situation positively within the terms of the UN resolution.

6.51 pm

**Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): I am glad that the Foreign Secretary mentioned Iraq, because it is seldom mentioned now, and needs to be mentioned far more often. I have three recent Amnesty reports on Iraq that are well worth reading, because they point out some of the deficiencies in the Iraq that we have left behind. Tens of thousands of Iraqis, emboldened by the successful uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, have taken to the streets since early February to protest against the chronic lack of basic services, rising prices, mass unemployment and endemic corruption, and to demand greater civil and political rights. Unfortunately, the security forces have

frequently responded with excessive force, using live ammunition, sound bombs and other weapons forcibly to disperse peaceful protesters, particularly during what the Iraqis called the “day of rage” on 25 February, when demonstrations were held across Iraq. At least 20 people were killed, many of those arrested say that they were tortured or ill-treated, and journalists trying to cover the protests, as well as political activists, have been targeted for attack or threats.

I obviously have a particular interest in this subject because, for seven years, I was special envoy on human rights to Iraq for the previous two Prime Ministers. I therefore have an ongoing interest in the development of human rights there. During this “day of rage”, protesters used violence, mainly by throwing stones at members of the security forces or public buildings, and on rare occasions by setting fire to public buildings, and as a result members of the security forces have also been injured. On 30 March, in a belated but welcome development, the Iraqi authorities announced that their security forces were under orders not to use firearms against demonstrators except where necessary for self-defence.

Up to now, the Iraqi authorities, in both Baghdad and Kurdistan, have sought to crack down on peaceful protesters. That obviously has to change. As Amnesty wrote:

“They should be cracking down on the use of excessive force and torture by their own largely unaccountable security forces, not on the right of people to peacefully protest. The Iraqi authorities should be upholding the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, including the right to protest, not trying to suppress them. It is high time to do so...Torture and other ill-treatment were widespread in Iraq before the US-led invasion in 2003”,

of which we were part,

“and continued in prisons and detention facilities controlled by coalition forces and the new Iraqi governments. Since 2004, suspects held in Iraqi custody have been systematically tortured and dozens of detainees have died as a result.”

In my seven years as special envoy, I continually visited prisons and detention centres and spoke on many occasions to the Iraqi human rights Minister, to whom I pay tribute, because she has a difficult job but has not had enough support.

Amnesty also wrote that

“US forces handed over tens of thousands of prisoners to Iraqi custody between early 2009 and July 2010 without any guarantees that they will be protected.”

I argued constantly in this Chamber that they should not have been handed over to the Iraqis, because they did not have the capacity to deal with the thousands of detainees they were expected to hold. Amnesty also wrote that

“there is every likelihood that torture and ill-treatment will remain widespread. Such abuses have a devastating impact on the victims not just when they are being tortured or ill-treated, but often for years afterwards...Urgent action is needed to end the pattern of abuse and to help the victims and their families.”

I received an email from an American working in Iraq. His name is Tom Cruise—not the actor Tom Cruise—and he is the former senior adviser to the Iraqi Ministry of Defence directorate of human rights. He came to see me several times in the Baghdad embassy because of his great concern about an Iraqi prisoner killed while in detention. He wrote to me in February saying that he was still trying

“to bring attention to the disturbing torture and murder of detainee Adnan in...the former Iraqi 2/3/6 brigade which was run by BG Nasser who is now the Commander of the Iraqi 2nd DIV in Mosul.”

[Ann Clwyd]

He was tortured and murdered, and the person responsible was known to everybody. His name is Lieutenant Nabil Rahman Ali Mosa al-Yasseri. After eight months of intensive investigation by the FBI, he was located and arrested in al-Hillah. He was held for a mere 10 weeks, and then suddenly he departed. He was helped to escape. Tom Cruise wrote:

“I hope this communication can serve to bring the necessary attention to resurrect this matter and initiate further judicial action so the world can see that Iraq respects human rights and it is important for all and especially for Adnan Awad Mohammed Thaib Al-Jumaila and his family.”

Our embassy has raised this matter with the Iraqi President, Deputy President, Prime Minister and many others in Iraq, but with no results. Obviously, I think that the UK Government can play an important role in putting pressure on the Iraqi authorities to ensure that detainees are either released or brought promptly to trial on recognisable criminal charges, with full and fair trial rights and without recourse to the death penalty. We have invested too much—in money and blood—in the country to allow this abuse of human rights to continue in Iraq.

6.59 pm

**Richard Ottaway** (Croydon South) (Con): It is, as ever, a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), who is a Foreign Affairs Committee member.

In my judgment, we made the right decision in March to establish a no-fly zone. At the time, there were concerns about a stalemate and about setting a precedent, but we had a UN resolution and a request from the Arab League to support us and to quell our doubts. The question was whether to intervene or not to intervene, and we chose the lesser of two evils to save Benghazi. As a result, there has been no slaughter in Benghazi, and to that extent it has been a success. We do have a stalemate, however. The question now is how to break the stalemate.

The UN resolution has been widely interpreted. We had the rather unexpected remarks over the weekend of General Sir David Richards, the Chief of the Defence Staff, who has called for a change in the rules of engagement to enable NATO to attack infrastructure to oust Gaddafi. There is a clear difference in our policy between our military and our political objectives. Our military objectives are humanitarian—in that, we are backed up by a United Nations resolution—whereas our political objective, which is not backed by the UN, is to remove Gaddafi. I think that General Richards has come pretty darn close to the latter course of action, touching on the political objectives. As the right hon. Member for Warley (Mr Spellar) said, regime change was set out by Tony Blair in his Chicago speech. I do not support that speech—I do not believe in regime change, and I reject the notions that he set out—but there is a difference between wanting regime change and using military force to achieve it, and General Richards is close to that concept.

The question that I would put to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development is whether General Richards was authorised to make that speech. Is there a legal opinion that says that targeting infrastructure is legal? Can he say what General Richards meant by infrastructure? Was he talking about

refineries and power stations? If so, then in my opinion that would not be legal. Going down that road would need an amendment to Security Council resolution 1973 and, of course, a further resolution of this House, which adopted it. Such a policy would also be divisive within NATO. Furthermore, it is not in Libya's interest to wipe out its economy by attacking the refineries and power stations. When we come to help rebuild that country, we will need that infrastructure—that was one of the mistakes that we made in Iraq. We may be critical in the House of Commons about what is happening in Libya, but it is our reputation and the perception of the Arab world that counts.

So what is the exit strategy? Having achieved the military objective, how will the Government achieve their political objective? There is a big gap between the two concepts. There is nothing wrong with the no-fly zone, the economic sanctions and the hope that a lucky hit on a command and control centre will destroy Gaddafi, but we need to send clear messages to the regime around him. I invite my right hon. Friend to consider the possibility of an amnesty. Why not suggest an amnesty for those around Gaddafi who abandon him and co-operate in bringing him down? It is not beyond the realms of credibility to start talks between the regime and the rebels. We do it where the IRA is concerned and we are proposing to do it in Afghanistan, so why not in Libya?

Let me touch briefly on the Government's decision to cut the World Service and the Arabic service that it broadcasts. We need soft power to help us in this situation. Cutting the World Service at this point is a mistake.

What is happening in Syria is wholly unacceptable, but the army is solidly behind President Assad. He had a choice, between reform and oppression, and he chose repression, so why do we not have a no-fly zone there? The difference is that we have neither a request from the Arab League nor a UN resolution. I regret the Arab League's inconsistency and silence on Syria. I have no doubt that it is silent because no one wants the next domino to fall—that is the Arab League's reservation—but it is still regrettable that it remains silent.

The death of Osama bin Laden represents an opportunity in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Foreign Affairs Committee calls for talks in Afghanistan, and I believe that there is a momentum there that can be built on. However, we have to rebuild the relationship between Pakistan and the United States. Pakistan is a key player. It is a nuclear power and will be involved in any settlement negotiations in Afghanistan. Pakistan is clearly shaken by the death of Osama bin Laden. When the Foreign Affairs Committee went there last October, I was quite shaken by the level of hostility expressed by people in the Pakistan Administration towards the United States. Patching up the relationship will not be smooth, but Britain has a unique role to play. It is the one country in the world that is trusted by both the United States and Pakistan, and it is not beyond the realms of credibility to try to broker talks. Indeed, may I venture to suggest that we could broker talks between the two here in London?

This is a busy time in foreign affairs. I conclude by paying tribute to the Foreign Office. It is having to address action on two fronts, with the usual consular challenges all around. It has a trade policy that it is desperately trying to promote, and it is also dealing with more than its fair share of natural disasters. We have the middle east situation to deal with and, of

course, the latest developments in Israel and Palestine. The Foreign Office faces a challenging situation, but in all this it has the full support of the Foreign Affairs Committee. We will of course engage in constructive criticism of the Foreign Office, but we want it and Britain to succeed. As a diplomatic organisation the Foreign Office is the envy of the world. Let us try to keep it that way.

7.6 pm

**Sir Gerald Kaufman** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): Three months ago it seemed that the Arab spring in north Africa and the middle east might bring democracy to widespread areas of the region. Tunisia made major changes with its jasmine revolution, and Egypt rid itself of the Mubarak regime, even though the aftermath rumbles on. Now, however, the situation seems far less promising. Syria, Bahrain and Yemen continue to suppress the movements for democracy, with continuing serious loss of life inflicted by brutal regimes.

In Libya, not only has the situation reached deadlock, but misgivings must be aroused by NATO's lack of political direction. UN Security Council resolution 1973 was right and necessary. There is no doubt that the implementation of the no-fly zone has saved very many lives. However, NATO now appears to be stuck, turning to regime-change policies, which are in no way authorised by the resolution. Loathsome though Gaddafi may be, attacks on his compound, apparently targeting him personally, are unacceptable, and it is deplorable that members of his family have been killed. There is no way in which the Security Council has authorised political assassination. It is essential that there should be a clear line of political control, linked to discernible political objectives. The resolution would otherwise never have been nodded through by Russia and China. It is a matter of concern that over the weekend General Sir David Richards tried to state political objectives that are not within his remit. Our brave armed forces are there to carry out objectives decided politically. It is not their leaders' role to make or urge political policies.

Political assassination appears to be becoming the flavour of the month. I shed no tears for Osama bin Laden, a monster who was responsible for this century's most lurid atrocity, but for Barack Obama to violate another country's sovereignty by sending in an assassination squad must arouse deep concern, especially as the White House has made so many conflicting statements that it is impossible to know what really happened in Abbottabad. Was bin Laden armed, and did he seek to resist with arms, thus provoking the Americans to kill him? Did he try to use women as human shields, or was he unarmed? Was any real attempt made to take him alive and put him on trial for his crimes? The White House's handling of the situation has turned a killing into reality TV. There is also a lethal aftermath: 80 innocent Pakistanis were killed by the Taliban at the weekend in what they say was a revenge attack, with a threat of more to come. Did the Americans think this through before they acted?

This latest episode confirms—to me, at any rate—that Obama is simply a sanctimonious version of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush. An example is his breaking his pledge to shut down the Guantanamo Bay illegal torture camp. As Zbigniew Brzezinski, the former US national security adviser, has said of Obama: he does not strategise; he sermonises. Nowhere has Obama's failure been more damaging than in his handling of—or

inability to handle—the Israel-Palestine stand-off. On 4 June 2009, he made a ponderous speech in Cairo that was supposed to launch a successful peace initiative. Now, two years later, not only has there been no such initiative but his envoy has packed it in and the situation has become threateningly worse. We are told that the President is going to say something more, quite soon. He will be praised for his oratory, but will it have any practical, useful or helpful consequences?

This past weekend, Israeli soldiers slaughtered 14 more Palestinian protesters. Last week, they murdered a Palestinian teenager on the west bank. Their brutal treatment of peaceful protestors with rubber bullets, tear gas, the spraying of sewage and the manhandling of women and children would be the object of condemnation if inflicted by any other country. The way in which Israeli soldiers maltreat Palestinians is appalling. A Palestinian contact of mine e-mailed me at the weekend with this description of what happened on Friday:

“In Nabi Saleh where I was, the soldiers attacked the men and women with extreme cruelty, although our demonstration was extremely peaceful. We had at least 24 injuries, without counting injuries with pepper spray. They were shooting the gas canisters right at us, aiming at our bodies. One American citizen was shot with a canister on his head. I was standing right to him and I saw the soldier aiming at him. The man is fine now, but he lost part of his scalp.”

I cannot fault the way in which our Government have reacted to this situation, and I particularly commend the Secretary of State for International Development for the way in which his Department has done everything possible to assist those affected. In the end, however, only the United States can exert the necessary pressure to make Israel see sense. The Palestinians are an oppressed people, and the Israelis will never know peace and security until there is a two-state solution. How long, O Lord, how long?

7.13 pm

**Malcolm Bruce** (Gordon) (LD): As befits my role as Chair of the International Development Select Committee, I will concentrate on the development aspects of this wide-ranging debate. In the context of Libya, I echo the words of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman) about the Department's prompt response to the emerging crisis in north Africa, and especially to the evacuation of people fleeing the violence of the conflict. I also commend the non-governmental organisations that are operating in difficult conditions, often under fire, to provide medical relief, assistance and support to those beleaguered people.

We all recognise the capacity of the Department to respond to these situations, and the way in which it has done so is extremely welcome, although I think that the Secretary of State would agree that Libya is not a prime target for our aid programme and budget, and nor should it be. Clearly, reconstruction should be carried out within the country's own resources, but in regard to the first and immediate response, it is good to know that we can respond as well as we have done. In passing I would point out that, as and when we get a resolution that enables Libya to start its reconstruction, the prime investment should come from within its own resources and those of its Arab League neighbours, although we will want to have a constructive engagement if, as we hope, a more benign regime emerges from the conflict.

[*Malcolm Bruce*]

As far as the rest of the middle east is concerned, one area of interest is the role of the European Union's external relations strategy. It has focused on the neighbourhood to the east of Europe, which does not have quite the same affinity but which has nevertheless been pursuing a Mediterranean policy. I hope that our Government will encourage the EU to shift the emphasis of its neighbourhood policy towards north Africa a little, rather than seeking to draw down more of the development budget from the UK. It is a matter of some embarrassment that the money we pay into the central budget of the EU goes into a neighbourhood policy that is classified as overseas development assistance, the prime beneficiary of which is Turkey. There is nothing wrong with encouraging Turkey to join the European Union, but it is a little disappointing that that overseas development assistance, which the UK would prefer to go to the poorest people in the poorest countries, is going to those who have the capacity to address their own problems. I hope that the UK has a degree of authority to assert in this instance. Given that we will be the first G20 country to achieve a 0.7% commitment on overseas development assistance by 2013, I think that we are entitled to say to other members of the European Union, which will not have achieved that, that they should not be diverting their aid away from where it could be most effectively targeted.

I intervened on the Foreign Secretary about the middle east peace process. We will be giving £343 million to the occupied Palestinian territories over the lifetime of this Parliament, which is a tragedy because we would not have to give anything if a proper peace process were in place. The area is not incapable of economic activity; it is prevented from being economically active by the frozen conflict. We should use whatever influence we have through the Quartet—I accept that the United States is the dominant influence—to point out to Israel that if it responds to the protests of the frustrated Palestinians in the way that Syria has responded to its protesters, the international community has a responsibility to put pressure on Israel to behave differently, even if we have no ability to intervene in Syria. We must point out that, if Israel does not unblock the peace process now, it could make matters much worse in the short to medium term and that it is really missing an opportunity.

Afghanistan and Pakistan are totally interlinked. The irony is that it looks as though we have more possibility of achieving stability in Afghanistan, difficult though that might be, than we do in Pakistan. It is instructive to take on board the fact that we are committing £2.1 billion of UK overseas development assistance over the course of this Parliament to Pakistan and Afghanistan combined. We must ensure that people understand why we are doing that. The military engagement in Afghanistan understandably gets all the attention, because our soldiers—male and female—are losing their lives in that operation. At the end of the day, however, it is our ability to deliver real improvements in the quality of life, education, health and livelihoods in Afghanistan that will have the most chance of giving people a sense that our engagement has validity and that we are on their side rather than against them.

The same applies, perhaps even more, in Pakistan. I know that the Secretary of State has placed particular emphasis on visiting that country and ensuring that our

aid has precisely that effect. Pakistan has a huge, young and very suggestible population who are open to persuasion to take up extreme political positions. The best way to address that—although the outcome is not guaranteed—is to give people access to things that will give them a stake in the future and make them less inclined to join the terrorist activity to which they might otherwise be recruited.

I want to summarise the complicated developments taking place all over the world. Just as the collapse of the Soviet Union took place with unexpected suddenness, so did the onset of what is being called the Arab spring. Looking back to the collapse of the Soviet Union, we can see that we failed to hold Russia to a path of pluralism, democracy and human rights, but we were able to offer its satellites the opportunity to break away from the Soviet Union, achieve democracy and join NATO and the European Union. We cannot do quite the same for the Arab states, but we should hold out a hand of friendship and encouragement. To the extent that they can move towards pluralism, democracy and human rights, they will find willing partners to engage with in Europe.

We must not underestimate the fact that the Iraq war incensed middle eastern and Arab opinion. It also distracted us from the legitimate tasks in Afghanistan, took our eyes off Pakistan and, in many ways, damaged the legitimacy of the democratic world when engaging in these issues. We need to tread more softly if we are to build trust and respect that can open the way for economic development and poverty reduction, and expand the numbers and proportion of people in all those countries who have a stake in peace, transparency and the rule of law. We need to be a little more humble and a little less arrogant, and we need to use our soft power development funding in ways that build trust and confidence where our foreign policy has not always achieved the same result.

7.20 pm

**Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): As we approach the sixth anniversary of 7/7 and the 10th anniversary of 9/11, my thoughts turn to the lives so tragically lost. It is clear that the war on terror is the battle of our era—a struggle to rid perceptions and ethics, ideology and religion of extremism and its deadly inevitability.

I find it hard to rejoice at the death of any man, even that of Osama bin Laden. I hope that his death is the beginning of the end for al-Qaeda—I accept that it might not be—but we must not be naive of history: no individual is irreplaceable; the war, the fight and the danger are far from over. However, bin Laden's death provides us with an opportunity which, if seized, could lead to real progress in the fight against extremist violence, especially on the two key fronts of Pakistan and Afghanistan. There could be no better tribute to bin Laden's victims than to use his death for lasting good.

In this war, our relationship with Pakistan is perhaps the most crucial. One immediate impact of the raid on Abbottabad has been to put that country under pressure as never before. One well-informed observer in Pakistan told me over the weekend that the country feels like it is in anaphylactic shock, while some in my constituency called for us to review our co-operation and aid in light of the perception that Pakistan was complicit in harbouring the world's most wanted man.

I doubt whether we will ever know the hard facts about what the Government of Pakistan knew or did not know about bin Laden's whereabouts. It should be investigated, but what is most important is the bigger question of our overall longer-term relationship with Pakistan. There are clearly severe problems that need to be resolved and changes that can and must be made. We need urgently to find new ways to do that, but there is an overriding mutual interest in making the relationship work. I think that the basic outline of how to achieve that is clear.

Pakistan has legitimate concerns about sovereignty and its own security. Those concerns can be addressed, but in exchange, the Pakistanis cannot pursue those interests in a way that directly undermines stability in Afghanistan and harbours extremism at home or abroad. I believe that the crisis that has followed the killing of bin Laden provides a real opportunity for ourselves and the Pakistanis to reflect on how we refine our relationship to suit our shared interests. It is an opportunity we must take; indeed, we have to take it and we have to get it right. The consequences of failure—for ourselves and for the Pakistanis alike—are too dangerous to contemplate.

The UK's interest in a stable, democratic and peaceful Pakistan is clear. The country faces serious challenges and internal divisions. Those are very real: they include rising political tensions, unrest in the tribal areas, insecurity on its borders and more violent extremist groups than any other nation in the world. As with the wider middle east and north Africa as well as Afghanistan, the UK will feel the effects of state failure in Pakistan all too directly. The path used to import its product—whether it be drugs, the hateful rhetoric of extremism or the suicide bomber—is well trodden. We should also not forget how many of Pakistan's people have died as a result of terrorism or in their fight to contain it. The prospect of a nuclear-armed Pakistan collapsing into internal strife or war with its neighbours is a nightmare. Now, more than ever, Pakistanis need us to stand shoulder to shoulder with them.

**Rory Stewart** (Penrith and The Border) (Con): It is great to say that we should stand shoulder to shoulder with Pakistan and that we should respect its security interests, but what exactly does the hon. Gentleman mean? Does he mean recognise the Durand line or the boundaries with Kashmir? What security interests is he talking about; what concessions is he proposing?

**Dan Jarvis:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. It neatly brings me on to the points I am about to cover.

What I believe is that we and our allies must work closely with Pakistan and that we must address its fears about its relationships with Afghanistan, India, other neighbours—and, crucially, as already mentioned, with the United States. We must do that in a way that acknowledges the particular challenges that the country faces. We must work together to find ways to tackle extremist groups without overly infringing on Pakistani sovereignty. I accept that the hon. Gentleman has made a good point, but the time constraints mean that I will not be able to go into detail now on the questions he asked. I would say, however, that in order to refine UK-Pakistan relations, we must find the balance between respecting Pakistan's sovereignty and the eradication of

Islamist extremist networks operating from Pakistan. The threat to both of us from the unchecked rise of extremism is too great to ignore. Perhaps most immediately, Pakistan can play a decisive role in reaching a fair and lasting peace in Afghanistan.

We are at an important crossroads in our relationship with Pakistan. The death of the head of al-Qaeda is significant, but we must remain engaged: this is a fight for the long term and we must leave those who would attack us in no doubt that we have the stomach for it. We should not stick blindly, however, to the path we have followed up to now. There are real dangers in our current position, but there are also real opportunities. We must be ready to seize them if we are to achieve the peace we all desire.

7.27 pm

**Mr Roger Gale** (North Thanet) (Con): In January this year, I had the privilege to visit Pakistan with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association delegation. We all know that the danger with such visits is that we travel fast, meet a few people and come back as instant experts. I am aware that many Members know much more about the subject than me, but I feel completely confident in saying what I am about to say.

Sadly, it has recently become fashionable to criticise Pakistan—to criticise the amount of aid that we give it and to criticise it for being lukewarm in its reaction to the terror threat. The point has been made this evening on a number of occasions that Pakistan has invested more blood and treasure than any other country in the world in the fight against terrorism. We met the Pakistan Minister for Minorities, Dr Shahbaz Bhatti on 24 January; a fortnight later, Dr Bhatti was dead—murdered because of his Christianity and, more particularly, I think, because of his commitment to the cause of moderation. If such people are not to have died in vain, we have to ensure that we stand behind Pakistan and offer such assistance as we may.

The country has changed its constitution. There will be a shift of power from federal government to the regions. The point has also been made that it is a young country in respect of its population—it is one of the few countries in the world with more young people than old people. The young people we met were hugely enthusiastic for their future, but they were also hopelessly disorganised. In the regions, the democratic processes and the infrastructure are lamentable.

I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development is hugely committed to the cause of education in Pakistan, but we need to go one step further and strengthen the democratic infrastructure, perhaps through institutions such as the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, so as to enable the transfer of power from the federal government to the regions without extremism taking over. We will report to the Minister next Monday, and we will make those points then, but I want to make them to my right hon. Friend here tonight and to put them on the record.

I have the honour to be the chairman of the all-party parliamentary Tunisia group. The Arab spring, as it is now called, actually began in midwinter with the jasmine revolution in Tunisia. Since then, the introduction of an interim Government has led to the creation of an election commission, which has set in train the processes for the democratic elections that we hope and believe—

[Mr Roger Gale]

despite some misgivings—will still be held on 24 July. I say “despite some misgivings”, because the task is herculean. In the time available, the commission must try to create a register and an identification process, and it must try to work out the detail of the election itself. It must establish whether the election will be held in constituency terms or nationally on a proportional-representation basis. As things stand, some 60 parties will be entering the election, which will create huge problems in itself.

The choice, however, is between action now and delay. Delay will lead to further unrest and further confusion. The consensus seems to be that it is right to move ahead, accepting the fact that the election will probably be ragged around the edges. Those of us who have worked as international election observers know only too well that in developing countries there must be an acceptance of some degree of imperfection. If we judge on the basis of our own methods, perhaps we should not look too closely at the dust in other people’s eyes.

The important part of the process will be what follows the election. The Government who are elected will again be an interim Government, but they will have been elected. They will be charged with the duty of creating a constitution that will then be taken back to the people for a further election, and only then will the real process of reconstruction start. However, that should not gainsay the fact that Tunisia is, at this moment, open for business. What it needs more than anything else is economic development and investment. The tourism industry is on its knees, but the country is safe and able to receive visitors.

The other problem that Tunisia has with Europe is that Europe will not take its agricultural goods, which has implications for rural jobs. It is not good enough for France and Italy to complain about the number of migrants from north African countries, while closing their doors to the produce that those countries, especially Tunisia, need to sell in order to create the jobs that will keep migrant workers at home and enable them to grow their own economies.

The abandoning of the Schengen agreement by France and Italy should come as no surprise to any Member, but it would behove, in particular, the southern states of the European Union to try to create real opportunities, rather than investing cash in programmes that may or may not lead to jobs in the longer term. They should immediately consider the possibility of bringing Tunisia into a customs union, so that it can look to Europe legitimately and play a real part in the development of the Arab spring and of democracy.

7.34 pm

**Cathy Jamieson** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate, and, in particular, to follow so many hon. Members with great expertise in the matters that we are discussing. I do not claim to have such expertise, but it is important to put on record some of my concerns and those conveyed to me by constituents, including women—I note in passing that I am now the only female Member in the Chamber.

It is important for us to debate a situation that continues to develop on a daily basis in Libya, as well as wider issues relating to the middle east and north Africa.

There are far too many of those issues for me to be able to cover them in a short speech, so I shall focus on matters involving Libya.

Like many other Members, I thought long and hard before deciding to support the Government in their Libya mission. I am not naturally inclined towards armed interventions, and many of my constituents expressed concern about what such an intervention would lead to, but—albeit with a heavy heart—I felt it necessary for us to enforce UN security resolution 1973 in view of the rapid deterioration towards a one-sided armed conflict and the humanitarian crisis that was likely to follow, particularly given the number of non-military casualties.

I have no doubt that the British forces have performed their role in an exemplary and professional fashion, as they always do, and that they have contributed significantly to the protection of the civilian population. As we have already heard, however, the challenge now is to define our future role and establish at what stage we will feel able to withdraw. Regretfully, I have to say that there currently seems to be a lack of strategic direction. In recent weeks, the Government appear to have made tactical and operational decisions that begin to depart from the original mandate of protecting civilians. The Government’s decision to provide telecommunications, body armour and a number of military advisers seems to me, and to many of my constituents, to have more to do with a military situation developing on the ground in Libya than with simply enforcing the resolution. I also regret having to express the view that the Government have failed to communicate to the public, and indeed to Parliament, the exact role of those people in a developing situation. For how long will they be deployed, and how does their role relate to the wider remit of protecting civilians? Those questions remain unanswered.

It seems that none of the measures represents a breach of the mandate provided by the United Nations and approved by the House, but they suggest a move towards measures that are beyond what I expected in supporting the Government when we debated the issue. Perhaps, when he winds up the debate, the Secretary of State for International Development will identify some specific issues and make the case for the strategic role of the advisers in resolving the crisis. Specifically, the advisers are there as a result of the Foreign Secretary’s assertion to the House on 26 April that

“it is impossible to see a way of securing the full implementation of the UN Security Council resolution while Colonel Gaddafi remains.” —[*Official Report*, 26 April 2011; Vol. 527, c. 40.]

A number of Members have commented on that statement. Is the mission now to remove Gaddafi at all costs, rather than simply to ensure the protection of civilians? If the Foreign Secretary’s statement is informing strategic military decisions, the Government must be absolutely clear and up front. That is vital in the context of some of the comments made today about a possible move towards identifying different targets.

**Martin Horwood** (Cheltenham) (LD): Does the hon. Lady appreciate the distinction between the wishes of the British Government, in terms of someone who is now wanted by the International Criminal Court, and what the UN resolution sanctions in terms of the military mission by the international community? Those are two different things.

**Cathy Jamieson:** Of course they are two different things, but I have worries, which were identified at the outset of the process, about where we will end up and about the possibility of mission creep. It is important for the Government to continue to report back to those of us who, while supporting the Government, had and still have concerns.

There may also be a danger that as the conflict has continued, many of us—including the wider public—have become used to seeing images of it on our TV screens. Fewer column inches may have been devoted to reporting the details in the press, causing people to become immune to the process. That is why, as the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Martin Horwood) has implied, it is vital for the House to have an opportunity to hear from Ministers regularly, and to be allowed a further vote if measures beyond those outlined in resolution 1973 are considered at any stage. Understandably, the military situation and western involvement in Libya have become the focus of media attention and therefore of public debate, but in the wider region there is also a whole range of other, non-military options, which I hope the Government will support. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say about that.

It is important that wherever we are involved in trying to resolve conflict, we support universal suffrage and the democratic process, which is especially the case in countries that are on the brink of a bright new future. It is reassuring that the UK is at the forefront of pressing for European Union action, and that an agreement has been reached on an arms embargo and the revocation of the association agreement that had been put in place with Syria.

My final point is about the ability of the UK to offer continued commitment to the aims of resolution 1973. The Select Committee on Defence asked whether the UK will remain a full-spectrum force capable of deploying all aspects of military power across the world, and the chiefs of all three services—the British Army, Navy and Air Force—answered no. However, that view seemed to be contradicted by many senior UK officials, such as Britain's ambassador to the US, who maintained that the UK has emerged from the recent strategic defence review and the ensuing round of spending cuts announced by the Prime Minister in October as a full-spectrum military power. It is important that we understand what effect the cuts are going to have, and what their implications will be for our work in all the areas where we are currently involved.

In conclusion, I make the following plea. While British troops remain deployed in Afghanistan and elsewhere, it is vital that our armed forces are not stretched to breaking point. It is also important that we continue to give humanitarian aid, and I hope that that becomes the focus of our work. I urge the Government to ensure that the focus is on bringing peace in all areas of conflict where we are involved, supporting humanitarian aid and, importantly, returning our armed forces safely to the UK as soon as possible.

7.42 pm

**Sir John Stanley** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): In the House on 21 March, the Prime Minister said in answer to a question from the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) about the current violence in north Africa and the middle east:

“I agree with the hon. Lady that there will be lessons to learn from the conflict for the future.”—[*Official Report*, 21 March 2011; Vol. 525, c. 707.]

I want to focus on one area where I believe that there is a very important lesson to be learned—arms export policy. That question arises because in the two years prior to the Arab spring, under both the current and previous Governments, arms export licences for weapons that can be used for internal repression were granted on an extremely wide scale throughout north Africa and the middle east, and those export licence approvals have been shown to have been grievously mistaken.

The policy was clearly stated on 18 February by the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt):

“The longstanding British position is clear. We will not issue licences where we judge there is a clear risk the proposed export might provoke or prolong regional or internal conflicts or”—

this is the key policy statement—

“which might be used to facilitate internal repression.”

The recent Committees on Arms Export Controls report sets out quarter by quarter since the beginning of 2009 the details of the arms export licences that were approved in each period. That shows, for example, sub-machine-guns and sniper rifles to Bahrain, and components for semi-automatic pistols and sub-machine-guns, artillery computers, combat shotguns, intelligence equipment and small arms ammunition to Libya. Since the publication of that report, the latest quarterly report has been published, taking us up to the last quarter of 2010—in other words, to a matter of two or three weeks before the start of the Arab spring. It shows that even in that period we were exporting equipment for sniper rifles to Bahrain and components for combat aircraft, military equipment for initiating explosives and weapon night-sights to Libya.

If one Government statement reflects the over-optimism that has afflicted both the current and the previous Governments about the risks that are run in exporting certain types of weapons to authoritarian regimes, it is to be found in the 2008 annual report on strategic arms exports. There was a case study of a licence application for armoured personnel carriers for Libya, which concluded:

“There remain wider human rights risks in Libya, but it was judged very unlikely that these vehicles would be used to carry out abuses. As a result it was concluded, with reference to the Consolidated Criteria, that there was not a clear risk that these vehicles would be used for internal repression and the licence was approved.”

I think that conclusion was symptomatic of the policy followed by both Governments.

**Martin Horwood:** I strongly support many of the points that my hon. Friend is making, and it is absolutely proper to raise this issue. However, we both welcome the fact that the current Government have revoked more than 150 such arms licences granted by the Labour Government, and we both welcome the fact that this Government are currently actively reviewing the whole policy of arms exports.

**Sir John Stanley:** That anticipates the point that I am about to make.

Britain was, of course, by no means the only country to engage in this degree of over-optimism and, as has been said, the Government have sought to retrieve the

[*Sir John Stanley*]

position. First, they have announced the revocation of a substantial number of arms export licences. Indeed, according to the latest figures, between 27 January and 9 March this year more than 150 previously granted arms export licences were revoked. That serves to highlight the scale of the previous misjudgment.

Why, however, are those revocations limited to just four countries—Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Bahrain? Why have there been no revocations of arms exports to Syria, for example? Why, too, have there been no revocations of arms exports to Saudi Arabia, whose British-made armoured personnel carriers have rolled into Bahrain and are therefore complicit, as it were, in the appalling abuses of human rights there? Of course, I understand that Saudi Arabia is big money, is big oil, and is useful intelligence, but can the Government really justify such a blatant degree of inconsistency in their revocations policy?

Secondly, I greatly welcome the review of arms export licences, but it has been initiated only in relation to north Africa and the middle east, while recent events also suggest that there are serious questions to be raised about arms export licence policy for weapons that can be used for internal repression in relation to authoritarian regimes worldwide. Sadly, authoritarian regimes extend from the boundaries of the European Union to the very furthest east. There are too many authoritarian regimes in Africa and some in central and south America. The current review should therefore be extended to cover authoritarian regimes worldwide. The Committees on Arms Export Controls has recommended that, and I earnestly hope that the Government will accept that recommendation and the other recommendations in our report.

7.49 pm

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (*Sir John Stanley*). He and I have served together on the Committees on Arms Export Controls and on the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs for many years, and he speaks a great deal of sense on those arms exports issues.

Somebody once said, in the context of British politics, “You can be in office and not in power.” That situation clearly applies in a number of countries around the world, but I wish to focus my remarks, as others have done, on what is happening in Pakistan. The fact that Osama Bin Laden apparently lived in Abbottabad with food and access to information, although not to the internet, and was somehow protected, is a matter of deep concern, but I have no doubt that the Government of President Zardari had no knowledge that that was the case. The question for us, which is highlighted in a very good book that came out this week, “Pakistan: A Hard Country” by Anatol Lieven, is about the relationship between the civil society and the political society in Pakistan and the military and intelligence elite that has run that state.

Anatol Lieven says:

“the Pakistani national security state...was born chiefly out of fear of, and hostility to, India. This is felt most strongly in the military and, in the ISI, it is a raging monomania.”

That sums up the problem. According to an opinion poll of about two years ago, 85% of the Pakistani population want better relations with India. We find the

same thing when we speak to people in the British-Pakistani and British-Indian community—many of whom, including many of my constituents, have roots in the divided Punjab—and when we go, as I did with the Foreign Affairs Committee five years ago, by road from Amritsar to Lahore, through the Wagah crossing. If we leave aside the symbolism of the soldiers on both sides at the ceremony, we also find the interesting sight of the bearers, who, on the one side, carry sacks of onions on their heads for about a mile and half and, on the other side, carry boxes of dried fruit. This is an international border where people cannot trade by means of vehicles passing through; everything has to be unloaded and then loaded again.

Economic co-operation between India and Pakistan would be of great benefit to both countries, especially in dealing with Pakistan’s problems arising from its rapidly growing population: it has 180 million people, and that is on the way to becoming 300 million or 350 million. Massive difficulties are also caused by the fact that a disproportionate amount of money in Pakistan is taken up by the national security structure, and because the obsession with India means that it is a state that has in the past, through its Inter-Services Intelligence, sponsored terrorist organisations and insurgent groups in both Afghanistan and India. The democratic and secular forces—the people, including the late Shahbaz Bhatti, to whom reference has been made, who believe in women’s rights and in protecting minorities, and who stand up for ethical values and global values of human rights—are besieged now in Pakistan because of the international context.

The Pakistani Government and Pakistani politicians can rightly point out that many of the problems they face arise because of the misguided interventions of 25 and 30 years ago, which led to the situation in Afghanistan, where the groups that evolved into the Taliban were developed. However, there was also a Pakistani hand in some of that; they got the money from the United States—from the CIA—it was pushed through the ISI and it went through to people such as Mr Hekmatyar, to what is now the Haqqani network in Afghanistan, and to the Taliban.

That worm has turned, and the Pakistani state faces enormous threats from those organisations, but it also has its own resilience and ability to fight back. In my opinion, it is good news that Osama Bin Laden was killed and is dead, and however critical we might be of the fact that he was in Pakistan, we need make an assessment and take a clear view. The Government of Pakistan were not shielding that man, nor were the Pakistani people. That was done by certain rogue elements within their society, and it would be completely wrong to do what some in the United States Congress are calling for and punish Pakistan by cutting off economic assistance and ending co-operation.

What Pakistan needs today is our solidarity against the terrorist threat it faces. Its secular politicians need our support and an encouragement to rebuild the dialogue with India, to resolve the difficulties over Kashmir and to co-operate against the common threats of terrorism which both those countries are facing. That is not going to be easy—the history and the fact that the pain is so deep on both sides means that it will be very difficult—but the alternative is to play into the hands of the extremist groups that wish to foster a failed state, further conflict

and terrorism. That will not only be destructive to all the values of Pakistan and India, but it will blow back into this country because people here have family roots in that part of the world. We owe it to them, as well as to ourselves, to work in co-operation with Pakistan at this time of great difficulty.

7.57 pm

**Mr James Arbuthnot** (North East Hampshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes), the former Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee. I agreed with almost everything he said. I agreed with the main thrust of it, and with his point about the essential need for our continued involvement in Pakistan in terms of providing aid and support. I also pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development for his concentration on the issue of education in Pakistan. A country that spends only 2% of its gross domestic product on education is one that must cause considerable concern to the rest of the world, as it is doing now.

I declare my interest as the chairman of the Conservative Friends of Israel, and I wish to say two things, which may take me a little time. First, it has become increasingly clear over the past six months that the middle eastern problem is not Israel. When Osama Bin Laden was killed a few weeks ago, an important article by Robert Fisk appeared in *The Independent*, in which he made the point that al-Qaeda's irrelevance has been shown by the fact that the Arab spring was demanding not more Islamic fundamentalism, but freedoms. It is just as important to note that the Arab spring has not been demanding a change in Palestine, essential though that change is; the Arab spring has been demanding the sort of freedoms—freedom of speech, freedom of the press and the rule of law—that are provided and embodied in Israel. My main initial point about Israel is that it is not the middle eastern problem; the autocratic regimes that have been surrounding Israel are the problem.

The second issue—it looks as though I shall have plenty of time to finish within my eight minutes—is the rapprochement between Hamas and Fatah. I would like to ask what it means. If it means that Hamas and Fatah will be united on the Fatah way of looking at things—the renunciation of violence, the recognition of Israel, the agreement to maintain and honour previous agreements—it will be a very good thing indeed. If, however, it means that they will be united on the Hamas view of things, that is entirely different. We know about Hamas. In the last month alone more than 120 rockets have been fired into Israel from Gaza, some with 40 km in range. There have been rockets and mortars, and a guided anti-tank missile hit a school bus in Israel and killed a 16-year-old schoolboy. Terrorism sponsored by, perpetrated by and supported by Hamas has killed more than 500 people in Israel since the beginning of 2003.

If the new Hamas-Fatah organisation follows the Fatah line I will be utterly delighted. That would mean that we could negotiate with Hamas again and that Israel would have a useful negotiating partner, because all these things must be achieved by negotiation and cannot be achieved by force or unilateralism. If, however, the new united organisation follows the Hamas line, the reconciliation will be either meaningless or significantly worse. This is not a various shades of grey issue, but a black and white one.

**Mike Gapes:** Does the right hon. Gentleman not agree that one of the important consequences of this agreement is that it allows a programme to go forward for democratic elections, hopefully at the end of this year or the beginning of next, that will then allow the Palestinian people as a whole to elect a new Parliament and a new President? That is vital if we are to get serious negotiation between Israel and the Palestinians.

**Mr Arbuthnot:** I agree that that is very important. I asked the Prime Minister a month or so ago whether he was concerned that when the President of the Palestinian Authority called for elections, Hamas immediately rejected that—Hamas having been a democratically elected organisation that renounced democracy once its mandate had expired. I agree, however, that the notion of bringing democracy back to Hamas would be a welcome change.

Unfortunately, I think there is a risk that in the British Foreign Office the view is that this is a matter of shades of grey as opposed to black and white. For Israel it is not a matter of shades of grey. Israel has been struggling to secure itself and just to exist. When it comes to murdering schoolchildren, which Hamas went in for, that cannot be regarded as shades of grey.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Does the right hon. Gentleman not think that things such as the killing of 13 people at Qalandiya crossing yesterday by Israeli forces, the continued expansion of settlements and the taking over of Silwan in East Jerusalem need to change in Israel if there is to be any hope of some longer-term peace agreement?

**Mr Arbuthnot:** I agree about the settlements, and I have said so in a speech in this Chamber. The hon. Gentleman heard me say that in the last speech I made about Israel. As for what happened at the crossing, I think the Government are right to call for restraint on all sides. There seems to me to be something very convenient about Israel moving in to the headlines as soon as there were clashes on the border of Syria and Lebanon. I am profoundly suspicious about what was behind those clashes.

At a time when the Arab spring is showing that the Arab people are desperate for freedoms, now is not the time for the United Kingdom or the international community to abandon the Quartet's principles. They must demand that Hamas should renounce violence, recognise the state of Israel and honour the previous agreements.

8.5 pm

**Mr David Winnick** (Walsall North) (Lab): I listened to the speech made by the right hon. Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Arbuthnot) with much interest, but there have been many civilian casualties on both sides and innocent people have been killed; indeed, that happened over the weekend, as many of my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), have said. What is required is a genuine peace settlement.

I was not going to speak about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict until the right hon. Member for North East Hampshire provoked me. There are only two Members in the House who were here in 1967, when the war took place, and I am one of the two. I expressed my point of view on the situation at the time. With respect to the

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right hon. Gentleman, it is not a question of Israel now fighting for its very existence, but of the absolute refusal of Israel to come to any genuine agreement for a viable and independent Palestinian state. The Israeli settlements that have been built on the west bank surely demonstrate a lack of commitment on the part of Israel to what the international community—including, of course, the United Kingdom—would like to see: a two-state solution.

We can disagree about Hamas and the rest. Obviously, what Hamas stands for, being basically an Islamic fundamentalist concept, to say the least, is totally alien to everything I believe in. That goes without saying, but in negotiations one deals with one's enemy. After all, if anyone is says that it is impossible to reach agreement with Hamas, we know that the IRA argued for years that there could be absolutely no solution in Northern Ireland until Britain decided to leave, yet a very different situation emerged. Those who, like the right hon. Member for North East Hampshire, take the Israeli point of view very strongly would do far more good if they could pressurise Israel to recognise that there needs to be a wide-ranging agreement.

If it was right, in the circumstances of the extermination of millions of people, for Israel to be created by the international community in 1947 and 1948, let us not forget for one moment the tremendous injustice that was done to the Palestinians as a result. The Palestinians were not responsible for what happened to the Jewish people during the second world war.

I now turn to the question of Libya. I made it clear in my speech on 21 March, in the previous debate on Libya, that I could not support the Government. I hesitated about voting against the motion, and in fact I abstained. I had hesitations during that debate, not because I did not want to see humanitarian action taken—obviously, I wanted help to be given to civilians in Libya who could be at the mercy of Gaddafi; that goes without saying—but I had the feeling that resolution 1973 would in practice result in an attempt at regime change. All that has occurred in more recent weeks, since that debate, has persuaded me that in spite all the denials we heard today from the Foreign Secretary and the rest, at the end of it all what is required is that Gaddafi should abdicate, that there should be regime change and that, if necessary, Gaddafi could be the subject of an assassination attempt.

I am no apologist for Gaddafi; heaven forbid. I have opposed the regime ever since he took power 32 years ago, as it was obviously based on tyranny and was much involved in international terrorism, as we know. Why on earth should I in any circumstances wish to defend or justify such a regime? But international law does not permit regime change or the assassination of a leader. The remarks of the Army chief, General Richards, over the weekend are bound to cause added worry. What will happen is an escalation of what has been occurring in the air strikes of the past fortnight or so. It is interesting that so many of the Members on both sides of the House who have spoken in this debate, most of whom voted with the Government on 21 March, have expressed the same reservations and concern about what is happening in Libya that I am expressing now.

The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley) made a very good speech about the selling of arms to authoritarian states. There was hardly

a word he said, even in his criticism of the previous Government, with which I could disagree. As he pointed out, it is interesting to note that however despicable the Gaddafi regime has been, Britain was selling arms to it right up to the moment before the demonstrations when opposition emerged in Libya. Why did we do that, and why do we sell arms to other states that are based on tyranny? Syria, which the right hon. Gentleman mentioned, is a good example of that. I certainly hope that there will be far greater concern about that in future, and that more attempts will be made to ensure that Britain is not involved in selling arms to countries such as Gaddafi's Libya.

Turkey has put forward certain proposals regarding Libya that I should have thought it would be useful to try. It has urged an immediate ceasefire and has emphasised the need to start a political process leading to Gaddafi's leaving office. The Government say that there is no wish on Gaddafi's part to engage in a genuine ceasefire, but let us test that; let us see. Let us use Turkey's proposals, which seem worth trying at least, and in so doing save lives.

Had there been time I would also have discussed Afghanistan and the wish to end as soon as possible the use of British military forces there. In the absence of time, I will simply say again to the Government that although they received support from the overwhelming majority on 21 March, that majority did not support regime change, and that resolution 1973 should not be used for that purpose.

8.13 pm

**Sajid Javid** (Bromsgrove) (Con): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick), who can always be relied on to make a thoughtful contribution.

In 1961, a young man, Abdul-Ghani, left his poverty-stricken village in Punjab, Pakistan, for England. He had heard that the mother country, as England was still known at that time, had plenty of jobs, so he decided to try his luck. Like many young Pakistanis arriving in Britain at that time, Abdul-Ghani planned to stay in England for only a few years—just long enough to earn enough money to send back to his siblings so that they could have the education that he never had. He also intended to return home because he loved his homeland. He remembered how, at the age of nine, he had been part of the largest population exchange in history, in which more than 15 million Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs had tried to find safety in their newly born nation states. To this day, he will never forget the stench of death and the heart-wrenching human misery that he witnessed.

In the early 1960s, many young Pakistanis such as Abdul-Ghani still harboured huge hopes for their country. They believed in the vision of Pakistan's founding father, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who wanted a democratic, secular, modern state. As the years passed, Abdul-Ghani, who was by then a very proud bus driver in Rochdale, sadly came to realise that he would not be going back to Pakistan because the country was moving backwards. He gave up on his dreams of returning home and decided that he and his future family would be wise to make their permanent home in England. It is because of that decision that I am able to stand before the House and contribute to this important debate.

By the 1960s, it was already clear that the ruling bargain in Pakistan had changed. Gone was the dream of a tolerant, democratic and secular nation. In sharp contrast to the situation in neighbouring India, the rules of the game in Pakistan were being set by the Pakistani army. The army allowed the pretence of civilian rule, but everyone knew that it called all the shots. Each year, the army granted itself nearly 25% of the national budget and justified its rule on the grounds that Pakistan needed to confront its real enemy—India. Despite the very real challenges of widespread poverty and illiteracy, with enlightened leadership Pakistan could have taken the path to greater prosperity. That is not just a dream: many Muslim-majority countries have achieved that, including Turkey, Malaysia and Indonesia. Virtually every leader of Pakistan has failed his people, choosing self-interest over the national interest. They have all too often obscured their own incompetence and deceit by blaming every failure on an external, exaggerated threat. In much the same way, many Arab rulers love to blame Israel for all their problems.

I was saddened but not surprised that bin Laden was found to be living in Pakistan. Let us be clear. He was not just living in Pakistan: he was a stone's throw away from the national military academy and just a two-hour drive from Islamabad. I have no doubt that it was just and strategically right for the US to kill bin Laden, and although I do not think that the Pakistani Government were involved in any way or were complicit as a whole, I find it very hard to believe that there were not elements of the Pakistani military intelligence services and some Government officials providing him with safe harbour. To suggest otherwise is frankly laughable. That is why there is no way that Britain's relationship with Pakistan can remain the same.

When the Prime Minister visited Pakistan last year, he was right to say that Pakistan looked "both ways" when it came to terrorism. He was also right when he told the House very recently that we cannot afford to turn our back on Pakistan. If we did, the threat to Britain from the emergence of a nuclear-armed failed state in one of the world's most volatile regions would be far too great. It is in neither Britain's interest nor Pakistan's for relations to become more adversarial, but Pakistan's strategy of being both a friend and an adversary is no longer tenable. That is why we need to take a harder line on Pakistan and demand a lot more in return for our assistance, aid and friendship. The UK and the US should formally present to Pakistan's leaders any information they have about Pakistani complicity in shielding bin Laden and should demand tough and immediate action. We should demand that Pakistan uproots insurgent sanctuaries, shuts down factories that produce bombs that kill our soldiers, and hunts down leading terrorists who are still at large.

We also need to start reducing our dependence on Pakistan. First, the international security assistance force should find an alternative to the supply lines that run through Pakistan to Afghanistan, and we should expand alternative supply routes through Azerbaijan and other countries in central Asia. Secondly, NATO and Afghanistan should reach agreement on a longer-term settlement allowing for a small but lasting military presence in Afghanistan. That capability could be indispensable in preventing some of the worst-case scenarios involving Pakistan and its nuclear weapons.

When it comes to helping Pakistan, our No. 1 focus should be on promoting commerce and education, as they are the only tools by which to help ordinary, long-suffering Pakistanis to climb out of poverty. Our message should not be that we are abandoning Pakistan, but that we will help Pakistan fight its true enemies—ignorance, illiteracy, corrupt elites and religious conflict. Although the killing of bin Laden was an important success, a greater achievement would be to transform UK-Pakistani relations into a true partnership that fights terrorism and helps ordinary Pakistanis.

8.20 pm

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): I welcome today's debate and the commitment from the Foreign Secretary that there will be regular reports to the House on the situation in Afghanistan and Libya.

The uprisings across the whole Arab world are momentous in historical terms and in many ways are a continuation of the uprisings of the 1950s, which were eventually mired in corruption and autocracy in almost every country. What we see now on the streets of so many Arab countries is a thirst for accountable government, economic sustainability and, above all, political freedoms. These developments are to be wholly welcomed, but they are not without their problems. The forces of the state that have sustained dictators in power for a very long time are hitting back in a real and quick way.

I pointed out in an intervention what was happening in Tunisia, where protesters are being fairly brutally prevented from making their views known. In the same way, progress in Egypt is up and down. Elements of the old regime constantly pop up and try to prevent industrial action by legitimate trade unions and to control society, just as the Mubarak regime did for a very long time. There should be understanding and solidarity.

While visiting Tunisia earlier this year, I recall talking to a group of young people in the central square in Tunis. It was when the protests were beginning in Libya, and I asked them whether they wanted any outside help. They said no, they did not. Historically, they had had quite enough of French colonialism, and they felt that people in the neighbouring countries had had quite enough of Italian and British colonialism. They wanted to do it themselves.

Proposing the intervention in Libya and support for the UN resolution, the Foreign Secretary made it clear that that was humanitarian; that it would create a no-fly zone; that it was designed to protect lives; and that it would be within the terms of international law. Listen to his speech today, follow the mood music, follow the statements made by NATO and all the others, and it is clear that the whole intervention is about regime change and occupation. The rush to provide facilities and support for the transitional council, which has renamed itself after its members were called "rebels" for a long time, suggests to me that we are in fact involved in a civil war.

I am not here, any more than my Friend the Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) is, to defend the human rights abuses of the Gaddafi regime. I just feel that we have involved ourselves in a civil war, that there are ulterior motives relating to oil and future markets, and that a macabre demonstration is taking place to show the power of various defence systems and strike aircraft.

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): My hon. Friend had the wisdom to vote against this ill-fated intervention. Does he agree that it is concerning that we are sending so-called advisers to the region? In other interventions of this kind, where advisers go, troops cannot be far behind.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** The parallel is Vietnam 1963, when several thousand CIA advisers descended on that country. That eventually turned out to be 500,000 US troops, 100,000 of whom died there. A million Vietnamese also died in that conflict. We should be slightly more careful, more sanguine and less gung-ho about the process.

Turkey has tried to bring about a peace process, as has the African Union, but what hope is there for a peace process and a diplomatic settlement if the language coming from NATO and others is, "We are going to win this conflict"? That is the subtext.

**Paul Flynn:** It is an extremely rare event when I disagree with my hon. Friend on this subject, but does he understand the predicament of many of us in the House when that vote was taken on whether we should intervene? If we did not intervene, we were leaving the people of Benghazi defenceless against the bloodthirsty threats of Gaddafi.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I have no doubt that the forces of the Gaddafi regime were being very brutal to people in Benghazi, just as the forces in Tunisia and Egypt were brutal to people in those countries. If the west was serious about bringing about a diplomatic solution in Libya, the Secretary-General of the UN and Heads of State would have gone there and there would have been a real effort, but the subtext the whole time, by Sarkozy particularly, was that they wanted military intervention and a no-fly zone. I voted against it because I do not believe that the intervention was as high-minded as my hon. Friend suggests it may have been, and many Members who voted for the motion on that day are having some doubts about what went on on that occasion.

**Yasmin Qureshi** (Bolton South East) (Lab) *rose*—

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I will not give way any more as I have had my allotted injury time, if the House understands what I mean.

I want to mention two other topics. I believe that there are double standards at work. The west has intervened in Libya, where there are large amounts of oil and where, under Tony Blair, a deal was done with the Government and arms were sold. They were being sold right up to the point when NATO was preparing to go in there. Interestingly, the arms sales there and in every other country in the region are, yes, planes, missiles and radar systems, but in every case they include anti-personnel equipment for crowd control, to deal with civil disorder and control populations.

That is what is now happening in Bahrain, with the support of Saudi Arabia. Other Members have drawn attention to what is going on there. I was with the Bahraini opposition groups in London last week. I first met Bahraini opposition groups at a UN human rights conference in Copenhagen in 1986, when they were complaining about British support for the regime, the suspension of the constitution and the lack of democracy

in Bahrain. That has not stopped this country doing a lot of business with Bahrain. It has not stopped arms exports and oil imports from Bahrain. I would like condemnation of the violence of the Bahrain and the Saudi regimes equal to the condemnation of the Libyan regime and, rightly, of the Syrian regime for what it is doing.

My last point concerns Palestine. Yesterday, on the anniversary of Nakba, the day on which the Palestinian people were driven out of what is now the state of Israel to become that vast diaspora, was the occasion for demonstrations outside the Kalandia crossing. Thirteen Palestinians were shot dead. Last year or the year before, Operation Cast Lead over Gaza brought about the deaths of nearly 1,500 people in that bombardment. Routine operations by Israeli forces over Gaza result in deaths. Rocket attacks and suicide attacks also result in deaths.

However, there seems almost to be an approval of Israel and its perceptions of its own security needs to the exclusion of all understanding of just how brutal the regime has been towards Palestinians. If someone tries to travel through the west bank and sees the settlements, the settler-only roads, the check points and the abuse that Palestinians receive every day from Israeli border guards, they will understand why people feel so angry. They will see the walls being built, the wells being taken away and the opportunity for economic life being removed. The people in Gaza are living in an open prison and young people are growing up living their lives vicariously through TV and computer screens because they cannot work and they cannot travel—they cannot do anything. They get very angry. There must be a recognition of the rights and needs of Palestinian people.

Likewise, the huge Palestinian diaspora, largely living in refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, but also all over the world, feels very angry. On a visit to Lebanon earlier this year my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman), who led the delegation, and I met an old man living in Shatila refugee camp—hon. Members will remember the Sabra and Shatila massacres in 1982. A man in his mid-80s could remember with absolute precision every tree, house and well of his Palestinian village, which he was driven out of when the state of Israel was established. Is he determined to go back? Yes. Does he think he has a right to go back? Absolutely. Do the people in that camp think they have a right to return? They absolutely do. This anger among Palestinian people is a cause that will go on for a very long time.

The result of 1948 might have been seen as a reasonable diplomatic solution to the massive and awful experience that Jewish people experienced before and during the second world war, but the residue of the ill-treatment of the Palestinian people lives on. The state of Palestine needs to be supported and the Palestinian people need to be recognised. If we do not do so, the cause will go on for a very long time. We cannot just sell arms to Israel and pretend that what is happening to the Palestinians is nothing to do with us.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I am concerned that everyone who wishes to speak in the debate should get in. The only way we can do that is by reducing the time limit on speeches to six minutes, in fairness to Members who have been waiting.

8.31 pm

**Nick Boles** (Grantham and Stamford) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker—it is just my luck to have the axe fall as I rise.

**Mr Winnick:** It was nothing personal.

**Nick Boles:** I am not so sure about that. Nevertheless, it is fortuitous that I find myself following the hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), whose speech I listened to with great interest, because I hope to shed some other light on the situation. I should start by declaring two interests. First, I do some work with the Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre. Secondly, and perhaps more important, I very recently tied the knot with my Israeli partner.

I am afraid that it is with sadness, but not surprise, that I find myself speaking a day after another depressing turn in the wheel of futility and violence that characterises the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. All Members of the House—from the hon. Member for Islington North, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman) and the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) to all Government Members—want to help them break out of this morbid cycle, but we will do so, as the hon. Member for Islington North said, only if we understand the fears and motivations of all parties in the dispute and grasp the way they perceive their situation, not how we perceive it.

Other hon. Members are more qualified than I am to shed light on the Palestinian point of view—the hon. Gentleman has done so, as I hope and trust will other hon. Members. I want to try to contribute a little understanding of the Israeli point of view. I will start by asking the House a question. Why is it that young Israeli men and women, such as my partner, are willing to do three years' military service at a time when young men and women in Britain are working, studying, travelling and having fun? They are not compelled to do so, as they can choose a civilian form of service. It is not possible to say that Israel is some latter-day militaristic Prussia. Anyone who has been to Israel will have to testify to the fact that Israelis are a remarkably individualistic, even hedonistic, bunch of people. It is not even possible to say that somehow they are all brainwashed into thinking that this is something they must do. Israeli politics is one of the most disputatious and argumentative politics one can find, and there are many groups in Israeli politics preaching peace and arguing for a change in the pattern.

So why are they doing it? The reason is simple. There is nothing more important for my partner and people of his age, and for his parents and grandparents, than the security of the state of Israel because it is the first place in 2,000 years that Jews have been able to call home. The key to understanding Israel's actions is this: what will it mean for their perceptions of their long-term security? In this place, such an obsession with security may seem overblown, but we are an island, we have water all around us, we have been here for thousands of years, and I remember that about 70 years ago we seemed to take threats to that security pretty seriously indeed.

**Mr Winnick:** The hon. Gentleman, although I disagree with him, is making the most interesting speech. I now understand the personal factor involved, but there is no

criticism in what I have just said. Is not the best security for Israel—I have already indicated my support for Israel as a state, pre-1967 borders—to find and be willing to reach an accommodation with the Palestinian people, who are not going to go away?

**Nick Boles:** I am very grateful for that intervention, and I agree with the hon. Gentleman and share his analysis. The vast majority of Israeli people also think that a two-state solution is the long-term source of their security, but they will grasp it only if there are guarantees that that state will not threaten the long-term security of Israel.

It is not unreasonable to ask for that when only five years ago Israel withdrew from Gaza and Gaza immediately fell into the hands of an organisation that is directly sponsored by Iran and wants to wipe Israel from the map. It is not unreasonable when Lebanon's Government have been brought down and the new Prime Minister has been put in place by an organisation whose leader only yesterday said that we need to drive Israel into the sea, and that no treaties, no borders, no agreements will stop that happening. It is not unreasonable for the Israeli people to have that expectation. I wish that they might be willing to make more of a risk, but my wishes, and our wishes, carry no weight.

We must provide guarantees of security, which means, first, that the Palestinian state cannot have a military force, because if it does there will be no agreement, ever, not in our lifetime, our children's or our grandchildren's; secondly, that the neighbours of Israel will have to agree to recognise the existence and legitimacy of the state of Israel; and thirdly, that we in Europe and America will have to provide the kind of security guarantees that we have provided each other over the past 60 years.

That, in my honest judgment, is the only way in which we will bring the Israeli people to a table where we will be asking them to make an enormous compromise for their security. It is a compromise that, I agree, is necessary and vital to the interests of the Palestinian people and the interests of justice, but if we want to achieve a result we have to recognise what it will take, and deal with that.

8.37 pm

**Keith Vaz** (Leicester East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), and may I offer the congratulations of the House on his recent civil partnership? I am disappointed that he did not invite me to the event: after all, we share offices in Norman Shaw North and Leicester is not that far from Grantham—I would have made the journey.

I say to the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid) that I am glad, as I think is the whole House, that Abdul Ghani decided to stay in Britain rather than go back to Pakistan. The hon. Gentleman made a forceful and important contribution, and throughout the entire year of his being a Member I am sure his constituents have been extraordinarily proud of his contribution.

I always use opportunities such as this to talk about Yemen, and I make no apology to the House for doing so. I was born in that country and chair the all-party group on Yemen. I always start my contributions to such debates by saying that Yemen is in crisis, but it really is in crisis. There is a deep humanitarian crisis affecting Yemen. Some 40% of the country live on

[Keith Vaz]

under £1.25 a day, one third of its people are unemployed and 7 million literally cannot find anything to eat each day. The situation that led to the uprising has caused the displacement of 330,000 people in the north of the country. As a matter of urgency, therefore, we need to continue the work that was started under the previous Government, through the Friends of Yemen procedure, and to give Yemen the support that it needs.

I am delighted to see the Secretary of State for International Development here today. I have known him for 35 years, and he is responsible for giving me my first political speech when he presided over the debating society that we both belonged to; he probably regrets it now. In the work that he has done, he has been an outstanding International Development Secretary. I know that there are many countries and that the budget is limited, but it is very important to focus on Yemen, which is one of the poorest countries on earth. It does not have the political capacity to punch above its weight as other countries have done, and it does not have the focus of the international community. That is why it is important that we should give it as much help as we can.

On the political side, tomorrow there will be a mass demonstration in Sana'a, and the predictions are that even more people will die unless there is restraint on all sides. So far, 170 people have been killed in the uprising. When I spoke in an Adjournment debate on Yemen a few weeks ago, I believed that we were near a solution, and I think that that was the Foreign Secretary's view as well. The Gulf Co-operation Council had negotiated an agreement with President Ali Abdullah Saleh that he would stand down in 30 days. That agreement was also adhered to by the opposition. Everyone agreed that there was a process for the resignation of the President, with all the dignity of a person who has occupied that post for 32 years, and that a new Government would take over. This did not happen. It is vital that we provide not only humanitarian relief but political support. I have urged on the Government and the Prime Minister the need to appoint an envoy who will be able to bring all sides together; it could be an EU envoy or someone from the United Nations. After all, we are proposing to do this in other countries. I believe that Yemen is a country that can be saved from civil war if we are able to provide that political support.

Why is it in our interests to support Yemen? Why do we want to keep the country as one? The reason is the power that al-Qaeda has in Yemen. A lot of reference has been made to the death of Osama bin Laden, but the head of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Anwar al-Awlaki, is still in Yemen. Though born in the United States, he is of Yemeni descent. According to the Pentagon, he is more dangerous, as a person, than Osama bin Laden was. It is therefore in our interests to ensure that the country remains stable and united, that humanitarian support is given, and that the security situation in that whole area is not infected by the break-up of this impoverished country.

8.43 pm

**Mr Stewart Jackson** (Peterborough) (Con): It is a pleasure, as ever, to follow the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz). I am going to talk about

Israel and the middle east and, more substantially, about the dangers posed to regional and international security by a nuclear-armed Iran.

I will not reiterate the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Arbuthnot), but I am wary of the rapprochement between Hamas and Fatah given that the aim of many individuals in those organisations is to move towards unilateral and incremental recognition of Palestinian statehood rather than the alternative—a round-table debate and discussion among all parties, including the United Nations and the European Union, towards a negotiated settlement, which would mean a two-state solution that is viable and sustainable in terms of the creation of a Palestinian state.

It is very important that we support the courageous stand of Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad in his efforts, because Hamas has consistently repudiated the Quartet principles, including the recognition of Israel, the renunciation of violence, and the acceptance of all previous agreements. Indeed, it has called for the destruction of the Jewish state. Just last month, after the signing of the agreement, the Hamas leader, Khaled Meshaal, said:

“The only battle of the Palestinians is against Israel.”

I see ominous developments in the mixing of the Hamas forces—with their terrorist activists—and the police service of the Palestinian Authority, which is controlled by Fatah. That is the political context in which the Foreign and Commonwealth Office must reiterate the Prime Minister's undertaking to the Community Security Trust that we must continue the dialogue with all parties and that:

“The alternative to compromise is that moderates will always lose out.”

Iran is a state that espouses a jihadist, anti-Semitic, militant theology. It is a leading sponsor of state terrorism across the middle east. Furthermore, it wishes to challenge the United States and undermine the historic undertaking of the Baghdad pact of the 1950s, through which the United States sought to support moderate Arab states. There is no doubt that the Iranian regime not only sees itself as the pre-eminent regional power seeking hegemony in the middle east, but is developing a supra-conventional nuclear missile capacity to consolidate that hegemony and become a rival to the United States in global terms.

Iran is close to weaponised nuclear capability, and to being able to move, via a breakout position, from the conversion of low-enriched uranium to high-enriched uranium at the minimum 90% level. Once the regime has achieved that, weaponisation can be achieved relatively simply. Much of that has been achieved with the help of North Korea, which has provided enrichment technology and, for hard currency, highly sophisticated centrifuges from its large, modern uranium enrichment plant at Yongbyon.

The Obama Administration are committed to this issue and have adopted a policy of sanctions, particularly through UN Security Council resolution 1929 of June 2010, and active diplomacy and engagement. The problem, as ever, is a lack of consensus in the United Nations—the P5 plus Germany—and the European Union. The next step must be the consideration of more draconian and targeted sanctions. I concede that diplomatic engagement will assist reformists in Iran such as Khatami, Rafsanjani and the fledgling green movement, but we cannot rule

out the chance that military action may be necessary. Make no mistake, within two years it will be possible for Iran's Sejil 2 multi-stage solid propellant missiles to travel a range of 3,000 km, which would reach most of continental Europe. Iran is well advanced in uranium enrichment, weaponisation and ballistic missile development.

A nuclear Iran would destroy the policy objective of global non-proliferation and semi-permanently destabilise the middle east, with countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and smaller Arab states seeking nuclear parity. That argument is enunciated in a report entitled "Global Trends 2025" by the National Intelligence Council. The prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran presents a clear and present danger to Israel and to regional stability, and it is too great a risk. The European Union, the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency must rise to the challenge of preventing that prospect from coming to fruition.

8.49 pm

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): As the proud son of a soldier who was grievously injured on a battlefield and later cheated out of his pension by an ungrateful Government, giving him a sense of grievance and injustice that he took to his early grave at the age of 43, I do not need any instructions on the need for a military covenant from the Government. However, I believe that the military covenant should have as its first sentence the obligations of the Government, and it should read that they guarantee never to send our armed forces into conflict for causes that are avoidable or vainglorious. Earlier, I was accused of being a pacifist for suggesting that, but I point out that I have supported with my vote or voice all the conflicts and military interventions in which we have been involved over the past 24 years, except for two. Those were the ones that conflicted with what I hope will be the first line of the covenant: the second Iraq war and our intervention in Helmand province in 2006.

In the case of the Iraq war, Labour Members were bribed, bullied and bamboozled with a three-line Whip into voting for the war. To the great credit of 139 of us, we resisted that. In the case of Helmand, in March 2006 the total number of British soldiers who had died in Afghanistan, after five years there, was seven, only two of whom had died in conflict. It was said that to go into Helmand was to stir up a hornet's nest, and it was compared with the futility of the charge of the Light Brigade. We have now lost not two but 365 of our brave soldiers, and I believe we have achieved very little for that. We are perhaps coming to consider why we went in there.

I wish to mention some points that give reason for optimism. On a point of order last Thursday I mentioned a story in *The Daily Telegraph* that gave us some hope, and I raised it again with the Foreign Secretary this afternoon. It stated that a decision was going to be taken within a matter of days that would bring 450 of our troops home from Afghanistan. As a result of that point of order, I had a stream of messages from wives, grandfathers and other relatives of soldiers out there saying, "For goodness' sake, keep asking this question. Keep putting pressure on." The character of the conflict in Afghanistan at the moment is such that they do not feel that the risk that their loved ones are taking is justified. There is good reason for that.

Will the Government please learn the lesson? We have never asked the Taliban why they are killing our soldiers. It is always easier to go on repeating the old lies than to reveal the new truth. We need to know why they are killing our soldiers—is it because, when they have killed them all, they want to come over to London and Newport to blow up people on our streets? Or is it because we are there as the ferengi, the foreigners, and it is their sacred religious duty to kill our troops in the same way that their fathers did the Russians, and as their great-grandfathers and all the previous generations have done? The great lesson of the recent actions is that the number of deaths that we have suffered has gone down greatly, not because the Taliban are slightly less wicked than they were, but because we are not in the north of Helmand. The sooner we make our exit, the better.

Another serious point is that as the rate of deaths has gone down, an increasing proportion of them have been among the immensely brave people who dismantle improvised explosive devices. The justification for taking the great risk of dismantling them rather than blowing them up, which would of course be perfectly safe, is to capture the members of the Taliban who constructed the IEDs. Details can be found such as fingerprints and so on, so that the Taliban who made them can be captured and put in prison. We know what happened recently—500 prisoners escaped. Those who risked their lives to ensure that those Taliban bomb makers were put in prison will now question whether their sacrifice was necessary. I urge the Government to re-examine their tactic and, instead of risking more lives by dangerously dismantling IEDs to capture Taliban who are detained for a very short time, to consider blowing up the IEDs.

I am hoping that there is a truth in what the Foreign Secretary expressed today, and that President Obama and the Prime Minister make a statement on making a start on the only sensible thing that we can do: bringing our people home. The question by which the Government should be haunted is the one that troubled Senator Kerry in Vietnam in 1971: who will be the last soldier I will order to die for a mistake?

8.55 pm

**Christopher Pincher** (Tamworth) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Members for Newport West (Paul Flynn) and for Walsall North (Mr Winnick), who is not in the Chamber. I learned tonight that the hon. Member for Walsall North entered the House before I was born, but if the clarity and passion of his speech is anything to go by, he will almost certainly still be here long after I am dead. He spoke about Libya, which I shall speak about, but from a different point of view—I do not share his outlook.

Since the insurgents began their campaign against Gaddafi some three months ago, they have scored a remarkable victory, in as much as they have built around themselves a tremendous international coalition. Something like 17 countries are contributing to the Libya campaign, and many more provide overflight rights, yet that military capability, which has undoubtedly reduced the opportunity for Gaddafi to strike against civilians with his tanks and heavy weaponry and stopped his using air power against them, has not removed him. While he is still there, he presents a terrible threat to civilians, as he has rather chillingly said. Anybody who calls their people "rats" cannot "live in the hearts of millions" other than as a feared and loathed object.

[Christopher Pincher]

We have reduced Gaddafi's military capability by something like a third, but that means that two thirds of it remains. His ability to strike at the insurgents is greater than their ability to defend themselves. As long as that position obtains, he will go on fighting. There was a striking piece the other day in *The New York Times* on the hidden workshops of Misrata, which describes the insurgents' position. Men who a few months ago were welders or electricians now run makeshift military workshops, putting armour plating on pick-ups, cannibalising captured machine guns and building do-it-yourself rocket-propelled grenades. They do not have munitions know-how or the tools with which to do the job. They scrape explosives out of shell canisters to reuse, because they do not have supplies. They have nothing other than what they make themselves or that they capture from Gaddafi.

Is it therefore any wonder that the insurgents' battle is desperate, bloody and very slow? That is why I am persuaded by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kensington (Sir Malcolm Rifkind) that we need to move to bring the conflict to a conclusion. If we have a stalemate in Libya, and a failed state, torn in two, with factions fighting one another, we risk a Somalia-type situation. We also risk people in this country becoming tired and bored with a drawn-out campaign. We therefore need to take on board what General Richards, who is a thoughtful man, has said, and acknowledge what the Foreign Secretary has said on intensifying our military, diplomatic and economic campaign to remove Gaddafi from power. A few men in workshops—a few enterprising rebels—are not enough to do the job that needs to be done.

If we cannot, within the bounds of UN Security Council resolution 1973, put boots on the ground—I agree that we should not do that—or give military matériel directly to the insurgents, it seems to me that we can at least release frozen Libyan assets to the national transitional council. We have effectively recognised it; it has its own defence minister; and Baroness Ashton has set up her EU legation in Benghazi. Hundreds of millions of dinars are locked in this country and should be released to the NTC for it to spend as it wishes, whether on utilities in Benghazi to look after its people or, if it wishes, on the military campaign against Gaddafi.

The balance is already tipping in favour of the insurgents, but it is taking a long time and needs to be tipped more quickly. In Misrata, we have a refugee crisis. There are electricity cuts, and oil, food and medical supplies are running out. We have seen people migrating from Libya, causing friction on the country's borders and friction between Italy and France. If we are to raise the siege over these cities, if we are to stem the migration from Libya and if we are to demonstrate to people at home that we can prosecute a compassionate and successful war to a quick conclusion, we need to move to remove Gaddafi, either through allied effort or by giving the Libyans the means to do so themselves. The status quo is not an option.

9.1 pm

**Yasmin Qureshi** (Bolton South East) (Lab): When the tragedy of 11 September occurred, I was working for the United Nations mission in Kosovo. I was in the

region of Mitrovica, which is divided by a bridge. Across the bridge, I could see Serbian Orthodox Christians burning American flags in jubilation at the events unfolding in America. On 2 May, I saw similar signs of jubilation in America after the death of Osama bin Laden. It is important not to confuse the desire for retribution with the desire to defeat an enemy. Because terrorism partakes of both crime and war, it is perfectly natural, and perhaps legitimate, to have both these attitudes towards Osama bin Laden—to think that we had to disable him, and to think that he deserved to die. However, Milosevic, who killed 100,000 Bosnians, was tried at The Hague.

His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Williams, has said:

“I think the killing of an unarmed man is always going to leave a very uncomfortable feeling, because it doesn't look as if justice is seen to be done in those circumstances”.

It is deeply troubling if we are moving to a global assassination policy for our enemies. Surely, the norm must be that terrorists be dealt with as criminals, through legal processes of arrest and trial. Such a trial would have had the benefit of laying out before the world the evil of terrorism. It would have peeled away the mystique of bin Laden and shown al-Qaeda to be banal and ridiculous.

In recent weeks, a blizzard of questions and fingers have been pointed at the legitimacy of Pakistan as an ally. I was disappointed by the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid), who seemed to suggest that more questions should be asked of Pakistan, although I was pleased that the Foreign Secretary mentioned Pakistan's commitment to the international coalition against terrorism since 9/11. Pakistan has become the victim of an almost daily onslaught of suicide bombings in the very heart of its country. Just yesterday a suicide bomb killed 18 people. The US-led drone attacks continue to take civilian lives, resulting in a breeding ground for al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

Pakistan's efforts since 2002 have cost it 30,000 civilian casualties, 5,000 security personnel casualties, and the devastation of property and infrastructure. Over the past nine years, its economy has borne the loss of more than \$35 billion. The war on terror and the rehabilitation of internally displaced people has consumed a huge amount of the Government's financial resources and halted economic growth. Unemployment is high, which is triggering other social problems and putting pressures on successive Governments.

The obligation to focus on security has contributed to a continuing failure to invest in key areas of public provision, such as education and health, and assisted the military and intelligence sectors in retaining power and influence in Pakistan's political system. There may be some rogue elements in Inter-Services Intelligence, but to tarnish the whole of the ISI, the army and the Government of Pakistan by suggesting that they are not trustworthy is an insult to the people of Pakistan, including the civilian population, who suffer on a daily basis from atrocities that those of us sitting in this country cannot even imagine.

Many have mentioned the aid given to Pakistan over the past 12 years, which amounts to about \$10 billion. However, the USA has spent \$146 billion on this war on terror. In terms of loss—and, indeed, the near-destruction of Pakistan—\$10 billion is chickenfeed. It does not even start to compensate Pakistan for the breadth of destruction that it has suffered. Let us remember that until the Soviets invaded Afghanistan—then we had

11 September—Pakistan had no quarrels or squabbles with Afghanistan. It got involved in the war in Afghanistan only because historically it was a US ally. Therefore, it is completely wrong for everyone to start pointing the finger at Pakistan, a country that is suffering the most.

**Nick Boles:** I am enjoying the hon. Lady's speech so much that I want to give her a bit of injury time. Will she please continue?

**Yasmin Qureshi:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that.

I was also a little disappointed that the hon. Member for Bromsgrove talked about Pakistan's supposedly imagined problems with India. At the end of the day, each nation state is interested in its own interests. However, when two countries have gone to war on two occasions, as Pakistan and India have, when India supported the breakaway of East Pakistan, which became Bangladesh, and when every year it releases flood waters from dams, causing flooding in Pakistan, it is naive to say that Pakistan's perceived security problem is an apparition. Rather, it is real. Indeed, Bishop Nazir-Ali, who is not normally pro-Pakistan, touched on Pakistan's security in an article last week.

In all these wars that are taking place across the world, we lost the plot in the graveyard of empires, turning the hunt for the now largely irrelevant inventor of global jihad into a war against tens of thousands of Taliban insurgents who have little interest in al-Qaeda, but much enthusiasm for driving western armies out of their country. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn), who is no longer in the Chamber, referred to the ferengi, and that is exactly what is going on. The fact is that we are interfering in Afghanistan, while Pakistan, as an ally of the west, is having to pay the price for our war on terror.

9.8 pm

**John Glen (Salisbury) (Con):** I want to take this opportunity to make some observations about the situation in Libya and Syria, and to address the wider issue of British foreign policy in that rapidly changing part of the world. Our foreign policy is perhaps seen as one of intervening when we can, but not always where we should. There is a perception that the moral component of our motivation or justification for intervention does not always seem to apply everywhere with the same degree of seriousness. When it comes to that part of the world, I do not see an appetite in either this House or the country at large to seek out theatres of war. However, I seek to discern some consistency, even if the consistent application of principles will not mean that the same action is taken in every country.

Back on 21 March, I supported the implementation of the no-fly zone, which seemed entirely appropriate, not simply from the perspective of seeking to prevent mass slaughter in Benghazi, but on the understanding that all diplomatic efforts and avenues had been exhausted. Walking away when an evil tyrant was about to murder his own people would have been an abdication of responsibility by the international community. At the same time, however, I listened to the many excellent speeches in the Chamber, and the many warnings, especially from some of those hon. Members who are present this evening, who feared that the solution would not be quick and easy. Sure enough, it has proved not to be.

I am slightly concerned about the way in which the debate has unfolded over the past eight weeks. Nowhere in the UN Security Council resolution does it prescribe a time frame. There was a great expectation that the operation would all be over immediately and that everything would be fine, but that was never my expectation when I voted for the no-fly zone on 21 March. Across the House, however, there seems to be a great need to bring the operation to a close, as though the international community's other weapons—diplomacy, economic sanctions and exerting our influence over what other countries in the region do—will have no effect. I was never tempted to assume that Gaddafi would quickly emigrate to Venezuela, or that his iron grip on his media would somehow dissipate overnight. It is true that he enjoys widespread support in Tripoli today, but there are horrendous things happening in Misrata. This is a moving situation, despite the notion that the world somehow stopped on 21 March.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** The hon. Gentleman is making some important points. All wars have to end with some kind of political settlement and some kind of deal. Does he think that it might not be the west that brings about such a settlement, and that an effective diplomatic intervention from the African Union, the Arab League, the Turkish Government or someone else would be more likely to stop the bloodshed and bring about some form of peace?

**John Glen:** Quite possibly; that is my point. Given recent events, I believe that the notion that we can bring the situation in Libya to a neat, precise conclusion by the extension of targets will prove erroneous.

These operations have significant implications for our armed forces. Last week, the Defence Committee, of which I am a member, interviewed the heads of the three services. It was quite clear, when we read between the half-answers and the attempts not to address the issue directly, that all the services are under massive strain. It will be an abdication of responsibility if the Government do not address that point and allocate appropriate resources. I was very concerned to hear that there is to be a review of defence expenditure over the next three months, as we try to squeeze out more resources. Concern was expressed following the strategic defence and security review about putting off decisions on expenditure until future years.

We need to deal with the reality, and a number of scenarios could evolve. We could find ourselves in a perpetual stalemate. Alternatively, we could have a little more humility about the way in which this awful situation could be resolved, and realise that it will not happen very quickly. We must realise that a change in regime achieved by the rising up of internal forces against Gaddafi is hardly likely to happen in just a few weeks or months, given the grip that he has had on his country over so many years. It is necessary for us to maintain the current posture and continue to develop diplomatic pressure and the role of the regional players. Yes, it is messy and uncomfortable, but it is right to hold the line and to continue to strengthen and broaden the base of support. We must continue to show resolve and to provide as much support as possible. It is also clear that going down the route of putting boots on the ground is never going to be acceptable in the current environment.

[John Glen]

We acted on the basis of stopping an evil man from murdering his people. We may find the process since then rather uncomfortable, but it is not one from which we can pull away.

Some parallels have been drawn with Syria. There, we have seen numerous efforts taken to impose travel bans, to freeze assets, to provide medical supplies and so forth. There, too, the answer is in diplomacy and securing concessions one by one rather than necessarily threatening military action. The reality is that each country in the region is different, which means we cannot have a one-size-fits-all policy; we need the slow, sober, determined, persistent and measured policy that this Government are undertaking. We need to recognise that we do not have the right or the means to solve this problem overnight.

9.16 pm

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I am very pleased indeed to have the opportunity to speak in this important debate. Before going any further, I would like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi) on what I thought was an important and brave speech. I am going to touch briefly on the Israel-Palestine question, on Afghanistan and then, of course, Libya.

On the Israel-Palestine question, I cannot add much to what many others have said, but let me say this. I have heard Conservative Members say that we do not understand the Israelis' wish for security. I was a Member of this House at the end of the '80s, when an IRA bombing campaign on the mainland was still happening and I remember Mrs Thatcher being blown up in the Grand hotel in Brighton. I also heard the Canary Wharf bomb going off from my kitchen in the east end of London, so do not tell those of us who lived through that era that we do not take security issues seriously.

The proposition was put forward that Israel wants all these triple locks, guarantees and so forth before it will move forward. What triple lock guarantees did John Hume of the Social Democratic and Labour party have before he opened the first tentative negotiations with the IRA back in the '80s? What triple lock guarantees did Nelson Mandela have when he was in prison and first opened overtures to the apartheid regime? The truth is that in the most bloody, difficult and seemingly intractable situations that we have seen in my lifetime, people have had to be prepared to go forward without the triple lock guarantees about which some Members have spoken, but with a will to bring about peace. As long as Israel believes that it has the unconditional support of the United States and Britain, it will continue to shelter behind the notion of triple lock guarantees.

**Nick Boles:** I accept what the hon. Lady says, but does she accept that there was no question in the Irish situation of the people of this country being driven out of this country by those in the IRA who were fighting us? They wanted us to get out of what they perceived as their country; they were not trying to deny our right to be here. The fundamental situation faced by Israel is that some, though not all, of its neighbours believe that Israel should not exist and that all its people should be driven into the sea. That poses a security risk of a quite different quality.

**Ms Abbott:** The hon. Gentleman should speak to some of my friends in the Democratic Unionist party about how they perceived their security as part of Britain in the '80s.

Let me move on and deal with Afghanistan. I have been fortunate enough to visit Afghanistan and to meet, talk and stay with our troops there. I was very struck by the bravery of our ordinary soldiers. Not many people realise that the level of mutilations—not just death—is far higher in Afghanistan than anywhere else our armed forces have been sent since the second world war. In talking to ordinary troops—which Ministers and shadow Defence Ministers do not necessarily do—I found that those who had been on two or three tours of duty said that they were regarded as liberators on their first tour, but were now regarded as an occupying force. Members who are familiar with our history will know that no British occupying force has won a war in Afghanistan since the 19th century. [HON. MEMBERS: “We didn’t win that one, either.”] No, we did not. The idea that there is a military solution to what is going on in Afghanistan has a basis in history, but no basis in fact.

When my party was in government Ministers often presented, as Ministers do now, the notion that we were waiting for the Afghan police and armed forces to be ready to take over, but if we wait for that we will still be there in a hundred years. We must act decisively and stop making the mistake that we made with, for instance, the south Vietnamese: the mistake of propping up a regime that needs not to be propped up, but to face reality.

It seems to me that the best thing we could do for our brave soldiers who have lost their lives and limbs fighting this war is to use the occasion of the elimination of bin Laden—whatever we think of the circumstances—to do what we should have done before, and withdraw from Afghanistan. Let us by all means give that country support with development and nation-building, but let us stand back and withdraw from military intervention that history tells us is doomed.

I voted for the intervention in Libya, but I did so with a heavy heart. I was present for the debate—because I think that one should take part in debates on such important occasions—and I was persuaded that unless we intervened as the Government suggested, the civilians of Benghazi would meet a horrible fate. However, a number of developments in Libya since then have been extremely disappointing. For instance, where is the Arab League? I was in the Chamber when we were promised that we would have its support, and that we would be fighting alongside Arab troops. Where are they? We have sold those people billions of pounds-worth of arms. What has happened to the arms, the aeroplanes and the armaments? Where are they? This has the look and the feel of a straightforward western bombardment of a north African country, and I must tell the House that that is not sustainable politics. Where is the Arab League, and how can it be persuaded to shoulder its responsibility in relation to Libya?

I am also concerned about the sending in of advisers. Where advisers go, can troops be far behind? As one who sat through the entire debate on Libya, I am clear about the fact that there is no will in the House to become involved in a land war in north Africa, and as it happens, I do not believe that there is a will among the

British public—Labour, Conservative and all points between—to become involved in such a war. I sincerely hope that we shall not see a further escalation of the Libyan intervention without returning to the House for a full debate.

Was it Walpole who said, “They are ringing the bells today, but tomorrow they will be wringing their hands”? I believe that unless we adopt a more decisive approach to what is happening in Afghanistan and do not simply allow ourselves to be sucked in, the British public—however much they appreciated the humanitarian impulse that led us into Libya—will be wringing their hands tomorrow.

9.23 pm

**Stephen Gilbert** (St Austell and Newquay) (LD): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). I agreed with some of her analysis, although by no means all of it.

As we meet here tonight, civilians in Libya continue to become victims of a brutal regime that is showing no humanity in its efforts to impose its will on the Libyan people. The contrast between the cowardice of Gaddafi and the courage of his people could not be greater. While he continues to hide behind mercenaries and soak himself in delusional rhetoric in his compound, the vast majority of the Libyan people are standing in hope, in the open, and poorly armed, against him. Like all tyrants, he has lost his grip on reality. He is alone, and lost in his own propaganda.

When I look at the faces of the men and women fighting Gaddafi, I see a yearning for freedom and a grasping for dignity, pride and self-determination. All those are the antithesis of what Gaddafi represents. The only person he is fooling with his insane rhetoric is himself. He is hated by his people, he has lost legitimacy, he is shortly to become a wanted war criminal, and it is now a question of when, not if, he must go.

Against that backdrop, I pay tribute to the men and women of our armed forces who continue to execute the tasks set by the Government with the professionalism that we have come to expect from the best armed forces in the world. I remain in awe of their selfless determination and courage. In putting themselves in harm's way to protect innocent people, they are standing up for the very best traditions of our nation, and they should rightly be proud of the work they are doing on behalf of their country.

Like the hon. Members for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) and for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), I remain convinced of the legitimacy of the steps the international community is taking. We could not have stood by and watched Benghazi entered by Gaddafi's murderous thugs. We could not have watched from the sidelines and merely grimaced at the slaughter that would inevitably have followed.

I fear that we are witnessing Syria begin the slide into the same violence and bloodshed that we have seen so dramatically in Libya. The United Nations estimates that over the last two months about 700 innocent civilians have been killed and hundreds more detained by the Syrian security services. We have seen their cities shelled by tanks, and troops conduct house-to-house searches to arrest and intimidate protestors. In Syria, as in the early days in Libya, people are standing up unarmed,

with only an idea to inspire them: the idea of freedom, which we in this country all too often take for granted. The reality is that the only long-term solution for the Syrian regime is one that regains the consent of the Syrian people. Failure to reach out to a political solution will only result in Syria descending into further turmoil and bloodshed. The international community must do all it can to impress that on the Syrian regime.

President al-Assad is at a crossroads. He can either respond to the demands of his people or he can continue his efforts to repress them, but only one course of action will leave his regime with security and legitimacy. If he chooses repression over reform, I believe he will ultimately be swept from power. I therefore welcome the steps the Government have taken to put pressure on the Syrian regime, but I ask the Secretary of State to say in his winding-up speech whether the discussions with the Syrian ambassador touched on rights of access to that country for the foreign media, and what the Syrian representative told him about the national dialogue proposed by that country's President.

The events of the last few months in north Africa and across the middle east highlight the urgent need to review our arms export regime, as the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley) made clear. People across the middle east and north Africa have displayed true courage in standing up against oppressive regimes that have used the most modern equipment and munitions to try to break their will. It is difficult for any of us in this House to stomach the idea that British-made equipment may have been used against these courageous people.

Of course it is right for the UK to play an active part in the international negotiations that have recently started at the United Nations aimed at securing a global arms trade treaty, but we must not lose sight of the choices that we ourselves can make to tighten our export regime. That is why I welcome both the Foreign Secretary's review of British arms export controls announced last month and the fact that the Government have revoked more than 150 export licences in recent weeks—but we can, and we must, go further. We need to tighten controls on both exports and re-exports, and we need to make sure that we put human rights at the heart of our consideration of which countries we should export to. When will the Foreign Secretary's arms export review be published, and will it be brought before the House for debate?

It should now be crystal clear that the long-term interests of this country will always be best found in standing next to the people who seek freedom, and against the regimes that would simply impose their will. This strategic reality needs to be reflected in all corners of our Government and in all parts of the United Kingdom's global posture.

9.29 pm

**Rushanara Ali** (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): Today's debate is profoundly important and comes at a critical time. I thank the Secretary of State for providing Government time for it in order to consider the issues facing the people of the middle east, north Africa, Pakistan and Afghanistan, as well as our military, political and humanitarian response to the multiple crises in those crucial parts of the world.

[*Rushanara Ali*]

Following the earlier debate on the military covenant, it is right that we pay tribute to the brave servicemen and women who are engaged in protecting civilians in Libya under UN resolution 1973, as well as to our troops in Afghanistan. In particular, I wish to join others in paying tribute to Nigel Dean Mead, from 42 Commando Royal Marines, who was killed in Helmand province yesterday. We remember the continued price paid by innocent people whose lives have been taken in terrorist attacks around the world, most recently in Morocco and, last week, in Pakistan. I also wish to reiterate Labour Members' grave concern about the killing of protestors by Israeli soldiers on the Syrian-Israeli border and about the injuries of civilians in the Palestinian territories. We join the Foreign Secretary in reaffirming calls for restraint on both sides.

A common theme that has arisen from events in Tunisia and Egypt, and the current situations in Libya and Syria, has been the way in which citizens have responded to the abuse of power by, and the lack of legitimacy in, their Governments. People have taken to the streets in their millions to bring about badly needed change. Few could have imagined just how much a few short months would change the world, as the self-immolation of one man led to a chain of unstoppable events around the Arab world. Tunisia will hold its first elections to a new Assembly in July, Egypt will go to the polls in September, and we are seeing rapid change in a number of other countries.

However, it is also vital to pay closer attention to the need to tackle global inequality and economic inequality, given the situation in those middle-income countries. Many of the international financial institutions did not foresee what was about to happen in these countries, which did not have significant levels of poverty but did have great inequality. The historical failure of their Governments to deliver political and human rights opportunities, and economic growth, continues to fuel the protests, and this country has a crucial role to play in supporting the people of those countries.

For many, these events have been a cry for freedom, democracy and transparency after decades of repression and abuse of power by those in positions of authority and responsibility; they have been about the need to be treated with dignity and fairness, and the opportunity to have jobs and decent chances in life. The international community must do everything possible to help realise those aspirations and ensure that the brave people of those countries genuinely have the best chance for a better future.

Excellent speeches have been made by many distinguished right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House, in which they have highlighted their great insight, expertise, conviction and passion for the subject. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) spoke with great passion and expertise about the need to support Yemen, about the threat from terrorism and about the many challenges facing that country, including the need to tackle poverty. The hon. Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) spoke of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and concerns about Iran's nuclear capabilities. The right hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) spoke of the importance of the EU providing support for the middle east in its pursuit of democracy and human rights. The right hon. Member for Tonbridge

and Mallong (Sir John Stanley) raised concerns about the UK Government's export licences for arms to the middle east.

The hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid) spoke with great passion about Britain's relationship with Pakistan. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi) highlighted the many challenges faced by Pakistan and the loss of thousands of civilian lives in terror attacks, including the one last week. It is vital that we continue to work closely with Pakistan despite the challenges and some of the criticisms. We must recognise, as many have in the House today, the importance of working with Pakistan, maintaining our alliances and ensuring that the terror threat is overcome.

Many Members have spoken with great expertise and passion about the situation in Libya and the middle east and, in particular, their concerns about the UN resolution, which we support, the dangers of scope creep and the parameters within which the resolution is implemented. Clearly, there are great concerns about stalemate, as highlighted by a number of Members, including the right hon. and learned Member for Kensington (Sir Malcolm Rifkind) and the hon. Member for Croydon South (Richard Ottaway).

Let me turn to a recent tragedy involving migrants. The Government rightly supported the International Organisation for Migration, but I am sure that the Secretary of State for International Development will have been deeply concerned about reports last week that a boat full of migrants, including young children, died after their distress calls were not acted on. Only 11 survived. Will the Government clarify whether British forces intercepted any such distress messages, and say that they will co-operate with any international investigation?

As has been touched on by many hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Croydon South and my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman), in the light of the recent comments made by the Chief of the Defence Staff about upping the ante, may we also have an assurance that the House will be consulted before any significant change is made to targeting policy in Libya? Given the concerns expressed by Baroness Amos, will the Secretary of State assure us that a thorough assessment will be made of the humanitarian impact if military action is stepped up? In particular, if power, water and fuel cuts are made, as reported in some of the press, there are grave concerns about a humanitarian catastrophe. That contradicts the very reason why we are there: our military action is designed to protect civilians. There are also concerns about access for medical personnel, and we would appreciate an update on whether we are providing additional support to get medical personnel into Libya.

At a meeting today with Michelle Bachelet, the head of UN Women, the shadow Secretary of State for International Development and I discussed the concerns about sexual violence faced by women. May we have an assurance from the Secretary of State that the British Government will ensure that every effort is made to provide security and safety for women in conflict, not just in Libya but in other parts of the world? As was pointed out by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), drawing on her experiences in Iraq, human rights, particularly those of women, are crucial and are often left out of major discussions and political negotiations on matters of conflict.

Many of my hon. Friends and other hon. Members raised concerns about what is happening in Syria. We, like the Government, denounce the appalling violence that the Government of Syria are using against their own people. We recognise the complexity and difficulty of the situation and we call on the Government to do everything possible to ensure that every pressure is put on the Government of Syria to bring an end to the violence against their people, who are out protesting. Will the Secretary of State for International Development, in his summing up, update the House on his assessment of the situation on Syria's borders, and tell us whether large numbers of civilians are starting to leave that country?

On the situation in the middle east, many right hon. and hon. Members spoke passionately about the situation in Israel and Palestine and the need for a lasting peaceful settlement, with many highlighting the deaths of Palestinians over the weekend and the security concerns of Israel. We heard speeches from both sides of the argument: my hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) spoke with great expertise about the plight of the people of Palestine, and others spoke of concerns about the security issues facing the Israeli people. It is clear that we desperately need a lasting settlement in the middle east, and we urge the Government to do everything possible to keep the pressure on the US and on the Israeli and Palestinian Governments to resume negotiations as soon as possible.

I now want to address issues concerning Pakistan and Afghanistan, particularly the political settlement in Afghanistan and the great concern about the exclusion of women from those negotiations. That concern has been raised a number of times in our discussions with politicians in Afghanistan, and we very much hope that the UK Government will do everything possible to make sure that women have a strong voice in the peace process, including in discussions about the role of the Taliban. There are particular fears about the violation of women's human rights in Afghanistan, and we must do everything possible to ensure that those rights are not neglected—not just in Afghanistan but in Libya, Egypt and the many other countries in the middle east that currently face such challenges.

In conclusion, I reiterate how vital it is for the House to debate this important issue and I thank the Foreign Secretary for the opportunity to do so. I hope that in his summing up the Secretary of State for International Development will shed light on the many issues that have been raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House, and that he will address some of the questions that have not yet been answered, particularly about the widening scope of the UN resolution and about the humanitarian situation in Libya and other countries. I also hope that he will ensure that Britain provides the support needed not only to bring an end to the violence in countries such as Libya, but to ensure that the aspirations and hopes of the people who have been out on the streets demonstrating over recent months are realised.

9.42 pm

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Andrew Mitchell):** This has been an important, timely and wide-ranging debate—a huge mouthful of a debate with a number of very fine speeches, not least

from the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali), who speaks for the Opposition. I will address the issue of Libya at the end of my remarks and I will write to hon. Members if I do not cover the issues that they raised.

Let me start with a view of the discussion on the middle east. The transition sweeping the middle east is an historic opportunity for the region, as many hon. Members have pointed out. The Government are working to ensure that the international community rises to the challenge in its support for countries that embark on change. It is in our interests to ensure that those transitions succeed, but significant challenges must be addressed before lasting stability can be achieved. In particular, there must be the political and economic reforms that will support sustainable growth and facilitate the transition to a freer, fairer and more inclusive society. Britain is pushing the international institutions to play a leading role in galvanising support for that process, including by meeting the significant financial needs. As the Chairman of the Select Committee on International Development, the right hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce), said, the role of the European Union is critical. We are pressing for the restructuring of European neighbourhood funding for the region to ensure that it backs strong commitments to political and economic reform and to make it easier for countries in the region to trade with Europe. We also plan to fund a “know-how” facility to provide immediate access to expertise on economic reform. The right hon. Member for Warley (Mr Spellar) raised that issue. The facility will be closely linked to the efforts and expertise of the international financial institutions.

As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made clear, the European Union has a huge and critical role to play. The right hon. Member for Warley mentioned my right hon. Friend's announcement of the expansion of the Foreign Office footprint, but said that it was not expanding in the middle east. I point out to the right hon. Gentleman that we are already represented in all the countries that we are discussing today, and more widely. The mission to Benghazi is an example of the expansion of the Foreign Office in a timely and sensible way.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr Gale) spoke with his usual expertise about Tunisia. He spoke wisely about elections and in particular about the importance of opening markets. The difficult but important subject of the international arms trade was raised by the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley). I emphasise that there are high British standards for this trade, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Martin Horwood) pointed out in an excellent intervention. In the end the answer is for the international community to accept the need for an international arms trade treaty.

On the occupied Palestinian territories, the wave of democratic movements that we are witnessing represents a unique opportunity to take forward the middle east peace process. The violence over the weekend at Israel's borders underlines the urgency of making progress. With British support, the Palestinian Authority has developed its institutions to the point where the International Monetary Fund, the UN and the World Bank have recognised them as technically ready for

[Mr Andrew Mitchell]

statehood. To achieve a two-state solution it is important that this work continues. The recent announcement of a reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah is a step in the right direction if it leads to a Government who reject violence and pursue a negotiated peace—a point set out eloquently by my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Arbuthnot).

We heard disparate but firmly held views across the Chamber this afternoon. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman) was characteristically forthright, and I thank him for his kind comments about my Department. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), on whose civil partnership the whole House will wish to congratulate him, from the hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), who entered the House on the same day as I did and whose views have not changed one jot in the past 24 years, from my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) in a fine speech, and from the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), who touched on Israel in a wide-ranging speech. Everyone was united in the absolute requirement to make progress and to take advantage of the changed circumstances, which were eloquently described.

**Jeremy Corbyn** *rose*—

**Mr Mitchell:** If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me for a moment, I turn now to Yemen. The right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) warned of the continuing crisis. I will consider carefully some of his wider comments. With reference to Yemen, I am concerned that alongside the current political impasse, we are seeing an escalating economic crisis. In particular we are seeing increasing reports of fuel shortages and rises in food prices. Any further deterioration in the economy could prompt a much broader humanitarian crisis, not least because without fuel, much of Yemen cannot be provided with water.

The British Government are working with aid agencies to ensure that they can respond to humanitarian needs in Yemen, and I can announce today that we will be committing additional support to UNICEF and the Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs under the United Nations humanitarian response plan for Yemen. Through this support we will prevent 11,000 children under five from dying of malnutrition, vaccinate 54,000 children against measles, saving lives and preventing blindness, deafness and brain damage in over 2,000 children, and ensure that agencies have rapid access to funds if Yemen tips into a humanitarian crisis.

**Keith Vaz:** I am most grateful to the Secretary of State for that announcement and thank him very much for it. What he has said to the House tonight will save the lives of many Yemeni people, including children.

**Mr Mitchell:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention.

I have even greater concerns about the situation in Syria. The current ongoing human rights abuses and lack of access to humanitarian organisations is particularly worrying. If organisations are to compile an accurate

picture of need, sustained unhindered humanitarian access is essential. I call on the Syrian Government to allow United Nations humanitarian organisations unfettered access to undertake assessments of the situation across Syria without delay. As the Foreign Secretary made clear, the EU will insist that the violence must stop or additional measures will be taken, and I note that there was strong support across the House for that stance.

My hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Stephen Gilbert) mentioned the importance of international press and humanitarian access in Syria, but I can offer nothing for his or anyone else's comfort on that point tonight. Finally, with regard to the sensible comments made by the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow, we are watching the humanitarian situation on the borders with great care. I discussed that matter a few days ago with Jakob Kellenberger, the head of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Pakistan, which has been mentioned a great deal in the debate, remains a top priority for the Government. It can meet its enormous potential only if it works to stabilise its economy in the short term and to educate and develop opportunities for its rapidly expanding population in the longer term. A stable and prosperous Pakistan that can meet the needs of its people will benefit regional and global stability and security.

Britain will therefore support Pakistan in achieving this end. As the Prime Minister announced last month, our aim is to help Pakistan to get 4 million children into school, out of a population of 17 million who do not go to school. Pakistan could become Britain's largest country development programme, but only if we see commitment and progress on reform from its Government, including a fairer approach to taxing its elite.

The people of Pakistan have suffered grievously from terrorism. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made clear, many thousands of civilians have been killed and many more maimed or injured. The right hon. Member for Warley made the same point. Osama bin Laden was no friend to the people of Pakistan; all he brought was a nihilistic message of death and destruction. His death, however, presents an opportunity for a brighter future in Pakistan and the region. Pakistan can make greater strides in its fight against extremism and the way is now clear for the Taliban to make a decisive break from al Qaeda and join the Afghan political process. The choice is theirs. Peace and security can be improved for Afghan and Pakistan civilians on both sides of their border.

To grasp this opportunity, Pakistan needs to make a clean break with the past. There are serious questions to be answered on bin Laden's support network in Pakistan, and we welcome Prime Minister Gilani's announcement of an investigation into the matter. Nevertheless, it is right that we remain steadfast in our support for Pakistan as its democratically elected Government continue their fight against terrorism.

Pakistan matters to us. In an increasingly interconnected world, the UK cannot simply look on from the sidelines. More than 1 million people of Pakistani origin live in this country. We have a long, close and historic relationship with Pakistan. What happens there directly affects us. There is no serious alternative to our continued engagement with Pakistan. Neither the region, nor we, would be safer by leaving a nuclear power that is in danger of

extremism and instability to its fate, a point my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid) made in an interesting and thoughtful speech.

Our engagement with Pakistan must therefore be both long term and strategic. Increasing access to high-quality education and developing greater economic opportunities will improve the lives of the Pakistani people and help strengthen resilience to terrorism. A stable and prosperous Pakistan that can meet the needs of its people will not only benefit regional stability and security, but directly benefit our own security.

On Afghanistan, the Chair of the International Development Committee noted that we should not concentrate only on military aspects, important though they are, and I join the whole House in paying tribute to Marine Nigel Mead, who recently lost his life. Although the next four years will be critical, 2015 will not be the end of the story. This is why Britain has made a long-term commitment to Afghanistan. It is unrealistic to expect the Afghan Government to become perfect in such a relatively short time, but they must be strong enough to secure the support of their people and defend themselves. To achieve these objectives, the Department for International Development is focusing on three development aims: supporting stability in insecure areas, stimulating growth and building the capability of the Afghan Government to deliver basic services.

I was able to see for myself the very real impact that aid is having on stability when I recently visited Helmand. British assistance has helped to train more than 2,000 policemen and women, built 12 checkpoints, with 16 more in construction, and laid more than 80 km of roads, giving local farmers the access to markets that they badly need.

At the same time, we are helping people to develop the skills that they need to improve their lives. We are developing plans to provide vocational training for 45,000 people, and that will include funding Turquoise Mountain to equip almost 200 men and women with traditional skills and crafts.

Although there is evidence of progress, the scale of Afghanistan's challenge remains considerable, as the recent disgraceful events relating to the Kabul bank have illustrated. We are working closely with the International Monetary Fund and the Government of Afghanistan to address the very serious issues that have arisen. They are undoubtedly a setback, but I can reassure the House that we have wasted no time in taking steps to protect British taxpayers' money.

On the wider economic front, Afghanistan is making good progress. With British support, it has achieved 20% growth in revenue each year since 2002, and economic growth averaged 9% between 2002 and 2010.

The mining sector will be absolutely critical to future growth. I met Minister Shahrani in March and was encouraged to hear about the reforms that he is making—reforms that Britain is supporting. He also told me of his success in letting a number of mining concessions, and the details of the 108 contracts on the departmental website are also welcome evidence of its commitment to transparency and accountability.

Decades of conflict have inevitably left Afghanistan's civil service ill equipped to do its job. During my visit, I announced funding for the Government-led civilian technical assistance programme, which will provide

international and regional expertise to support local and national Government as we train the next generation of Afghan civil servants.

On Libya, I pay tribute to the thoughtful and important speeches by my hon. Friends the Members for Tamworth (Christopher Pincher) and for Salisbury (John Glen), and to the interesting contribution from the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn). I wish to address directly one of the points that the right hon. Member for Warley made in his opening remarks.

Britain made two important decisions on humanitarian issues early on in the conflict. First, we gave very strong support to the weight of migrant workers moving across the borders into Tunisia and Egypt, and as a result of that support from Britain and others almost 800,000 migrant workers have crossed those borders and tonight less than 10,000 are caught on them. That help has prevented a logistical crisis turning into a humanitarian emergency.

Our second key decision was to announce that we would finance the rescue of 5,000 poor migrant workers who have been caught out on the portside in Misrata and subject to shelling and other attacks in recent weeks. Britain has been able to lift some 4,000 of them out of Misrata, and the final boat to remove the last 1,000 should go in any day now. The House will be aware that Misrata is no longer in Gaddafi's hands but has been completely taken over by the interim transitional national council.

In addition to that, we are also working closely with the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Medical Corps to supply medicines, 30 tonnes of which were recently delivered by boat to Misrata, and to support 100,000 internally displaced persons as well as 3,000 walking wounded.

We will shortly deploy a stabilisation response team, including some 10 stabilisation experts and 20 support and protection officials, to join together with the United States, Italy and the European Union. That team will work on infrastructure demands, basic services, justice, security and a political plan, all of which will be necessary following the ceasing of the conflict and as part of an early recovery.

We will of course work closely with the United Nations. When I saw Michelle Bachelet this morning, I had a chance to discuss with her the very matter that the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow raised. All of us believe that the plan that is worked up must be run by the United Nations, owned by the Libyans and supported by the region, the European Union and the international financial institutions.

All of us in the Chamber can draw inspiration from the way in which democracy is beginning to flower throughout the middle east. The Arab spring marks a truly historic moment not only for the middle east itself, but for us here in the United Kingdom. Our own peace and prosperity depend on the stability of the region and on the rights and freedoms that it espouses. Yes, there are challenges, and we will rise to them. The international community—

10 pm

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).*

## Business without Debate

### SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE (24 MAY)

*Ordered,*

That, on Tuesday 24 May, the House shall meet at 11.30 am and references to specific times in the Standing Orders of this House shall apply as if that day were a Wednesday.—(*Miss Chloe Smith.*)

### JUSTICE

*Ordered,*

That Mrs Siân C. James be discharged from the Justice Committee and Jeremy Corbyn be added.—(*Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

**Bob Russell** (Colchester) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I inquire whether a Minister from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has any intention of coming to the House to explain and answer questions on the written statement that was issued on Friday about performing wild animals in circuses. Following a consultation started by the previous Government, there had been an expectation that the coalition Government would bring in a ban on exotic animals in circuses. There is now a written statement saying that the Government are not going to do that. I hope you will agree, Mr Speaker, that a Minister should come to the House and explain why that is the case.

**Mr Speaker:** I have received no indication that a Minister intends to come to the House to make a statement. I am aware of the close interest in the subject that the hon. Gentleman has long expressed. In view of his 14 years' experience in the House, he will be well aware of ways in which he can continue to pursue this matter, and I trust that he will.

## Farming (Droughts)

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Miss Chloe Smith.*)

10.1 pm

**Dr Thérèse Coffey** (Suffolk Coastal) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for selecting this debate. I also thank the many hon. Members who have said that they will be present, one or two of whom may intervene during the debate.

This spring has been very dry; March was the driest in 50 years. Suffolk has suffered having had just 13% of its average rainfall across the entire county. Until this weekend, no rain had fallen in my constituency since February; that indicates the general dryness of what we have been suffering. My constituency has a mixture of clay fields, which have been able to absorb some water over the winter, and, predominantly, sand fields, on which a significant amount of agriculture relies.

I recognise that the consumer will probably do okay out of all this, because there is no prospect of a hosepipe ban in my part of England, and I understand that that is equally unlikely in other parts of the country. I also recognise that some farmers welcome these temperatures and are not worried about the lack of rain, because it is producing bumper crops of fruits and similar produce.

**Stephen Phillips** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): If this drought continues, it will affect not only those in rural constituencies but the pocket of every constituent of every Member of this House in six months to a year's time. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is therefore extraordinary that there is no Opposition Member, shadow Minister or shadow Whip in the House—in fact, nobody on the Opposition Benches at all?

**Dr Coffey:** I share my hon. and learned Friend's great concern. More than 10 of us are in the House, which is unusual for an Adjournment debate. Hon. Friends present represent rural constituencies and urban constituencies. Given that some of our colleagues from across the way claim to represent rural areas, their farmers and constituents will be disappointed.

My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right to say that this situation will come to impact on every single person in this country. One of the challenges that our farmers face is that irrigation is needed to meet the quality standards that our supermarkets demand for what they will sell on their shelves. This is also about the price that we are prepared to pay for our food. There is an impact not just on the price of a potato or an onion, but on the feed for our livestock because of a lack of forage and hay, which will have repercussions next winter. We will all pay a heavy price for that.

**Simon Hart** (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): My hon. Friend might be surprised to hear a Member from west Wales complaining about the lack of rain, but does she agree that her point about feed price will have a significant downstream effect on dairy producers, who are beginning to realise that their industry will be affected in six to eight months' time?

**Dr Coffey:** My hon. Friend and my hon. and learned Friend are right to recognise that this issue will impact on everyone. If our countrymen are happy to see greater imports, perhaps we will be protected from the price surges, but I believe that given the choice most people in this country would prefer to buy British, so we must do something as a consequence.

As I said, this issue does not affect all farmers or all counties across the country, but it does impact on the bread basket of our fair land. In my constituency, spraying has started early. Irrigation has long been part of the agriculture of Suffolk Coastal, which has a similar climate to north Africa. We have imported technologies from Morocco, Israel and similar places in recognition of the fact that we have one of the driest areas, although I recognise that one of my colleagues believes that his area is drier. This issue is impacting not just on agriculture, but on wildlife. Landguard nature reserve near Felixstowe is facing similar troubles and the lack of water is having an impact on biodiversity.

I will come on to the realities affecting farmers in my part of the world. The people who abstract came together in 1997 to form the East Suffolk Water Abstractors Group. They work with the Environment Agency to abstract correctly and appropriately to balance the needs of different water users. Most people have a quota for the year. Some people have taken a gamble by starting to spray early compared with previous seasons. They are concerned that they might be restricted later in the season. Thus far, the Environment Agency has not shown the flexibility that it did in 2009, when it allowed people to abstract later. I recognise that the Environment Agency has been proactive on this front and is working with farmers and other people to manage the situation. I pay tribute to it, because it is difficult to strike the right balance. However, there is no question but that people in my constituency are worried about the potential lack of water for their crops.

Some people abstract from ground water. Thus far, the aquifers are coping, but there is genuine concern about what will be available later in the summer and in the early autumn without further rainfall. The situation is more worrying for people who abstract from the rivers. This matter has been referred to by other Members who are worried about the impact on biodiversity. I believe that we should be more worried about the impact on food and agriculture. Frankly, other things can be cosmetic and temporary, whereas if farming is wiped out in certain areas of our country, it will greatly disadvantage food security.

What is the risk to rivers? In my constituency, the Blyth is running very slowly. Other parties, such as the internal drainage boards and the water companies, sometimes help by pumping water out to increase the flow. However, some of the farmers in my constituency are facing the reality that, by the end of next month, they may no longer be able to abstract at all. That is particularly worrying. Will the Minister say what co-ordinated action is being taken by the Environment Agency, internal drainage boards, water companies and farmers to understand how we can ensure that abstraction can continue?

I recognise that back in 2006, the last time we had a particularly dry summer, there was some voluntary activity that worked very well. People ended up abstracting

every other day, and they managed to cope through that summer. I am keen to ensure that there is similar preparation in future.

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (The Cotswolds) (Con): I inform the House of my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests as a practising farmer.

Does my hon. Friend agree that the world is a much more precarious place with regard to food than it has been for many years? Our world reserves are much lower than they have been, and countries such as China are importing much more maize and wheat than they ever used to. A shortage of production in this country for this harvest is therefore likely to have a much greater effect on household bills than it has in the past. Will she join me in urging the Government to adopt every flexible measure that they can, particularly in relation to water?

**Dr Coffey:** I thank my hon. Friend for that correct point. In my view, water is the new oil, and we need to ensure that we are careful with it where we can be. We have already seen cases of commodity prices spiking thanks to demand from the far east, particularly China, and we have felt the consequences. I agree that we need to be able to feed ourselves as best we can and not be subject to unnecessary spikes.

The rural development programme has given some priority to the management of resources such as water. In my constituency, the East of England Development Agency has undertaken some relevant projects. I do not have the details, but I am led to believe that 100,000 cubic metres of new storage facility will be made available in the summer. I would like the Minister to give us an understanding of the influence that he could have in helping the future Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs programme, and the existing programmes that are under the auspices of development agencies, to address the real need that exists. I understand that licences need to be made more flexible so that more water can be harvested in the winter, and that the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 changed the parameters so that those harvesting 10,000 cubic metres took on a significantly greater regulatory burden. What can we do to remove that burden and encourage co-operative reservoirs?

I will put in a bid for my area. A tiny part of my constituency managed to get in on the Leader programme, and I know that Suffolk is one of the pilot counties for the "Total Environment" scheme. I hope that we will be able to move forward after 2013 and allow Suffolk to form more co-operatives, so that funding can be diverted towards water storage. That would be good for farmers, for consumers and for the environment, and I am sure the Minister will put his mind to it.

I know that the farming community has great confidence in our Minister. He is a Suffolk man who was born in my constituency, and he was a farmer. [*Interruption.*] He still is a farmer—I apologise. I was not fully cognisant of that. The industry is looking for flexibility for the Environment Agency and for local farmers and stakeholders, and on that point I am more than confident in handing over to him.

10.14 pm

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr James Paice):** I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk

[Mr James Paice]

Coastal (Dr Coffey) on her initiative in calling for the debate and persuading you, Mr Speaker, to grant her this opportunity. It allows us to focus on an issue that is becoming of increasing importance every day not only to farmers but, as my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) has pointed out, to the rest of the general public.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal has rightly said, she represents the area where I was born and grew up, so I have a particular affinity for her constituents and understand the problems that they face.

In the title of the debate on the Order Paper, my hon. Friend uses the words “potential drought”. I asked the Environment Agency earlier today what the definition of a drought is, and I was told that there are a number of definitions, none of which yet fit. Nevertheless, most people in the countryside and most farmers would argue that we are in a difficult situation, which has been described to me as “an intense dry spell”. My hon. Friend spoke of the rainfall in Suffolk, but nationally, we have received only 61% of normal rainfall over the past three months, and in April we received only 24% of that average.

Soil moisture is at a level more usual at the start of June. Despite that, reservoirs are mostly at near-normal levels, but as my hon. Friend has rightly said, rivers are experiencing exceptionally low flows, which I shall come back to. Those low river levels are beginning to impact on farmers who rely on water abstraction to irrigate their crops, but they are also beginning to cause environmental damage and to have an impact on canals and waterways, as my hon. Friend has said.

So far, the dry spell has meant mixed fortunes for farmers. As my hon. Friend is probably aware, this has been a good season in parts of the country where they grow a lot of fruit. The weather has improved pollination rates, and we are getting English strawberries earlier than ever. It is not all bad news, but as she has said, and as I know from my constituency, crops on light and medium land are badly affected.

At Question Time last week, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs told the House that she would this week convene a water meeting with water companies and with farming and environment groups to ensure that we are properly prepared for prolonged dry conditions. That meeting took place today, and I am happy that I coincidentally have this opportunity to inform my hon. Friend and the House of some of the outcomes.

My hon. Friend has referred to 1976. The situation is very bad in our part of England—the east of England—but it is not yet a repetition of 1976, which has gone down in the annals of history as probably the worst ever event for farmers. I add that in the past three years, EEDA, to which my hon. Friend has referred, has assisted in the construction of some 26 farm reservoirs, of which there were very few back in 1976. At today’s meeting, we were told by farmers’ representatives that the latest estimate was for a 12% reduction in cereal yields, although that hides a massive range—some estimates suggest that some farmers will experience a 50% reduction.

The impact on the horticulture sector, in both fruit and vegetables, is much more variable. As I have said, top fruit and soft fruit have generally benefited, whereas

vegetable production has needed irrigation much earlier in the season than usual, as my hon. Friend has rightly said. That means that growers who have a limited amount of water to use, whether from a reservoir or abstraction rights, must think about rationing their usage.

The picture on livestock farms is one of concern—mainly about costs, particularly following a prolonged winter—but it is not yet one of panic, although I stress that we are only in the middle of May. In the dairy sector, the National Farmers Union advice is that the dry weather has brought forward the grass silage harvest, and boosted grass-sugar and energy levels, which has benefited those in good grass-growing regions.

Further east, back in our part of the world, and in the drier parts of the country, the dry spring will mean that there is less grass to cut or to graze cows on this spring. For all areas, re-growth will be stunted if there is a prolonged dry period. At a time when concentrate feed is very expensive, as my hon. Friend has said, reduced forage crop yields could mean substantially increased costs to farmers throughout the rest of this year. It is also worth mentioning that a poor cereal harvest—cereal farmers are experiencing very short straw—will mean a shortage of straw, much of which is exported for livestock from the east to the west of the country.

As my hon. Friend has said, it is clear that the main problem is for farmers who do not have reservoirs, who do not abstract from groundwater and who abstract from our rivers. Farmers have to compete for those abstraction rights with water companies, which abstract for human consumption, and with other industries. Overall, therefore, there are diminishing supplies. At this morning’s meeting, we felt this was an issue of great importance, and I can tell the House that we will be arranging a further meeting shortly specifically to consider the competing priorities for abstraction.

I emphasise that all Ministers in the Department recognise that, as my hon. Friend has said, both yield and quality of produce are affected by water supply. We do not wish to see farmers restricted unnecessarily, but obviously none of us can guarantee that those restrictions will not be required. I was not aware that, as she has suggested, farmers already believe that they will be restricted by the end of this month. I will consider that point tomorrow. However, the Environment Agency assured us today that it is trying to work with farmers to minimise the consequences. The point was raised—this is very relevant in today’s world—about allowing farmers with reservoirs to top them up during any summer surges. As we have seen over the past few years, we get horrendous summer storms. In a draught, there can suddenly be torrential storms, and it seems sensible that on those occasions, when there is a surge in the river, they could be used to top up reservoirs. That will be looked at.

Irrigation is not the only problem, of course. Farmers, particularly in my hon. Friend’s area—I know it very well—which has large areas of light-land forestry and heath land, are concerned about the potential impact of fire during this dry period. We will continue to work closely with those on the ground to warn the public, wherever possible, of the risks of fire in those circumstances. As she has mentioned, however, there are also the problems facing habitats in wet areas resulting from water drying up.

Taking a longer perspective, last week the Secretary of State published a Command Paper setting out the strong economic, social and environmental case for ensuring that our infrastructure is resilient enough to cope with the effects of climate change. Who can tell whether today's circumstances are the result of climate change? None of us can. None the less, the document pays particular regard to water infrastructure, which will need to cope, we believe, with hotter and drier summers, more extreme weather events and changing precipitation patterns in the years to come.

As my hon. Friend has said, water may well be today's oil—or tomorrow's oil at any rate—so to help realise the Government's vision of a well-adapted infrastructure network that can continue to support our economy, our infrastructure operators have been instructed to prepare climate risk assessments under the Climate Change Act 2008. My noble Friend Lord Henley will publish those assessments from water companies this Friday.

It is clear from what my hon. Friend and I have said that rights of water abstraction are a major issue for farmers. Work is going ahead, in consultation with farmers and a wide range of stakeholders, on the water White Paper, which we have already announced and hope to publish this autumn. We are considering whether to reform the water abstraction regime to facilitate investment, not least in reservoirs, and to respond to increased variability and the reduced availability of water owing to climate change. Of key interest to farmers will be the potential in such reform to increase the regulatory certainty in the abstraction regime in order to help farmers invest in storage.

My hon. Friend has asked me about the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 and the regulations on reservoirs of more than 10,000 cubic metres. She is right that the Act allows the extension of the Reservoirs Act 1975 to those reservoirs in the 10,000 cubic metres to 25,000 cubic metres capacity range. Reservoirs that pose negligible risks to public safety will not be regulated. Many farm irrigation reservoirs are remote from built-up areas and are of low-embankment height, and that includes reservoirs currently regulated under the 1975 Act. I hope that goes some way to allaying her concerns.

While I am talking about reservoirs, perhaps I should respond to my hon. Friend's point about the rural development programme for England, through which, as she has rightly said, our development agency has assisted the 26 reservoirs to which I have referred. Even though regional development agencies will cease to exist—many are being phased out now—I assure her that the rural development programme for England, which we are bringing back in house at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, will continue. I am not going to make light of the point that finances are obviously tight, and there have been some—I hope relatively small—reductions in the amount of money available. However, the overall programme and the assistance under it will remain in place for the rest of the programme.

Of key interest to farmers will be regulatory certainty. We are working closely with our farmers to develop that reform. In our approach to the White Paper, we are also considering a package of shorter-term measures to facilitate trading in abstraction licences, which should assist farmers managing their water use efficiently. It may surprise my hon. Friend to know—indeed, it surprised me—that there are farmers with abstraction licences who do not use them. Indeed, I discovered that there was one close to my home only over the weekend—the farmer is now thinking about using it. That is the situation, so the ability to trade licences would be a step forward.

We are also funding research into a wide range of issues, including investigating ways to improve water use. My hon. Friend referred several times to the use of spray irrigation, which is by far the commonest form of irrigation, although most people would accept that it probably wastes the most water. It is worth pointing out that those who use trickle irrigation are not subject to abstraction licences, so the more that we can do to improve water usage for irrigation—with more effective and perhaps novel strategies—the better. We are also investing in research that aims to anticipate the effects of climate change, so that we can be more accurate in helping people find the best ways to adapt. There is obviously also an issue when it comes to developing new and sustainable ways of providing livestock with sources of potable water, including novel methods for harvesting, storing and delivering water from rainfall, as well as from traditional sources such as rivers and streams.

Finally, if I may say so, I am really pleased that my hon. Friend proposed this debate. Indeed, it is also novel to see so many hon. Friends present, which shows the level of interest in this issue, which, as I said at the beginning of my speech, is a common subject of discussion among farmers, as I expect that you find in your constituency too, Mr Speaker. The weather has always been a subject of conversation, but this year more than ever, because farmers are understandably concerned. We do not know what the next few weeks hold. The Met Office forecast for the rest of May is not very encouraging for those who want rainfall, but beyond that none of us is prepared to speculate, least of all me. However, I hope that I have reassured my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal that we take the issue seriously. Today's meeting was really a stock-taking exercise to establish what the situation is, so that we can be in a better position to react, within the realms of feasibility for any Government. I assure her that I am not about to become the Minister for drought and that I will not do a rain dance or anything like that. However, I hope that I have assured her that we are concerned and are doing all that we can to free up the system and ensure that her farmers and mine, along with those in other affected parts of the country, are able to produce the best crops that they can in difficult circumstances.

*Question put and agreed to.*

10.28 pm

*House adjourned.*



# Written Ministerial Statements

Monday 16 May 2011

## BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

### Modern Workplaces Consultation

**The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Vince Cable):** Today the Government have launched a consultation on plans to modernise employment practices in the UK, making them more flexible, more family-friendly and fitter for the 21st century. The modern workplaces consultation proposes changes to employment law that will give employers and employees alike greater choice and flexibility, making it easier for parents to balance domestic and professional responsibilities and helping employers to recruit and retain skilled people.

The proposals cover four main areas:

A new system of flexible parental leave. The consultation seeks views on replacing the current, rigid system of maternity and paternity leave with new arrangements that will allow mothers and fathers to share leave, encouraging shared parenting while enabling both parents to retain their attachment to the workplace. We also propose giving parents and employers much greater choice over exactly how and when leave is taken, enabling them to agree arrangements that suit them both;

Extending the right to request flexible working to all employees. This will spread the benefits that flexible working can bring to all parts of the society and economy. It will give businesses access to a wider pool of skills and talents, improve recruitment and retention rates, and increase staff morale and productivity; Changes to the working time regulations as a result of Court of Justice of the European Union cases about the interaction of annual leave with other types of leave; and

Requiring employers who lose an employment tribunal case on equal pay to carry out a pay audit.

Taken together, these measures will deliver on several important commitments in the coalition agreement. We will introduce the changes in a way that maximises flexibility for both employers and employees, providing the necessary framework for a competitive business environment and economic growth, without compromising fairness.

The consultation is the latest step in the Government's comprehensive review of employment law, on which the next steps were announced last week. We want to make it easier for businesses to employ people, but also for people to balance work and family commitments.

Copies of the consultation document will be placed in the House Libraries.

## TREASURY

### Consumer Insurance (Disclosure and Representations) Bill

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr Mark Hoban):** I am pleased to announce that having considered the response to the Treasury's targeted consultation on

the Consumer Insurance (Disclosure and Representations) Bill, the Government have decided to take forward the proposed reforms, when parliamentary time permits.

These reforms are based on the recommendations made by the Law Commission and the Scottish Law Commission in their 2009 report "Consumer Insurance Law: Pre-Contract Disclosure and Misrepresentation" (Law Com 319/Scot Law Com 219).

The Bill will replace the requirement for consumers to volunteer information about everything which a "prudent insurer" would consider relevant with the requirement that insurers ask particular questions to obtain specific information about the customer. The current law and regulations on information disclosure are complex, and this Bill will provide protection for consumers and reduce costs for industry.

The Bill is the result of lengthy consultation and has broad-based support from industry and consumer groups. The Bill will be subject to minor modifications to meet concerns raised during the consultation.

A summary of the responses to the consultation, and the Government's response, has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

### Equitable Life Scheme Design Document

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr Mark Hoban):** The Treasury has today published the Equitable Life payment scheme design document.

The publication of the design document is a key step towards delivering the Government's pledge of May 2010 to

"implement the parliamentary and health service ombudsman's recommendation to make fair and transparent payments to Equitable Life policy holders, through an independent payment scheme, for their relative loss as a consequence of regulatory failure".

The document sets out the detail of the scheme design, including:

- the scheme rules;
- the scheme administration and timetable;
- the methodology behind loss and payment calculations;
- the scheme's approach to making payments;
- the details of the queries and complaints procedure; and
- the plans for communicating with policyholders.

Fairness, transparency and simplicity have been the guiding principles behind the Government's approach to designing the scheme. The final design reflects these principles, as well as the actuarial analysis carried out by Towers Watson, the evidence and arguments received in response to the Government's call for representations following the publication of Sir John Chadwick's advice, and the recommendations of the Independent Commission on Equitable Life payments.

The scheme also reflects previous announcements that with-profits annuity policyholders will have their losses covered in full, and that scheme payments will be free of tax and will not affect eligibility for tax credits.

The Government have previously stated their ambition to make the first scheme payments by the middle of this year. They remain on track to do so, with plans to make the first payments before the end of June. Policyholders will not need to do anything to claim their payments—the

scheme has policyholders' details from Equitable Life and the Prudential and will contact policyholders in the first instance.

Copies of the paper are being placed in the Libraries of both Houses and are available via the Treasury website.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

### Council of Europe: 121st Annual Ministerial Meeting: Istanbul, 10-11 May 2011

**The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington):** I represented the United Kingdom at the 121st annual ministerial meeting of the Council of Europe in Istanbul on 10 and 11 May 2011.

The Turkish and Ukrainian chairmanships issued a declaration covering a statement in their joint names. This statement reaffirmed the Council of Europe's role in protecting and promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law across the whole European continent and beyond; respect for and recognition of the political commitments and legally binding instruments to which all 47 member states are committed; and the urgent need to continue the current process of reform of the organisation.

I reaffirmed the United Kingdom's commitment to the Council of Europe and its aims. I paid tribute to the reform work done so far under Secretary-General Jagland but noted that much more needed to be done. I gave notice that the forthcoming United Kingdom chairmanship would continue to support Mr Jagland's reform programme while seeking to advance a programme of work under the theme of promoting and protecting human rights. A key priority of our chairmanship would be to drive forward the ongoing process of reform of the European Court of Human Rights, building on the agreements reached at the high-level conferences at Interlaken in February 2010 and at Izmir in April 2011.

At the end of the meeting, Turkey handed over the rotating six-month chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers to Ukraine. The United Kingdom will succeed Ukraine as Chair of the Committee of Ministers on 7 November 2011 and hand over the Chairmanship to Albania on 14 May 2012. Each country will have its own set of chairmanship priorities, but the Ukrainians, the Albanians and we have agreed in addition that our three successive chairmanships from May 2011 to November 2012 will include certain shared priorities. These cover reform of the organisation; reform of the European Court of Human Rights; and raising the efficiency of Council of Europe work on local and regional democracy.

While in Istanbul, I also held separate talks with a number of key Council of Europe and bilateral colleagues. These included the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, Mr Thorbjorn Jagland; the Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr Thomas Hammarberg; the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Mr Alexander Grushko; the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Turkey, Mr Ahmet Davutoglu; the Minister

for EU Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, Mr Egemen Bagis; and the Foreign Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr Sven Alkalaj.

I am placing a copy of the joint Turkish/Ukrainian statement, and of the UK statement, in the Library of the House. The latter document has already been published on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website ([www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)).

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Operation Gird

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May):** I am pleased to be able to announce that David Anderson QC has completed his report on the review of operation GIRD—the investigation of an alleged plot targeting the Papal visit of September last year. The report will be placed in the Library of the House and copies will also be available from the Vote Office.

I am grateful to David Anderson for his detailed report—his first as independent reviewer for terrorism legislation. I am also pleased that he finds that the police exercised the powers afforded them under the Terrorism Act 2000 lawfully and appropriately in seeking to prevent what they had reasonably suspected was a potential terrorist plot.

I welcome both his finding and his recommendations and intend to publish the Government's full response shortly.

## TRANSPORT

### Sale of Trust Ports

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Philip Hammond):** I am today launching a consultation on the criteria that the Government consider particularly relevant to the consideration of the appropriateness of sale of a major trust port<sup>1</sup> in England or Wales under the Ports Act 1991.

During the consultation period, which will run for six weeks until 27 June 2011, I am seeking the views of interested parties on the following criteria, which I propose to adopt in place of those set out in the written ministerial statement on the sale of trust ports of 25 January 2010, *Official Report*, column 44WS.

In view of this consultation, I have asked my right hon. Friend the Minister of State to suspend her consideration of the application for a transfer of the port undertaking made by Dover Harbour Board under the Ports Act 1991 until I announce a decision on the proposed criteria.

#### *The Proposed Criteria*

The following criteria are those which the Government consider particularly relevant when considering an application under the Ports Act 1991 for the sale of a major trust port in England or Wales. This covers the consideration of any proposal for a transfer scheme submitted under section 9 or 10 of the 1991 Act, together with the exercise of the Secretary of State's functions in respect of the subsequent sale of the port

to which the scheme relates. The Secretary of State also intends to have particular regard to the policy considerations set out below before making a transfer scheme himself under section 12 of the 1991 Act or subsequently approving the sale of a port to which his scheme relates.

#### *Community participation*

The Secretary of State will not approve an application for the sale of a trust port under the 1991 Act unless the sale is considered likely to deliver an ongoing and significant level of community participation in the port. Such participation could take a variety of forms, but must include the ability to influence the port's long-term development and may include the right to receive a share in the profits of the port, or the future increase in its value. It does not necessarily require a community role in the operation of the port.

#### *Future Development of the Port*

The Secretary of State will not approve an application unless the sale is considered likely to deliver an ownership model with the capability and access to capital to meet future investment needs.

#### *Fair price*

The Secretary of State will not approve an application unless the sale is considered likely to represent good value for money, having regard not only to Exchequer proceeds and market conditions, but also to other benefits including those to the community and the wider economy.

#### *Fair competition*

The Secretary of State will not approve an application that is likely to deliver an ownership model which results in unsatisfactory levels of competition in the relevant sector.

#### *Transport networks*

It is highly desirable for an application to be likely to deliver an ownership model which will cause the port to be operated so as to contribute to reliable and efficient transport networks.

#### *Sale process*

It is highly desirable that the sale should be conducted in such a way as to give all bona fide prospective purchasers a fair and equitable opportunity to participate.

#### *Employee involvement*

It is desirable for an application to be likely to deliver port employee participation in the ownership of the port, such as the right to receive equity shares or a share in its future success<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>For the purposes of the Act, a "major trust port" is a trust port with an annual turnover above a certain limit (currently £7.6 million). In England and Wales this currently includes Dover, Tyne, Milford Haven, Shoreham, Poole, Harwich Haven and the Port of London Authority (though the latter is excluded from provisions on privatisation contained in the Act).

<sup>2</sup>This is without prejudice to the Ports Act 1991 section 5(3) requirement to have particular regard to the desirability of encouraging the disposal of the whole or a substantial part of the equity share capital of the successor company to managers or other persons employed by the port company etc.



# Written Answers to Questions

Monday 16 May 2011

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Departmental Data Protection

**Eric Ollerenshaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many contracts his Department holds which allow contractors to store personal data of UK citizens overseas; to which contracts this applies; in which countries the data for each such contract is held; and how many people have their data stored overseas under each such contract. [55745]

**Mr Paterson:** None.

## TRANSPORT

### Car Hire: Young People

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the potential effects on the level of road safety of requiring car rental and leasing companies to hire vehicles to people aged under 23; and if he will make a statement. [52704]

**Mike Penning:** No assessment has been made. There are provisions in the Equalities Act 2010 banning age discrimination in services, public functions and associations. The Government Equalities Office has issued a consultation on proposed exemptions to the ban, which runs until 25 May 2011, with a view to new provisions coming into force in April 2012. It does not propose a specific exception for vehicle rental companies to deny services to drivers in high risk age groups, but accepts that they should be able to justify various proportionate measures to manage the risks, including requiring a minimum level of driving experience; not renting cars to people with adverse driving records; and charging higher prices to drivers in high risk groups.

### Driving Offences: Fines

**Meg Munn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of speeding fines issued to citizens of EU countries other than the UK were paid in each of the last five years. [51869]

**Mike Penning:** While there will have been overseas drivers caught by police for speeding, brought before the court, and fined at the time, the current system does not enable us to interrogate it sufficiently to record payments made by the nationality of the offender.

## High Speed 2 Railway Line

**Mrs Glendon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether his Department's consultation on High Speed 2 assesses the potential economic effects of the project on the level of air passenger demand. [52746]

**Mr Philip Hammond:** The "Economic Case for HS2", sets out the Government's assessment of the impact of the proposed high speed rail network on air travel, available on the HS2 consultation website at:

<http://highspeedrail.dft.gov.uk/library/documents/economic-case>

**Christopher Pincher:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the average house price within 1,000 metres of the route of High Speed 2 in Staffordshire in (a) February 2010 and (b) April 2011. [53015]

**Mr Philip Hammond:** My Department has not undertaken such an assessment. However, I recognise that owners of properties close to the proposed route may be experiencing blight. The exceptional hardship scheme is available now to assist those who urgently need to move but are unable to sell their property because of the high speed rail proposals. Further information on the exceptional hardship scheme can be found at:

<http://www.hs2.org.uk/exceptional-hardship-scheme?pageid=1>

Additionally, the current consultation on high speed rail includes information about the statutory provisions that would be available to people experiencing blight, as well as several options for additional discretionary assistance on which I would welcome people's views. The high speed rail consultation document can be found at:

<http://highspeedrail.dft.gov.uk/>

## Motorcycles

**John Woodcock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many motorcycle examiners have worked with the Transport Research Laboratory on trials of the proposed new motorcycle test since June 2010; [51574]

(2) how many trials of the proposed new motorcycle test the Transport Research Laboratory has conducted on the public highway since June 2010; at what location in each case; and how many more such trials he expects to be conducted before the proposals for a single motorcycle test event are put out to public consultation; [51587]

(3) what the total monetary value is of the contract between his Department and the Transport Research Laboratory for the trial of a new motorcycle test; how many motorcycle examiners are required to work on the trial at each stage; and what estimate he has made of the total number of working hours motorcycle examiners will have spent on the trial at its conclusion. [51589]

**Mike Penning:** No contract between the Department for Transport and the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) for trials of changes to the motorcycle test has

yet been let. TRL has not conducted any trials of the proposed new motorcycle test since June 2010, on or off the highway, so no motorcycle examiners have been involved in trials by TRL. We plan that such trials will be carried out before we proceed to public consultation on the proposed changes to the motorcycle test.

#### Railways: Standards

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with Network Rail on recent signal failures; and if he will make a statement. [54296]

**Mrs Villiers:** I regularly meet Network Rail and other key industry bodies to discuss performance issues on the network. Network Rail has briefed me on the recent signal failures, and the measures taken to minimise the impact and likelihood of such failures.

#### Roads: Accidents

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the potential role of targets in achieving reductions in deaths and serious injuries on roads. [55811]

**Mike Penning:** We have concluded that the best way to build on the UK's enviable record on road safety and ensure a continuing decline in road deaths and seriously injured accidents is to set out a new policy framework for road safety, including a significant degree of devolution to local authorities, rather than a series of numerical targets.

#### Taxis: Disability

**Caroline Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 relating to taxis, private hire vehicles and accessibility for disabled persons and assistance dogs to be implemented; and when he expects to launch his Department's consultation on the proportion of wheelchair accessible vehicles per local fleet that must be met before a licensing authority can refuse to grant a licence for a wheelchair accessible vehicle for the purpose of controlling taxi numbers. [53060]

**Norman Baker** [*holding answer 28 April 2011*]: The sections of the Equality Act 2010 which place duties on taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) drivers to carry assistance dogs came into force in October 2010.

Section 166, which allows taxi and PHV drivers to be exempt from the duties to assist passengers in wheelchairs for medical reasons, or under certain defined conditions, also came into force in October 2010.

We are currently considering the commencement strategy for sections 165 and 167 which deal with the imposition of the duties on taxi and PHV drivers to assist passengers in wheelchairs. We are also considering the commencement strategy for section 161 which qualifies local authorities' power to control taxi numbers. We will consult before making any regulations under this section, but we have not yet set a timetable for doing so.

The Department has no immediate plans to implement those sections of the Equality Act which are associated with a requirement for all taxis to meet certain accessibility standards.

#### Thameslink: Rolling Stock

**Margaret Beckett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce the successful bidder for the Thameslink rolling stock order. [54212]

**Mrs Villiers:** My officials are continuing to evaluate the bids from the two remaining bidders in the competition to build the new trains for Thameslink. We are planning to announce the preferred bidder shortly.

### CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

#### BBC Trust

**Mr Ivan Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Southend West of 3 May 2011, *Official Report*, columns 630-31W, on BBC, what the new arrangements are on which his Department is working with the BBC Trust. [55835]

**Mr Jeremy Hunt:** The new arrangements being negotiated are those which will enable the National Audit Office to have full access to the BBC's accounts; and which will give the National Audit Office the discretion to decide in which areas of BBC expenditure it can undertake value-for-money investigations. This was announced by my Department on 22 September 2010 at:

[http://www.culture.gov.uk/news/media\\_releases/7438.aspx](http://www.culture.gov.uk/news/media_releases/7438.aspx)

#### Broadcasting

**Mr Ivan Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport pursuant to the answer of 21 March 2011, *Official Report*, column 764, on broadcasting, whether he proposes to hold a public consultation in advance of publication of his Communications green paper. [55834]

**Mr Jeremy Hunt:** The Green Paper will be the primary mechanism for public consultation prior to drafting a White Paper and a draft Bill. There will be a period of engagement with interested parties leading to the publication of the Green Paper. We will outline our approach to the review via an open letter which will be published shortly.

#### Creative Industries Council

**Mr Ivan Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport if he will make it his policy to publish the minutes of meetings of the Creative Industry Council. [55810]

**Mr Jeremy Hunt:** Minutes of Creative Industries Council meetings will be published via the DCMS website at:

[www.culture.gov.uk](http://www.culture.gov.uk)

**Mr Ivan Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what criteria he proposes to use to decide which organisations will be represented on the Creative Industries Council. [55833]

**Mr Jeremy Hunt:** The group which met for the first time at the roundtable on 16 March was taken as the basis for the council membership. Following the model of the Automotive Council membership is comprised primarily of industry members with some representation from trade associations and other representative bodies.

Although it will not be possible to include all stakeholders with an interest in the membership of the council, this group provides cross-cutting representation from a wide spectrum of the creative and digital industries, as well as representation from smaller businesses, so each of the sub sectors and interests will have an opportunity to contribute.

#### Departmental Legal Costs

**Mr Slaughter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport how much his Department paid in (a) damages, (b) claimant costs and (c) defendant costs in respect of all civil claims brought against his Department in which the claimant was successful or the Department settled in each of the last three years. [54638]

**John Penrose:** Zero.

#### Heritage Lottery Fund

**Mr Timpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport how many charities in Crewe and Nantwich constituency have (a) applied for and (b) received awards from the Heritage Lottery Fund in each year since its establishment. [55515]

**John Penrose:** Since the Heritage Lottery Fund was established 15 applications have been received from, and seven awards made to, charities in the Crewe and Nantwich constituency. A breakdown can be found in the following table:

	<i>Applications</i>	<i>Number Awards</i>
1995	2	0
1996	3	2
1997	0	0
1998	1	0
1999	3	2
2000	1	0
2001	0	0
2002	0	0
2003	0	0
2004	1	0
2005	0	0
2006	1	1
2007	0	0
2008	0	0
2009	0	0
2010	2	1
2011	1	1
Total	15	7

#### National Lottery: Sports

**Mr Timpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what financial assistance (a) his Department and (b) the national lottery has given to (i) amateur sports clubs and (ii) professional sports clubs in Crewe and Nantwich constituency since 2010. [55510]

**John Penrose:** Sport England invests national lottery and Exchequer funding in community sport. Although Sport England does not record the amount of financial assistance specifically provided to amateur and professional sports clubs in constituency areas, £86,741 of lottery funding has been awarded to community sport in the Crewe and Nantwich constituency since January 2010. No Exchequer funding has been awarded during this time.

#### Scratch Cards: Gambling

**Rosie Cooper:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport if he will assess the potential effect on levels of gambling (a) in general and (b) among vulnerable people of the introduction of a £5 National Lottery scratchcard. [55626]

**John Penrose:** The National Lottery Commission scrutinised Camelot's proposals for £5 scratchcard games, to ensure that they were safe for players and did not encourage excessive play, before allowing the first such product to be launched for sale in October 2003. No such concerns have been identified since their introduction but, as with all licensed games, the Commission will continue to monitor sales data from Camelot and will take appropriate action should any issues arise.

## SCOTLAND

### Offshore Industry

**Ann McKeichin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what date he most recently met representatives of the Scottish oil and gas industry; and what the outcome was of those discussions. [55662]

**Michael Moore:** I last met representatives of the oil and gas industry on 31 March 2011. At this meeting we discussed concerns expressed about the impact of the fair fuel stabiliser on investment in the North sea oil and gas sector. The Government are listening to those concerns. We will work with the industry to ensure that the fair fuel stabiliser is implemented in a responsible way.

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Allotments

**Jeremy Lefroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether she has any plans to make it easier for community groups to establish allotments. [55473]

**Mr Paice:** The Government strongly support the need for more growing spaces to be made available for people to grow their own fruit and vegetables, as a contribution to helping people understand more about where food comes from and to eat a healthy, sustainable diet. Allotment authorities have a duty to provide plots for growing food to persons resident in the area and there are no plans to change this. In addition, my officials are in regular discussion with the Department

for Communities and Local Government to develop initiatives to release land which could be used by community groups and individuals wanting to grow their own food.

The Government are funding the development of a 'meanwhile lease' by DCLG, which would help provide access to land on a temporary basis for community groups and individuals wanting to grow food. DEFRA and DCLG have also jointly funded feasibility work into 'community landbanks'—effectively a land brokerage advisory service that would facilitate agreements between landholders and community groups on releasing land for community growing.

### Animal Welfare

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department has taken to improve the level of animal health and welfare in the (a) farming and (b) pet industry since May 2010. [55288]

**Mr Paice:** We are setting up a new Animal Health and Welfare Board for England to have responsibility for strategic animal health and welfare policy, and oversight of its delivery in relation to England. Groups within the new rural and farming network will be able to engage with Ministers on local animal health and welfare issues.

On 1 April we combined DEFRA's two key agencies for protecting animal health and welfare into a single body: the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency. This will enhance a joined up approach to responding to animal diseases and protecting the welfare of farmed animals.

A new Strategic Animal Health Policy Programme has also recently been launched, building on work done to minimise the impact of exotic diseases, through which we will be working closely with industry to promote activities which can help maintain animal health by preventing disease incursion.

We have placed increased emphasis on working with core groups of stakeholders to deliver better understanding and response to exotic notifiable disease incidents and emergencies and to develop new disease control strategies.

Working closely with farmers, the veterinary profession and others, we have made good progress towards improving the level of animal health and welfare:

We conducted a public consultation at the end of 2010 on the Government's approach to tackling bovine tuberculosis (TB) and a badger control policy, which also highlighted a number of planned changes to existing cattle measures to ensure that they are better targeted on the basis of disease risk. We will be announcing a comprehensive and balanced TB eradication programme for England as soon as possible.

We have reviewed the implementation of the Veterinary Surveillance Strategy to ensure that risks and emerging threats are effectively identified and prioritised. We continually monitor and assess the global animal health situation to help inform risk-based controls on imports of animals and animal products.

We have continued to support the development of a surveillance system for diseases and issues in pet animals. This has been led by the University of Liverpool using a consortium approach and has now completed a successful pilot project, the Small Animal Veterinary Surveillance Network, which is now accessing data from veterinary surgeons and veterinary laboratories across the United Kingdom.

We have improved our arrangements for conducting veterinary risk assessments and prioritisation and established a standardised, peer-reviewed evidence base for policy development.

We have continued to work to improve the availability of veterinary medicines for farm and pet animals by, for example, allowing the importation of medicines from other member states when there is a supply problem in the UK.

We implemented EU Council Directive 2007/43, which lays down minimum standards to protect the welfare of conventionally reared meat chickens. The implementing regulations set a maximum stocking density of 39 kg/m<sup>2</sup>, sets training requirements for all keepers and requires post mortem conditions and mortality rates to be assessed as an indicator of on-farm welfare.

The Code of Practice for the Welfare of Gamebirds Reared for Sporting Purposes came into force in January 2011.

DEFRA completed its review of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and presented its findings in the form of a Command Paper to the Parliamentary Select Committee on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in December 2010.

### Carbon Emissions

**Joan Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will include in the proposed Roadmap to a Green Economy a commitment to (a) measure and (b) reduce the UK's total carbon footprint, including (i) emissions from consumption and (ii) outsourced emissions embedded in imports. [54918]

**Mr Paice:** In 2008 DEFRA published an evidence study that measured UK embedded emissions: "Embedded carbon emissions indicator—EV02033". We are now carrying out further work to update these findings.

DEFRA is involved in a range of actions that will be covered in the Green Economy Roadmap to tackle embedded emissions. These actions include mandatory efficiency standards for energy using products, helping businesses to improve the efficiency of their supply chains, establishing voluntary agreements with businesses, introducing mandatory Government Buying Standards, advising on environmental claims and labels, and encouraging pro-environmental behaviours.

### Departmental Legal Opinion

**Mary Creagh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many veterinarians are employed in her Department's legal team. [55461]

**Mr Paice:** None.

### Horse Passports

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent steps her Department has taken in respect of horse owners who do not possess a passport for a horse; and if she will make a statement. [55290]

**Mr Paice:** All horse owners are required by law to obtain a passport for each horse they own and it is the responsibility of the appropriate local environmental health and trading standards officers to enforce the horse passport regulations throughout England. Penalties can be applied by the courts for non-compliance.

### Ivory

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received on the illegal importation of ivory. [55236]

**Richard Benyon:** I announced on 2 March 2011 that the illegal trade in elephant ivory and all other species listed under the convention on international trade in endangered species is a UK wildlife crime priority, and it will continue to be tackled vigorously by the enforcement agencies.

### Palm Oil: Labelling

**Caroline Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to support the mandatory labelling of palm oil on food packaging in negotiations on the revision of European regulations on food labelling; and if she will make a statement. [54981]

**Mr Paice:** Current food labelling law permits manufacturers to choose to label oils, when used as ingredients, under the generic name 'vegetable oil' (which could include any mixture of refined oil, other than olive oil) to allow for variability of supply in the type of the oils used and avoid label changes. If the palm oil was to be sold on its own it would need to be sold using the term 'palm oil' or any name that was sufficiently precise to indicate the true nature of the food and to distinguish it from any other food with which it could be confused, or a customary name.

Amendment 387 to the proposed food information regulation which will replace the existing food labelling directive (from which our legislation derives) has been proposed by the European Parliament. This would make it mandatory for all the specific types of vegetable oil, including palm oil, to be separately labelled in food ingredients. It is one of a number of amendments asking for more information to be provided about oils which are used as an ingredient in pre-packed foods. Discussions on the regulation are ongoing and it is unclear whether this provision will be included in the final regulation.

I consider that this requirement for mandatory labelling of all vegetable oils in foods is unlikely to be a cost-effective approach to improving the sustainability of palm oil production and consumption. It may be burdensome for businesses to identify all the individual oils given the high number of products affected, often containing only small quantities of oils, and it would not inform consumers about whether or not the palm or other oils were sustainably produced. There is nothing to prevent manufacturers providing further information on a voluntary basis.

### Pesticides: Bees

**Mr Reed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many acres of arable cropland are regularly treated with neonicotinoid pesticides; where such croplands are located; and what studies her Department has (a) evaluated and (b) commissioned on bee population levels in those areas. [51050]

**Mr Paice:** Information from the published 2008 Great Britain Arable Survey under the Government's Pesticides Usage Survey Programme shows that across England (898,455 hectares), Scotland (53,126 hectares) and Wales (6,034 hectares) a total area of 957,615 hectares was treated with neonicotinoid insecticides. More information on the Government's Pesticide Usage Survey programme is available on the Food and Environment Research Agency (Fera) website.

No specific study has been commissioned on honey bee population levels in areas treated with neonicotinoid insecticides.

### Pets: Complementary Medicine

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department has taken to tackle the sale of unauthorised herbal and homeopathic pet remedies in 2011; and if she will make a statement. [55286]

**Mr Paice:** Where unauthorised herbal medicines have been brought to the attention of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), letters have been written to the suppliers with a view to ensuring these products are remarketed in compliance with the Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2009. The VMD has entered into correspondence about five such products.

No similar action has been taken in relation to any specific homeopathic product, since complaints have not been received from interested third parties. However, the VMD is aware of general concerns about the safety of homeopathic nosodes and sarcodes and investigations are being considered.

When the need to enforce the Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2009 is identified, the VMD's enforcement strategy is followed. The strategy can be found on the VMD's website at:

<http://www.vmd.defra.gov.uk/public/enforcement.aspx>

It lays out a step-wise and proportionate approach to enforcement, which begins with a letter to set out how compliance with the law has not been met. Only when the correspondence has been completed and enforcement actions continue to be required will penalties such as improvement notices be issued. If necessary, a subsequent resolution through the courts can be sought.

### Pigeons

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether her Department is taking steps to reduce the number of pigeons in England. [55240]

**Richard Benyon:** Pigeons are an agricultural pest and in more urban areas pigeons carry a range of diseases that can be harmful to humans. For this reason, Natural England issues a general licence, which allows authorised persons (e.g. owners/occupiers/local authorities or persons authorised by them) to kill or take these birds all year round. The licensing regime provides a legal framework within which local authorities and other authorised persons can take action to address a particular problem. The licence permits adult population control, egg control and nest clearance.

DEFRA has no plans to instigate a national pigeon control programme.

### River Rom

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent steps have been taken to improve, manage and maintain the River Rom in Essex. [55235]

**Richard Benyon:** The Environment Agency spends approximately £40,000 per annum in carrying out maintenance and programmed debris clearance of the River Rom and its tributaries.

The maintenance regime includes trimming vegetation growth annually on the River Rom during the winter months and on the main tributaries during the summer. The Environment Agency also inspects these rivers every month and removes any debris likely to obstruct flood flows.

This regime has been in place for many years, and will continue as long as priorities and funding allow. However ultimate responsibility for the maintenance and repair of any watercourse rests with the riparian owner.

### Rural Areas: Community Development

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many bodies have participated in the LEADER programme in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [54757]

**Mr Paice:** There are currently 64 local action groups (LAGs) that implement the Leader approach under the Rural Development Programme for England. LAG membership is made up of representatives from a range of local organisations as well as individuals. These would usually include representatives of local authorities but actual membership will vary depending on local interests and businesses.

In each of the last three calendar years the number of projects proposed by local organisations and individuals and approved by LAGs is:

	<i>Number</i>
2008	41
2009	538
2010	1,334

### Squirrels

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent estimates she has made of the number of black squirrels in England. [55241]

**Richard Benyon:** Black squirrels are a colour variant of the non-native American grey squirrel. Although no specific monitoring of their numbers is undertaken, they have been reported as being present in several areas in England, including Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Huntingdonshire.

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what steps her Department is taking to ensure the long-term survival of red squirrels in England; [55243]

(2) what recent steps her Department has taken to affect the number of red squirrels in England. [55244]

**Richard Benyon:** In England, the approach to red squirrel conservation is to secure long-term habitat and conditions favouring the red squirrel in areas which grey squirrels have not yet reached in significant numbers, and to limit grey squirrel expansion into these areas.

The Forestry Commission and Natural England are, on behalf of the Government, delivering this policy in partnership with the Red Squirrel Survival Trust, the Wildlife Trusts, landowners and volunteers, through the Red Squirrel North England Project. A project manager has been employed by the Red Squirrel Survival Trust with the remaining staff being hired by the Wildlife Trusts. Funding is being provided by all partners and volunteers will be taking a central role in the new project.

In the north of England 17 reserves have been identified where long-term survival of the species is considered most likely. Targeted control of grey squirrels is carried out in the reserves and surrounding buffer zones. In addition, the reserves and surrounding areas are being managed in ways that favour red squirrels. In the south-east, where there are secure populations on the Isle of Wight and Poole Harbour islands, there is an action plan in place to respond to the appearance of grey squirrels.

### Tree Planting

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many voluntary groups in the west midlands have joined the Big Tree Plant scheme. [55289]

**Mr Paice:** The Big Tree Plant is helping communities in England to plant a million trees in areas where they live and work over the course of this Parliament. Civil society partners and volunteers have been very active in the west midlands.

Voluntary groups do not “sign up” but they are welcome to contribute to the Big Tree Plant by registering trees planted through the project website or by applying to the twice yearly Grant Scheme competition. About 70 groups or individuals (including several from the west midlands) have registered their trees through the website so far; while for the Grant Scheme we will announce the conclusion of the first round and the date of the next deadline soon.

### UN Convention on Biodiversity’s Nagoya Protocol

**Barry Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs by what (a) date and (b) process she intends to sign and ratify the UN Convention on Biodiversity’s Nagoya Protocol on access and benefit sharing. [55610]

**Richard Benyon:** The UK was highly influential in bringing the negotiations on access and benefit sharing to a successful conclusion in Nagoya. The resulting protocol to bring the agreement into effect was opened

for signature in February, but many contracting parties have had to delay signature because of a translation problem. This is likely to be resolved in June and we expect to be able to sign soon afterwards. It will be signed by the British ambassador to the United Nations in New York, as the United Nations is the depositary for the protocol. The process of ratification will take longer.

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Bangladesh: Special Educational Needs

**Richard Fuller:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support his Department has provided for the provision of education in Bangladesh to children with special education needs. [55605]

**Mr Duncan:** UK support to the Bangladesh second Primary Education Development Programme (PEDPII) helped benefit 78,000 children with special needs in government primary schools between 2004 and 2011. It also developed relevant policy and guidance. The largest non-government organisations in the world, BRAC, provided high quality primary school education to 28,000 children with special needs in 2010, mainly with UK Government support.

### Burma: Overseas Aid

**Valerie Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much aid his Department provided to Burma in 2009-10; and how much it plans to provide to that country for (a) cross-border humanitarian aid, (b) education and (c) health care in each of the next four years. [55716]

**Mr Duncan:** The Department for International Development (DFID) provided a total of £28 million in bilateral aid to Burma in 2009-10.

Over the next four years, we plan to focus our aid for Burma on health care, education, livelihoods, civil society and humanitarian assistance. A detailed breakdown by sector and year will appear in DFID's Operational Plan for Burma which will be published on our website at the end of this month.

Specific sums have not yet been allocated to cross-border aid. We plan to continue to deliver aid cross-border where that is the best way of reaching people in greatest need. Specific project allocations will be decided on the basis of detailed assessments of effectiveness, and value for money in achieving results.

### Democratic Republic of Congo: Elections

**Pauline Latham:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of the funding allocated by his Department to support the forthcoming presidential and legislative elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo has been allocated to support (a) the participation of female parliamentary candidates and (b) the registration of female voters. [55166]

**Mr O'Brien:** The Department for International Development (DFID) is providing £30 million through the United Nations to support the 2007-13 electoral cycle in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Of this, £625,000 has been set aside specifically to improve the participation of women in voter registration, elections and candidacy to Parliament. Our support should ensure that at least 52% of citizens registered to vote and casting their vote are women. In addition, DFID is also providing £1.5 million of support through the International Foundation for Electoral Systems to improve public understanding of the electoral process, particularly among women and first-time voters.

**Pauline Latham:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations he has made to the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on recent disruption by the Congolese national police of political opposition rallies in (a) Bukavu and (b) other parts of the DRC. [55167]

**Mr O'Brien:** The Department for International Development (DFID) works in close partnership with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in promoting free and fair elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Together we closely monitor reports of intimidation and harassment of opposition figures. We work with our EU partners to follow up cases of concern, and liaise regularly with the UN stabilisation mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) Joint Human Rights Office and local NGOs to assess the situation. We continue to press the Government of the DRC at the highest levels on these issues, including during recent meetings with the President, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister.

Additionally, we are working to support a transition towards democratic policing in DRC. Central to this is improving respect for human rights. We are actively engaging with the Government of the DRC, provincial governments and the police to promote adherence to democratic principles of policing during the elections process.

### Departmental Manpower

**Mr Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development in which overseas countries UK-employed staff of his Department are based; and how many such employees are based in each such country. [55504]

**Mr Duncan:** The Department for International Development does not publish the numbers of staff serving overseas by specific location as this may represent a security risk to such staff, especially those serving in fragile states or hostile environments.

As at the end of April 2011 we had 412 UK employed civil servants serving in 43 overseas countries: Afghanistan; Barbados; Belgium; Brazil; Burma; Burundi; China; Democratic Republic of Congo; Bangladesh; India; Indonesia; Nigeria; South Africa; Ethiopia; France; Ghana; Guyana; Iraq; Israel; Italy; Jamaica; Kazakhstan; Kenya; Kosovo; Kyrgyzstan; Malawi; Montserrat; Mozambique; Nepal; Pakistan; Rwanda; Sierra Leone; St Helena; Sudan; Switzerland; Tajikistan; Tanzania; Uganda; USA; Vietnam; Yemen; Zambia; Zimbabwe.

### Developing Countries: Education

**Andrew Stephenson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps he is taking to enable children who do not have access to education to do so. [55571]

**Mr O'Brien:** The Department for International Development is working to support partner governments to overcome the barriers that children face in accessing education. We are investing in methods that are proven to work, such as reducing the cost of education, and we are pursuing flexible and responsive approaches to education in situations of fragility or conflict, including through partnerships with non-state providers.

As stated in the DFID publication 'UK Aid: Changing Lives, Delivering Results', we pledge to support at least nine million children in primary school, over half of whom will be girls, and two million children in secondary school by 2014.

### Developing Countries: Food

**Keith Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps he is taking to assist the UN World Food Programme. [55268]

**Mr Duncan:** The UN World Food Programme was assessed as a strong performer in the Department for International Development's Multilateral Aid Review. The Government are currently considering UK support to the organisation in light of this review and our response to the Humanitarian and Emergency Response Review which will be announced shortly.

## INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS AUTHORITY COMMITTEE

### Security Certificate

**Priti Patel:** To ask the hon. Member for Broxbourne, representing the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, for what reason the security certificate for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority website has expired. [54873]

**Mr Charles Walker:** It has not been possible to provide a response to this question by the named day. An answer will be provided as soon as possible.

*Substantive answer from Charles Walker to Priti Patel:*

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority. I have asked IPSA to reply.

*Letter from Scott Woolveridge, dated May 2011:*

As acting Chief Executive of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking for what reason the security certificate for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority website has expired.

The certificate purchased was valid for 12 months and it reached its expiry date. The certificate was purchased by the IPSA implementation team (which is no longer in place) in March 2010 and activated in April 2010 and the renewal notice was sent to the registered purchaser, not to IPSA or our managed service provider, Calyx. Future renewals will be managed by our IT contractor to ensure that this problem is not repeated.

The certificate has now been renewed.

**Priti Patel:** To ask the hon. Member for Broxbourne, representing the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, on what date the security certificate for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority website expired; when the security certificate will be renewed; what assessment has been made of any risks resulting from the expiration of the security certificate; and who was responsible for permitting the security certificate to expire. [54874]

**Mr Charles Walker:** It has not been possible to provide a response to this question by the named day. An answer will be provided as soon as possible.

*Substantive answer from Charles Walker to Priti Patel:*

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority. I have asked IPSA to reply.

*Letter from Scott Woolveridge, dated May 2011:*

As acting Chief Executive of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking when the security certificate for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority website expired; when the security certificate will be renewed; what assessment has been made of any risks resulting from the expiration of the security certificate; and who was responsible for permitting the security certificate to expire.

The certificate expired on the 20 April 2011 and was renewed on the 5 May 2011. An assessment of the risks was undertaken by our managed service provider, Calyx, at the time and the risk was deemed to be low and that security levels were not diminished during this period.

The certificate was purchased by the IPSA implementation team (which is no longer in place) in March 2010 and the renewal notice was sent to the registered purchaser, not to IPSA or to Calyx. Future renewals will be managed by our IT contractor to ensure that this problem is not repeated.

## ATTORNEY-GENERAL

David Kelly

**Patrick Mercer:** To ask the Attorney-General how many representations he has received on the need for a coroner's inquest into the death of Dr David Kelly. [55906]

**The Attorney-General:** There has been a large amount of correspondence received on this matter since the first request was made to the Attorney-General to apply to the court for an inquest to be ordered into the death of Dr David Kelly by the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) in 2008. Since then representations have been made by letter, e-mail and telephone. No complete record of the total number of representations made has been maintained. However, I can say that since July 2010 I have given 14 written replies in answer to letters from Members of Parliament. In addition, since January 2011, I have received 82 pieces of correspondence from 22 individuals making representations of some kind in respect of this matter

## ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

### Absent Voting

**Andrew Stephenson:** To ask the hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, how many postal votes were issued for (a) the 2010 general election and (b) elections held in May 2011. [55594]

**Mr Streeter:** The Electoral Commission informs me that nearly 7 million postal votes were issued across the UK at the 2010 parliamentary general election.

The Electoral Commission is currently collecting data for the 5 May elections from Returning Officers, including the number of postal votes issued. The commission will include final figures for the number of postal votes issued in its report on the elections, which is due to be published in the autumn.

#### Alternative Vote

**Mr Spellar:** To ask the hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, for what reason no counting of votes for the referendum on the alternative vote was permitted until 4:00 pm on 6 May 2011. [55438]

**Mr Streeter:** The Electoral Commission informs me that the chair of the commission, as chief counting officer for the referendum, announced her decision on the timing of the count, and the reasons for it, in December 2010. This followed consultation with Members of Parliament, electoral administrators, potential campaigners—including political parties—and broadcasters across the UK.

The decision was taken because the commission believes it is important that voters should know who represents them, and who will form new governments and councils, as soon as possible. Starting the referendum count the next day meant that the counts for the scheduled elections could take place as soon as possible after the close of poll, while also allowing the result of the referendum to be counted on a UK-wide basis.

The commission further informs me that the chief counting officer's consultation and decision papers were published on its website and disseminated to a wide group of interested parties, including Members of Parliament. Copies of those papers have also been placed in the Library of the House of Commons.

### FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

#### Afghanistan: Christianity

**David Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department is taking to help ensure the rights of Christians are observed in Afghanistan. [55790]

**Alistair Burt:** We work closely with international partners to monitor the situation of Afghan Christians and to raise this issue with the Afghan Government.

We continue to remind the Afghan Government of their duty to abide by their national and international commitments on freedom of religion and belief, and to respect the freedom of worship as enshrined in the Afghan Constitution.

#### Bahrain: United Arab Emirates

**John Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the number of (a) military personnel and (b) police officers that the United Arab Emirates contributed to the Gulf Co-operation Council force despatched to Bahrain in March 2011. [54828]

**Alistair Burt:** On 14 March 2011 Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) forces were deployed to Bahrain in response to a Bahraini request for assistance under the GCC Peninsula Shield agreement. This included a military contingent from United Arab Emirates (UAE). No confirmed figures for the exact number of UAE personnel are available.

### British Indian Ocean Territory

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department spent on facilitating grave-tending visits to the Chagos Islands in each of the last 10 years. [55802]

**Mr Bellingham:** This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The budget for the current year for visits of all kinds (grave-tending, heritage, environmental work, etc.) is £50,000.

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many officials in his Department are stationed in the British Indian Ocean Territory. [55803]

**Mr Bellingham:** There are no Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials stationed in the British Indian Ocean Territory.

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people illegally residing in the British Indian Ocean Territory were evicted in each of the last 10 years. [55806]

**Mr Bellingham:** The Clerk of the Court is only required to hold records for the last five years. During this period, there have been no evictions for illegally residing in the British Indian Ocean Territory.

### British Indian Ocean Territory: Environment Protection

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department is taking to ensure that the Marine Protected Area around the Chagos archipelago is enforced. [55804]

**Mr Bellingham:** Enforcement is led by a marine protection officer working on board the Pacific Marlin patrol boat. The British Indian Ocean Territory Administration operates a system of permits to control access to and activities within the Marine Protected Area. We also work closely with the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission to limit illegal fishing.

### Departmental Pay

**Mr Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what additional pay he plans to provide to officials in his Department in the period from 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2013 to reflect (a) seniority, (b) promotion and (c) performance. [55413]

**Mr Bellingham:** The Foreign and Commonwealth (FCO) plans to provide the following additional pay to officials in the period from 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2013. All payments adhere to central guidance issued by the Cabinet Office and HM Treasury.

(a) Seniority—The FCO does not make additional payments to any staff based on seniority.

(b) Promotion—For staff below the senior civil service (SCS) we plan that promotion between grades within a payband will continue to attract a salary increase of 7.5% or an increase to the higher grade minimum. Promotion to a higher payband will continue to attract a salary increase of 10% or an increase to the higher grade minimum.

Staff being promoted to or within the SCS will continue to attract a salary increase of 10% or to the higher grade minimum.

(c) Performance—Staff below the SCS enter the 2-year public sector pay freeze for the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2013, so there will be no base pay increases for those earning over £21,000. We will continue to pay performance related pay linked to the annual appraisal process. The amounts paid will range from £720 to £2,990.

Performance related pay (PRP) for staff in the SCS follows central guidelines issued annually by the Cabinet Office, following recommendations by the Senior Salaries Review Body. For 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012 we will pay PRP to the top 25% of performers only. This relates to performance in the period 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011. The amounts paid will be according to guidance from Cabinet Office.

We do not yet know what will be paid from 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013.

#### Hamas: Guided Weapons

**Mr Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on the acquisition by Hamas of long-range rocket and high-specification anti-aircraft missiles; what recent discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on this issue; and if he will make a statement. [55348]

**Alistair Burt:** We are concerned by reports that Hamas continue to acquire and test a variety of weapons. This is a continuing picture and we are not able to comment further on the detail. However, we have long made it clear that the arming and funding of Hamas and other Palestinian rejectionist groups is unacceptable.

#### Ilois: Resettlement

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department is taking to enable Chagos Islanders to return to the British Indian Ocean Territory. [55809]

**Mr Bellingham:** This Government believe that, on the grounds of feasibility and defence security, there are clear and compelling reasons to oppose the resettlement of British Indian Ocean Territory. However, we have facilitated a number of visits to the islands for former inhabitants and their descendants, including to assist with environmental projects, and will continue to do so.

#### Israel: Terrorism

**Mr Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on Israel's security concerns since 14 February 2011; and if he will make a statement. [55296]

**Alistair Burt:** We have regular dialogue with the Government of Israel at both ministerial and official level. The Prime Minister met with the Israeli Prime Minister on 4 May. I visited Israel and the Occupied Territories in January 2011 and met Foreign Minister Lieberman. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague) also visited in November 2011. Foreign Minister Lieberman met with the Foreign Secretary and myself when he visited London on 24 January 2011. Officials will attend the rescheduled Strategic Dialogue talks in the summer 2011 in Israel. A wide range of issues will be discussed at these various meetings, including security.

#### Middle East: Anti-Semitism

**Mr Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 26 April 2011, *Official Report*, columns 395-6W, on Middle East: anti-Semitism, if he will place in the Library a copy of (a) the independent research from institutions such as Chatham House, Carnegie Middle East Centre and the Brookings Institute and (b) the report mapping Arab public opinion towards Israel, across six Arab states referred to in the answer; and if he will make a statement. [55299]

**Alistair Burt:** Chatham House has not produced any recent analysis specifically focused on anti-Semitism. However, I will place in the Library a copy of the 2010 report analysing Anti-Semitism Worldwide produced by the Steven Roth Institute at Tel Aviv University. An original copy can be found at:

<http://www.tau.ac.il/Anti-Semitism/>

I will also place a copy of the 2010 Arab Public Opinion Poll by the Carnegie Middle East Centre in partnership with the Brookings Institute in the Library as requested. An original copy may be found at:

[http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2010/0805\\_arab\\_opinion\\_poll\\_telhami.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2010/0805_arab_opinion_poll_telhami.aspx)

#### Middle East: Armed Conflict

**Mr Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his UN counterparts on Judge Goldstone's recent comments on his report on the Gaza war; and if he will make a statement. [55349]

**Alistair Burt:** The Goldstone report outlines serious allegations of breaches of international humanitarian law during the Gaza conflict. Justice Goldstone stated in his recent comments that some aspects of his report would look differently in light of new evidence, correcting the allegation in the report that Israel intentionally targeted civilians.

Justice Goldstone has made clear that there is no reason to reconsider the various other serious allegations contained in the report at this time. This is consistent with our longstanding policy of calling for full, credible and independent investigations by the parties into any and all allegations of breaches of international humanitarian law (IHL).

Allegations of breaches of IHL made against all parties to the Gaza conflict are not limited to the Goldstone report and have arisen from various other credible sources. We firmly believe that any and all such allegations must be met with credible and independent investigations by the parties to the conflict.

#### Middle East: British Nationals Abroad

**Stephen Gilbert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department has distributed guidance to British nationals in (a) Tunisia, (b) Egypt and (c) Libya during the recent political unrest in those countries on (i) consular arrangements which his Department has put in place to represent British interests through the embassies of other countries and (ii) their rights under Article 20 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [54985]

**Alistair Burt** [*holding answer 10 May 2011*]: Our embassies in Tunis and Cairo remained functional throughout recent events and this question therefore did not arise there. In Libya, the Hungarian embassy remains open and British nationals can seek assistance there or from any other EU member state embassy that remains open. The Hungarians have already provided consular assistance to a number of unrepresented EU nationals in Libya. Arrangements for accessing consular assistance have been communicated to British nationals through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) travel advice, available on the FCO website.

We also distribute guidance to British nationals regarding their rights under Article 20. This is set out in the FCO publication "Support for British nationals abroad" which is also available on the FCO website. While the guide does not explicitly mention Article 20, it makes clear that if British nationals need help in a country where there is no British diplomatic or consular mission, they can receive help from the diplomatic or consular mission of another member of the European Union.

#### Middle East: Peace Negotiations

**Mr Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what steps he is taking to press (a) Hamas and (b) other Palestinian terrorist organisations to renounce violence; what discussions he has had with (i) the government of Israel, (ii) the Palestinian Authority and (iii) the Arab League on this issue; and if he will make a statement; [R] [55295]

(2) what recent steps he (a) has taken and (b) plans to take to press Hamas to accept the Quartet Principles; and if he will make a statement; [R] [55300]

(3) what steps he is taking with his international counterparts to press Hamas to accept the Quartet Principles and join the negotiations between the government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority; and if he will make a statement. [R] [55301]

**Alistair Burt:** As the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), has said publically, there is an urgent need for peace in the middle east. We hope that the announcement of reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas will advance that cause. To do so we expect to see a government that rejects violence and pursues a negotiated peace. President Abbas reaffirmed his commitment to those principles in Cairo. But the government has yet to be formed. When it is we will judge it by its actions and its commitment to non violence and working for peace.

#### Middle East: Politics and Government

**Mr Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department's policies of comments by the leadership of Hamas on the attitude of the interim Palestinian government towards seeking peace with Israel; and if he will make a statement. [R] [54847]

**Alistair Burt:** The agreement was signed at a ceremony in Cairo on 4 May 2011, attended by President Abbas for the Palestinian Authority; Khaled Mishaal for Hamas and the Egyptian Foreign Minister, el Araby. A representative from our embassy in Cairo attended as an observer, along with key EU partners.

The Prime Minister met with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu on 4 May 2011 and discussed the announcement on Palestinian unity. We renew our calls on both sides to commit to peace talks, leading to a Palestinian state that exists in peace and security alongside Israel. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), has been clear that Britain hopes that the announcement of reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas will lead to the formation of a government that rejects violence and pursues a negotiated peace, and we will judge a future Palestinian government by its actions and its readiness to work for peace.

We will continue to monitor and discuss with the Palestinian Authority, Arab League and US via our embassies.

#### Yemen: Humanitarian Aid

**Keith Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what steps he is taking to address the humanitarian needs of Yemen; [55169]

(2) what support he is providing to the UN-administered Yemen humanitarian response plan. [55150]

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:** I have been asked to reply.

The Department for International Development (DFID) is finalising a contribution to UNICEF and the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in support of the 2011 UN Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan. I will announce further details of this support shortly.

### Yemen: Overseas Aid

**Keith Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much aid the UK provided to Yemen in the latest period for which figures are available. [55269]

**Mr Andrew Mitchell:** I have been asked to reply.

The Department for International Development disbursed over £47 million of official development assistance through our bilateral country programme in the 2010-11 financial year.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Alcoholic Drinks

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions she has had with representatives of the alcohol industry on the alcohol content of their products. [55215]

**Anne Milton:** I have been asked to reply.

The Department of Health is in regular contact with a wide range of industry interests to discuss both the alcoholic content of specific products and alcoholic drinks more generally.

Most recently the Department of Health has been talking to industry within the context of the Public Health Responsibility Deal, which was launched on 15 March 2011. Among other things, we are looking at commitments from industry to foster a culture of

responsible drinking, which will help people to drink within recommended limits. We will be publishing regular progress reports on this work, and other Alcohol Network workstreams, on the Department of Health's website at:

[www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Publichealthresponsibilitydeal/index.htm](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Publichealthresponsibilitydeal/index.htm)

### Asylum

**Tony Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many non-asylum cases were granted settlement outside the immigration rules in each year since 1997. [55599]

**Damian Green:** The available information is given in the following table. It shows the number of people granted indefinite leave (settlement) outside the immigration rules, 2004 to 2010, either:

in non-asylum and non-protection cases where someone qualifies under one of the immigration policy concessions (indefinite leave outside the rules-concession); or

for other reasons (indefinite leave outside the rules-no concession).

The data provided for "other reasons" includes asylum as well as non-asylum cases from 2007 as from that year it includes persons granted indefinite leave outside the immigration rules under measures aimed at clearing the backlog of unresolved cases.

It is not possible to determine how many grants of "indefinite leave outside the immigration rules for other reasons" relate to non-asylum cases or to provide corresponding information prior to 2004 without detailed examination of individual case records at disproportionate cost.

*Grants of settlement<sup>1, 2, 3</sup> by selected outcome, excluding EEA and Swiss nationals<sup>4</sup>, 2005-10<sup>5</sup>*

Recorded outcome	Number of persons						
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009 <sup>6</sup>	2010 <sup>6</sup>
Indefinite leave outside the rules—concession	10	5	10	70	610	1,330	1,155
Indefinite leave outside the rules—no concession <sup>7</sup>	5	25	20	13,655	23,395	30,690	74,380

<sup>1</sup> Includes reconsideration cases and the outcome of appeals.

<sup>2</sup> May include a small number of cases in which a decision is recorded twice, where an individual has dual nationality.

<sup>3</sup> Includes dependants.

<sup>4</sup> Nationals of EU accession countries are included or excluded according to their accession date.

<sup>5</sup> Figures rounded to the nearest 5 (- = 0, \* = 1 or 2).

<sup>6</sup> Provisional figures.

<sup>7</sup> Data from 2007 onwards include asylum as well as non-asylum cases as from that year it includes persons granted indefinite leave outside the immigration rules under measures aimed at clearing the backlog of outstanding unresolved cases.

### Asylum: Housing

**Paul Uppal:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are in place to ensure that housing provided to asylum seekers meets the needs of its tenants. [55433]

**Damian Green:** Accommodation for asylum seekers is provided on behalf of the UK Border Agency by both private and public sector providers. Accommodation is designed to be safe and habitable and each contract contains a "Statement of Requirements" that dictate the minimum standards expected from each provider. UK Border Agency regional contract compliance teams regularly undertake audits of contract compliance and perform physical property inspections to ensure standards are maintained.

Accommodation providers are committed to providing such standards and if failures occur a number of measures are taken including financial penalties in the form of service credits and ultimately termination of contracts where there is evidence of persistent failures.

A copy of the "Statement of Requirements" is available from the House Library.

### Crime: Foreign Nationals

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate she has made of the number of crimes committed by nationals of other EU member states in the latest period for which figures are available. [55444]

**Nick Herbert:** No estimates have been made centrally. The Home Office has two sources of crime statistics, namely the British Crime Survey and the police recorded crime statistics. However, neither source collects any information on the nationality of the alleged offenders.

#### Criminal Records: Disclosure of Information

**Angie Bray:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans her Department has to implement the recommendations of the Mason Review of criminal record disclosures to remove old and minor conviction information from criminal records checks. [55519]

**Lynne Featherstone:** Careful consideration is being given to the extent to which this recommendation should be implemented and to the appropriate route for doing so. A full response to all Mrs Mason's recommendations will be made once she has completed phase two of her independent review of the criminal records regime, which is expected to be by the end of June 2011.

The Green Paper 'Breaking the Cycle: effective punishment, rehabilitation and sentencing of offenders' referred to the possibility of filtering old and minor convictions so that they need not be disclosed under criminal records checks. A formal Government response to that consultation paper will be issued shortly.

#### Detainees: Telephone Calls

**Sadiq Khan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what comparison the UK Border Agency has made of the cost of calling cards for the new telephone system for detainees with the price of commercially available calling cards; [55430]

(2) who will be responsible for the payment for calling cards for the new telephone system for detainees. [55431]

**Damian Green:** As part of its contract with the UK Border Agency to operate Tinsley House Immigration Removal Centre, G4S is required to provide detainees with a telephone system that enables them to communicate with relatives and representatives.

G4S commenced a trial mobile phone system in February 2011 to address concerns about poor signal coverage from the existing DECT phone network and other mobile networks. It will be evaluated at the end of May 2011. G4S has had to provide substantive evidence to the UK Border Agency that any charges associated with the use of this system are broadly comparable to those charged by the main networks.

On arrival at Tinsley House each detainee is provided with a number of free minutes to ensure they have a means of making telephone calls. Subsequent costs for making calls are charged to each detainee via a personal account on a per second basis.

#### Drinking Water: Coffee

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much her Department spent on (a) bottled water and (b) coffee in each month of the last five years. [50400]

**Damian Green:** Data for the Home Department, inclusive of the UK Border Agency (UKBA) and the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB), for the period prior to financial year 2010-11 can be made available only at disproportionate cost.

Period 1 April 2010 to 28 February 2011

	(a) bottled water	(b) coffee
Home Department (including UKBA and CRB)	25,000	745

#### Driving Offences

**Mr Ruffley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drivers were fined for speeding in England and Wales in each year since 2008 in each police force area. [53399]

**James Brokenshire:** There were 1.1 million fixed penalty notices issued by the 43 police forces of England and Wales for speeding in 2009 and 1.2 million issued in 2008.

A breakdown by police force area for 2009 can be found on page 67, table 3.01, column 16 of the Home Office Statistical Bulletin "Police Powers and Procedures 2009/10". The publication is available in the Library of the House and at the following weblink:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/police-research/hosb0711/>

A breakdown by police force area for 2008 can be found on page 54, table 3.01, column 16 of the Home Office Statistical Bulletin "Police Powers and Procedures 2008/09". The publication is available in the Library of the House and at the following weblink:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110218135832/rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/10/hosb0610.pdf>

Data for 2010 is due to be published in April 2012.

#### Marriage of Convenience: Arrests

**Mr Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 18 January 2011, *Official Report*, columns 673-4W, on Operation Gomozia, how many arrests have been made of non-EU nationals who had been granted leave to remain. [55156]

**Damian Green:** Two non-EU nationals who had been granted leave to remain have been arrested. A further five who had not been granted leave to remain have also been arrested, together with 14 EU nationals. The UK Border Agency is still investigating the Operation Gomozia cases and anyone who has gained leave as a result of this scam will have that leave revoked and face removal from the UK.

#### Offences Against Children

**Mr Ruffley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many pornographic images of children were removed from the internet following investigations by (a) police forces and (b) her Department's agencies in each year since 2000. [53482]

**James Brokenshire:** The information requested is not held centrally.

### Overseas Students: Visas

**Simon Kirby:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions she has held with interested parties on tier 4 student visas. [54921]

**Damian Green:** The Secretary of State has had a number of discussions with various interested parties relating to Tier 4, including the Russell Group, and a number of vice-chancellors of prominent universities. I have also had recent discussions about Tier 4 with the Russell Group and vice-chancellors, as well as other interested parties including the Association of Colleges, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education and various Members of Parliament.

### Police

**Mr Ruffley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much the (a) Gay Police Association, (b) National Black Police Association and (c) Christian Police Association received from her Department in each year since 2008. [53390]

**Nick Herbert:** The following table shows the grant funding paid to each of the named staff associations in the 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11 financial years.

	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Gay Police Association	100,000.00	100,000.00	38,848.50
National Black Police Association	0	0	0
Christian Police Association	0	10,000.00	0

**Mr Ruffley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of (a) police community support officers and (b) police officers in each police force area were identified as members of each ethnic group in each police force area in the latest period for which figures are available. [53466]

**Nick Herbert:** Figures relating to 31 March 2010 are shown in the following tables:

Table 1: Police community support officer ethnicity<sup>1</sup> by police force area as at 31 March 2010

Police force	White	Mixed	Black or Black British	Asian or Asian British	Chinese or Other ethnic group	Percentage
						Not stated
Avon and Somerset	95	1	1	1	0	2
Bedfordshire	89	3	3	5	0	0
Cambridgeshire	89	2	1	6	1	0
Cheshire	97	0	1	0	0	1
Cleveland	98	0	0	2	0	0
Cumbria	100	0	0	0	0	0
Derbyshire	96	1	2	2	0	0
Devon and Cornwall	78	1	1	0	0	21
Dorset	98	1	0	0	1	1
Durham	99	1	0	0	0	0
Essex	97	1	1	0	0	1
Gloucestershire	92	2	1	2	2	1
Greater Manchester	93	1	2	4	1	0
Hampshire	99	0	1	0	0	0
Hertfordshire	95	1	1	2	0	1
Humberside	98	1	1	0	0	0
Kent	96	2	0	2	0	0
Lancashire	97	0	0	1	0	1
Leicestershire	88	1	0	11	0	0
Lincolnshire	98	0	1	1	0	0
London, City of	81	4	2	13	0	0
Merseyside	97	2	1	0	0	0
Metropolitan Police	70	4	10	11	4	1
Norfolk	98	1	0	0	1	0
Northamptonshire	94	4	1	1	0	0
Northumbria	99	0	0	0	0	0
North Yorkshire	99	0	1	0	0	1
Nottinghamshire	97	1	1	1	0	0
South Yorkshire	95	2	1	2	0	0
Staffordshire	95	1	0	3	0	0
Suffolk	99	1	0	0	0	0
Surrey	95	1	1	3	0	0
Sussex	96	1	0	0	1	1
Thames Valley	94	2	1	3	0	1
Warwickshire	96	1	1	1	0	1
West Mercia	96	0	0	2	1	1

Table 1: Police community support officer ethnicity<sup>1</sup> by police force area as at 31 March 2010

Police force	White	Mixed	Black or Black British	Asian or Asian British	Chinese or Other ethnic group	Percentage
						Not stated
West Midlands	87	3	2	8	0	0
West Yorkshire	95	0	1	4	0	0
Wiltshire	98	0	0	1	0	1
Dyfed-Powys	99	0	1	0	0	0
Gwent	98	0	1	1	0	0
North Wales	98	0	0	1	1	0
South Wales	99	0	0	1	0	1

<sup>1</sup> Percentage figures based on full-time equivalent figures that have been rounded to the nearest whole number. Because of rounding, there may be an apparent discrepancy between totals and the sums of the constituent items.

Table 2: Police officer ethnicity<sup>1</sup> by police force area as at 31 March 2010

Police force	White	Mixed	Black or Black British	Asian or Asian British	Chinese or Other ethnic group	Percentage
						Not stated
Avon and Somerset	98	1	1	0	0	0
Bedfordshire	92	2	1	3	0	2
Cambridgeshire	97	1	0	1	0	1
Cheshire	98	1	0	0	0	1
Cleveland	96	0	0	1	0	2
Cumbria	99	0	0	0	0	0
Derbyshire	97	1	0	2	0	0
Devon and Cornwall	89	0	0	0	0	10
Dorset	99	1	0	0	0	0
Durham	98	1	0	1	0	0
Essex	97	2	0	0	0	0
Gloucestershire	97	1	0	0	0	1
Greater Manchester	95	2	1	2	0	0
Hampshire	91	1	0	1	0	7
Hertfordshire	96	1	1	2	0	0
Humberside	99	0	0	0	0	0
Kent	97	1	0	1	0	0
Lancashire	88	1	0	2	0	9
Leicestershire	92	2	1	4	0	1
Lincolnshire	99	0	0	0	0	0
London, City of	94	2	2	2	0	0
Merseyside	97	2	0	0	1	0
Metropolitan Police	90	2	3	3	1	0
Norfolk	98	1	0	0	0	0
Northamptonshire	89	1	2	1	0	7
Northumbria	98	1	0	0	0	0
North Yorkshire	99	1	0	0	0	0
Nottinghamshire	96	1	1	2	0	0
South Yorkshire	96	1	1	1	0	0
Staffordshire	98	1	0	1	0	0
Suffolk	97	2	0	0	0	1
Surrey	95	1	0	1	0	2
Sussex	97	1	0	0	0	1
Thames Valley	93	2	1	2	0	2
Warwickshire	94	1	0	3	0	1
West Mercia	98	0	0	1	0	0
West Midlands	92	2	1	5	0	0
West Yorkshire	95	1	1	3	0	0
Wiltshire	98	1	0	0	0	0
Dyfed-Powys	99	0	0	0	0	0
Gwent	98	1	0	0	0	0
North Wales	99	0	0	0	0	0
South Wales	89	1	0	0	0	9

<sup>1</sup> Percentage figures based on full-time equivalent figures that have been rounded to the nearest whole number. Because of rounding, there may be an apparent discrepancy between totals and the sums of the constituent items.

**Mr Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when she expects to make a decision on implementation of the recommendations of the (a) Hutton and (b) Winsor reports in respect of police services; and if she will make a statement. [53748]

**Nick Herbert:** The Secretary of State for the Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), has referred those recommendations of Tom Winsor's first report that call for changes in the short-term to remuneration and conditions of service in England and Wales to the appropriate bodies to consider. She has directed the negotiating machinery for police officers to complete their consideration by 26 July 2011 and will consider their recommendations carefully, in line with her statutory obligations.

As the Chancellor of the Exchequer, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne), announced in his Budget statement of 23 March 2011, the Government accept Lord Hutton's recommendations as a basis for consultation. The Government will set out proposals in the autumn that are affordable, sustainable, and fair to both the public sector work force and the taxpayer. The Government recognise that the position of the uniformed services, including the police, will require particularly careful consideration. Any changes to police pensions would be subject to the usual consultation processes with the Police Negotiating Board.

**Mr Meacher:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are in place for the approval of police forces exchanging undercover police officers with police forces in other countries. [55494]

**James Brokenshire:** Authorisations under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 ("RIPA") may be given for the deployment of covert human intelligence sources such as police undercover officers both inside and outside the UK. Members of foreign law enforcement agencies acting as undercover officers may also be authorised under RIPA in support of domestic and international investigations. Authorisations under RIPA require that covert actions are carried out in a way that is necessary and proportionate with regard to human rights, particularly the right to privacy.

#### Police: Bureaucracy

**Keith Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date she last met Jan Berry to discuss recommendations for reducing the burden of administration on police forces. [53757]

**Nick Herbert:** Jan Berry was appointed as the Independent Reducing Bureaucracy Advocate by the previous Government in October 2008 and her role concluded in October 2010. The current Home Secretary has not met Jan Berry but I have met with her on a number of occasions.

This Government set up a Reducing Bureaucracy Programme Board with key policing partners in October 2010 to take forward the reducing bureaucracy work. We have already scrapped the national requirement for the Stop and Account form and reduced the reporting requirements for Stop and Search. We are also returning certain charging decisions to the police and establishing a more proportionate approach to inspections.

#### Police: Manpower

**Mr Ruffley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost of national police recruitment campaigns in each budgetary category was in each police force area in each of the last five years; and what resources her Department allocated to such campaigning in each such year. [53446]

**Nick Herbert:** Responsibility for police recruitment passed from the Home Office to the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) and individual forces in 2007 and details of the costs of recruitment campaigns to individual forces are not collected centrally.

The last national recruitment campaign took place in 2006 and was therefore funded by the Home Office from the Department's central marketing budget. The details of this are as follows:

<i>2006-07</i>	
	<i>Amount spent (£)</i>
PCSO recruitment	3,418,115.75
Police officer recruitment	2,848.00

**Mr Ruffley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications to join the force each police force received in each year since 1997; and how many officers were recruited in each such year. [53513]

**Nick Herbert:** The requested data on applications have been collected since 2002-03 and where available are given in table 1. The data provided here are management information and as such it is important to note that they are provisional and have not been subjected to the usual quality assurance practices.

The requested data on recruits have been collected since 2002-03 and are given in table 2.

*Table 1: Number<sup>1</sup> of formal application forms<sup>2</sup> received by police forces from 2002-03 to 2009-10*

	<i>2002-03</i>	<i>2003-04</i>	<i>2004-05</i>	<i>2005-06</i>	<i>2006-07</i>	<i>2007-08</i>	<i>2008-09</i>	<i>2009-10</i>
Avon and Somerset	916	446	3—	2,121	2,062	3—	3—	2054
Bedfordshire	1,940	3—	635	42	3—	456	285	299
Cambridgeshire	1,511	3—	3—	783	3—	21	3—	255
Cheshire	4,532	3—	779	3—	1,666	165	580	425
Cleveland	1,464	3—	113	3—	3—	3—	3—	3—
Cumbria	1,085	767	105	226	243	431	491	3—
Derbyshire	2,884	753	113	4	3—	1,310	3—	3—
Devon and Cornwall	3,614	1,203	1,366	1,397	3—	463	826	3—
Dorset	1,224	3—	3—	3—	358	3—	3—	3—

Table 1: Number<sup>1</sup> of formal application forms<sup>2</sup> received by police forces from 2002-03 to 2009-10

	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Durham	1,343	3—	3—	2,019	3—	3—	403	3—
Dyfed-Powys	859	366	3—	897	3—	3—	781	3—
Essex	2,282	2,127	571	925	3—	1,262	1,437	3—
Gloucestershire	1,062	245	795	963	3—	3—	3—	3—
Greater Manchester	3—	3,642	200	3—	3—	4,972	2,602	1,934
Gwent	1,493	1,005	3—	918	931	1,031	3—	1,761
Hampshire	5,820	1,349	3—	1,949	1,766	1,968	3—	3—
Hertfordshire	1,992	1,224	333	1,103	679	659	1,098	3—
Humberside	1,349	1,519	3—	996	3—	441	3—	3—
Kent	3,027	3—	1,401	1,347	3—	2,521	1,272	3—
Lancashire	3—	1,961	984	2,742	3—	4,370	1,832	3—
Leicestershire	1,421	1,249	3—	295	3—	435	640	38
Lincolnshire	1,289	3—	284	333	3—	1,020	469	976
London, City of	594	449	3—	415	3—	850	3—	3—
Merseyside	3,190	1,331	3,137	3—	1,729	550	2,232	3,375
Metropolitan Police	3—	4,065	1,160	3,444	1,460	5,498	11,566	2,591
Norfolk	1,206	3—	674	854	3—	3—	785	415
Northamptonshire	283	384	451	522	273	749	589	397
Northumbria	3,349	1,074	1,941	1,301	3—	2,590	2,615	223
North Wales	2,219	1,234	1,482	705	3—	346	568	363
North Yorkshire	3—	3—	3—	3—	3—	3—	3—	3—
Nottinghamshire	2,770	1,104	1,176	3—	445	279	566	331
South Wales	724	2,204	3—	1,814	1,102	3—	2,895	3—
South Yorkshire	1,300	1,235	807	366	721	893	3—	733
Staffordshire	2,043	3—	3—	3—	3—	3—	351	3—
Suffolk	1,352	890	442	1,115	3—	3—	3—	3—
Surrey	2,345	3—	3—	3—	3—	3—	32	785
Sussex	1,051	3—	1,190	520	3—	936	3—	318
Thames Valley	3,907	2,077	3—	3—	3—	0	1,938	3—
Warwickshire	651	229	572	468	3—	3—	482	3—
West Mercia	3,440	1,959	278	78	3—	1,005	924	14
West Midlands	3—	3—	3—	3,431	3—	3,451	739	299
West Yorkshire	4,087	2,704	2,939	769	1,434	2,149	1,810	3—
Wiltshire	1,183	432	499	3—	3—	3—	3—	3—

<sup>1</sup> Provisional management information data collected for planning purposes only. Data has not undergone usual quality assurance practices (including validation with individual police forces) and are therefore supplied for information purposes only.

<sup>2</sup> Does not include informal expressions of interest. Some forces did not send out and receive paper application packs when they could instead receive electronic applications via the [www.policecouldyou.co.uk](http://www.policecouldyou.co.uk)

website. Where forces have received application packs from other means it is not always possible to separately identify the number of paper application packs received, and in such cases forces have been instructed to return a zero response.

<sup>3</sup> Data not available (or may be zero). Force was not able to supply data at the time of collection.

Table 2: Police officer recruits<sup>1</sup> (FTE)<sup>2</sup> to police forces from 2002-03 to 2009-10

	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Avon and Somerset	40	198	93	123	90	153	67	74
Bedfordshire	89	178	106	54	45	79	87	65
Cambridgeshire	76	107	99	104	34	66	144	100
Cheshire	141	153	105	121	107	42	91	76
Cleveland	129	138	83	114	79	43	126	52
Cumbria	63	113	51	55	58	41	74	26
Derbyshire	146	146	64	66	84	129	122	48
Devon and Cornwall	138	131	200	255	98	115	145	80
Dorset	72	86	76	102	64	37	35	43
Durham	21	104	79	71	42	21	37	1
Dyfed-Powys	7	53	35	54	47	48	47	48
Essex	40	225	276	224	306	238	200	248
Gloucestershire	53	98	60	70	81	76	81	0
Greater Manchester	113	978	233	277	362	426	482	214
Gwent	45	78	102	80	69	61	21	42
Hampshire	267	282	204	244	249	204	81	182
Hertfordshire	202	279	155	173	185	105	149	85
Humberside	56	188	126	93	95	95	0	12
Kent	192	290	193	209	233	149	222	145

Table 2: Police officer recruits<sup>1</sup> (FTE)<sup>2</sup> to police forces from 2002-03 to 2009-10

	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Lancashire	240	311	148	196	165	182	215	56
Leicestershire	116	245	123	96	85	98	161	31
Lincolnshire	64	44	59	54	66	36	79	15
London, City of	44	52	39	41	30	20	38	49
Merseyside	101	192	389	161	312	200	259	241
Metropolitan Police	2,434	2,971	1,886	1,050	1,249	966	2,010	1,633
Norfolk	71	56	77	55	49	48	180	67
Northamptonshire	45	99	109	115	68	82	90	54
Northumbria	151	197	159	122	87	163	281	149
North Wales	77	66	71	51	44	45	90	49
North Yorkshire	99	82	71	110	85	0	0	96
Nottinghamshire	89	138	138	54	46	47	144	59
South Wales	180	173	118	122	118	54	73	120
South Yorkshire	103	261	205	148	164	92	57	29
Staffordshire	27	123	108	81	95	40	48	42
Suffolk	81	113	37	45	77	15	47	40
Surrey	92	116	130	124	157	121	93	126
Sussex	139	320	229	236	167	221	315	160
Thames Valley	306	479	361	374	219	244	346	297
Warwickshire	57	51	59	69	66	0	16	23
West Mercia	235	88	90	88	110	79	80	53
West Midlands	478	408	476	442	445	497	610	335
West Yorkshire	277	337	566	176	271	352	244	139
Wiltshire	62	120	70	50	28	47	55	18

<sup>1</sup> Recruits included those officers joining as Police Standard Direct Recruits and those who were previously Special Constables. This excludes police officers on transfers from other forces and those rejoining.

<sup>2</sup> Full Time Equivalent figures that have been rounded to the nearest whole number. Because of rounding, there may be an apparent discrepancy between totals and the sums of the constituent items.

### Police: Redundancy

**John Mann:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers in Nottinghamshire have been made redundant in the last three months. [54114]

**Nick Herbert:** None, as there is no provision in legislation for making police officers redundant.

### Police: Retirement

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many detectives have left police forces under rule A19 in 2011. [54703]

**Nick Herbert** [*holding answer 9 May 2011*]: The requested information is not collected centrally.

### Police: Vetting

**Jenny Willott:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) which company has been awarded the contract for the proposed biometric vetting scheme for police recruits; [54774]

(2) whether she has discussed with ministerial colleagues any extension of the proposed biometric vetting scheme for police recruits to other public services or public sector employees; [54775]

(3) whether DNA samples, DNA profiles and fingerprints taken from police recruits as part of the proposed biometric vetting scheme will be retained following recruitment; [54776]

(4) whether DNA samples, DNA profiles and fingerprints taken from police recruits as part of the proposed biometric vetting scheme will be stored on (a) the national DNA database and (b) the police elimination database; [54777]

(5) whether DNA samples, DNA profiles and fingerprints taken from police recruits as part of the proposed biometric vetting scheme will be destroyed or deleted (a) within a fixed time period and (b) on the individual's departure from the service; [54778]

(6) whether DNA samples, DNA profiles and fingerprints taken from police recruits as part of the proposed biometric vetting scheme are to be collected before or after job offers have been made; [54779]

(7) whether DNA samples, DNA profiles and fingerprints taken as part of the proposed biometric vetting scheme from potential police recruits who are unsuccessful are to be treated as volunteer samples and data for the purposes of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984; [55625]

(8) whether DNA samples, DNA profiles and fingerprints taken from police recruits as part of the proposed biometric vetting scheme are to be used for any further searches following recruitment. [55627]

**James Brokenshire:** No decision has been taken on any new scheme for biometric vetting for police recruits. The matter will be considered by a technical working party of the Police Advisory Board for England and Wales.

### Stop and Search

**Mr Ruffley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many stops and searches were conducted in each police force area (a) in total and

(b) per 1,000 population in each year since 1997; and what proportion of total stops and searches in (i) England and Wales and (ii) each police force area resulted in an arrest in each such year. [53517]

**Nick Herbert:** The requested data are published within the Home Office Statistical Bulletin 'Police Powers and Procedures'. Current and previous copies of these publications are available from the Library of the House.

### Stop and Search: Terrorism

**Mr Ruffley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people had their vehicles stopped and searched under section 1 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 in each year since 2006; and how many of those were (a) prosecuted and (b) convicted of (i) a notifiable offence and (ii) a terrorism-related offence in (A) each police force area and (B) England and Wales. [53375]

**Nick Herbert:** The number of vehicles stopped under section 1 of the said power is published within the Home Office Statistical Bulletin "Police Powers and Procedures". Data relating to prosecutions and convictions are published by the Ministry of Justice in its "Criminal Statistics" publication. It is not possible to identify which prosecutions and convictions were as a result of stop and searches. Current and previous copies of these publications are available from the Library of the House.

**Mr Ruffley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people had their vehicle stopped and searched under section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000 in each year since 2005; and how many of those were (a) prosecuted and (b) convicted of (i) a notifiable offence and (ii) a terrorism-related offence in (A) each police force area and (B) England and Wales. [53395]

**Nick Herbert:** The information requested is published in the Home Office Statistical Bulletin 'Operation of Police Powers under Terrorism Act 2000 and Subsequent Legislation'. Current and previous copies of both annual and quarterly updates are available in the Library of the House.

### Visas

**Tony Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Tier 4 visa holders extended their leave to remain by switching in-country to a Tier 2 (General) visa category in (a) 2009 and (b) 2010. [55601]

**Damian Green:** Tier 4 of the points based system was introduced on 31 March 2009. Information on the number of Tier 4 visa holders who have switched to a Tier 2 General visa is as follows:

<i>Tier 4 visa holders switching to Tier 2 General in 2009 and 2010</i>	
	<i>Number<sup>1</sup></i>
2009	15
2010	785

<sup>1</sup> Statistical information is provisional and subject to change. It has been derived from local management information and is not provided under National Statistics protocols.

### Visas: Finance

**Mr Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations she has received on the cost of visas. [55455]

**Damian Green:** During the last three months the UK Border Agency has received eight representations regarding the costs of visas. These consisted of four MP letters on behalf of their constituents, two Treat Official letters and two parliamentary questions.

## JUSTICE

### Career Breaks

**Priti Patel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many staff in his Department and its agencies have taken career breaks of (a) three to six months, (b) six to 12 months, (c) one to two years, (d) two to three years and (e) more than three years in each of the last three years; and how many staff were on a career break on the latest date for which figures are available. [55551]

**Mr Kenneth Clarke:** No central records are held by the Ministry on the number of staff on career breaks for specific periods of time. To obtain this information would require an examination of all staff personal files at a disproportionate cost. However, the Ministry does hold records of the number of staff on career breaks on specific dates. For the end of the last three financial years they were as follows:

<i>As at 31 March each year</i>	<i>Number</i>
2009	1'655
2010	1'587
2011	1'496

<sup>1</sup> The Department's total full-time equivalent staff numbers for these three dates were 76,470; 75,010 and 74,820 respectively.

### Charter of Fundamental Rights: EU

**Priti Patel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice whether the Government was represented at the Ninth Meeting of the National Liaison Officers held by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights in April 2011. [55535]

**Mr Kenneth Clarke:** Yes. A Ministry of Justice official represented the UK Government at the meeting.

### Civil Proceedings: Legal Costs

**Ian Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice when he plans to introduce legislation to implement his policy proposals for reform of civil litigation. [55161]

**Mr Djanogly:** "Reforming Civil Litigation Funding and Costs in England and Wales—Implementation of Lord Justice Jackson's Recommendations: The Government Response" was published on 29 March 2011, setting out the way forward on the proposals following full consultation.

As indicated in the response, changes to the CFA regime requiring primary legislation will follow as soon as parliamentary time allows. Other changes will require amendments to the Civil Procedure Rules or other secondary legislation. Further consultation will follow in due course, as appropriate. It is envisaged that the reforms will be implemented together, once the legislation is enacted, aside from the reversal of *Carver v. BAA* and increases to recoverable fees for litigants in person which can be taken forward independently more swiftly.

**Ian Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if he will publish the representations made by defendant insurance companies in response to Lord Justice Jackson's review of civil litigation costs. [55162]

**Mr Djanogly:** Lord Justice Jackson's year-long review of civil litigation funding and costs was an independent review. Representations made to Lord Justice Jackson were referred to in his "Review of Civil Litigation Costs: Final Report", which was published in January 2010. The annexes to his final report include lists of submissions received during his review and of meetings, seminars and conferences attended.

**Ian Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what representations (a) he and (b) his Department have received from defendant insurance companies since the publication of Lord Justice Jackson's review of civil litigation costs. [55163]

**Mr Djanogly:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello) on 14 March 2011, *Official Report*, column 139W.

I met with the Association of British Insurers (ABI) on 29 July. During the consultation period for Proposals for Reform of Civil Litigation Funding and Costs in England and Wales—Implementation of Lord Justice Jackson's Recommendations, I hosted three roundtable discussions with interested parties. The first, on 2 December 2010 aimed to include parties on all sides of the debate; claimant and defendant solicitors, insurers, after the event (ATE) insurers and other interested parties. I then held meetings with a group of claimant practitioners on 18 January 2011, and defendant practitioners, including insurers and the ABI on 19 January 2011.

The Secretary of State and I have regular meetings with representative bodies, covering a range of issues. The Secretary of State has not held any meetings with insurers or claimant solicitors specifically to discuss the proposed changes to civil litigation funding and costs.

The Department has received various submissions from defendant insurance companies in relation to the consultation 'Reform of Civil Litigation Funding and Costs in England and Wales—Implementation of Lord Justice Jackson's Recommendations'.

**Ian Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what assessment he has made of the effects of his proposed reform of civil litigation costs on people who have sustained long-term disabilities necessitating significant on-going care. [55260]

**Mr Djanogly:** "Reforming Civil Litigation Funding and Costs in England and Wales—Implementation of Lord Justice Jackson's Recommendations: The Government Response" was published on 29 March 2011, setting out

the way forward on the proposals following full consultation. An updated impact assessment was published alongside this response.

### Criminal Injuries Compensation: Public Consultation

**Mr Nuttall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what plans he has to hold a public consultation as part of the review of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme. [55941]

**Mr Blunt:** The Government intend to make an announcement before the summer recess.

### Domestic Violence: Fixed Penalties

**Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many penalty notices for disorder have been issued for wasting police time in cases where the accused had previously made an allegation of domestic violence. [55831]

**Mr Blunt:** In 2009, there were 3,109 penalty notices for disorders issued to persons aged 16 and over for the offence of wasting police time in England and Wales. Data held centrally do not include information about the circumstances behind each case. It is therefore not possible to identify offences where the accused had previously made an allegation of domestic violence.

Court proceedings data for 2010 are planned for publication on 26 May 2011.

### Human Rights Act 1988

**John Hemming:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if he will instruct his legal representatives to intervene on one or more cases in respect of recent judgments in terms of the balance between articles 8 and 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights to take the case to the Supreme Court for a ruling on the interpretation of section 12 of the Human Rights Act 1998. [55629]

**Mr Kenneth Clarke:** The Government have no plans to intervene in any cases concerning the interpretation of section 12 of the Human Rights Act 1998.

### Legal Aid

**Julie Elliott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many people resident in (a) Sunderland and (b) the North East received legal aid in each of the last five years. [55468]

**Mr Djanogly:** The Legal Services Commission (LSC) is currently collating data relating to Sunderland and the North East. I will write to the hon. Member once the information has been verified and place a copy in the Library of the House.

### Prison Sentences

**Karl Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many serving prisoners have been in prison for longer than their tariff length; and in which prisons those prisoners are located; [55425]

(2) for what length of time in addition to the length of their tariff each prisoner serving a sentence in excess of their tariff length has been in custody. [55427]

**Mr Blunt:** The tariff is the minimum term that a life or other indeterminate sentence prisoner must serve in custody before becoming eligible for consideration for release by the Parole Board.

As at 17 November 2010, there were 6,316 offenders in custody being held beyond their tariff expiry date. Table 1 shows a breakdown of this total by prison establishment. For a small number of offenders, the current prison establishment was not recorded on the data held centrally. Additionally, some offenders are held in secure hospitals and other secure accommodation.

Table 2 shows a distribution of the time served beyond tariff expiry date as at 17 November 2010. These figures include all offenders being held in prison and for whom the prison establishment was recorded centrally; they exclude those held in other secure custody or where prison establishment was not recorded on the data held centrally.

These figures have been drawn from administrative IT systems which, as with any large scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing.

*Table 1: Lifers and IPPs in custody beyond their tariff expiry date as at 17 November 2010, by establishment*

<i>Establishment</i>	<i>Number</i>
Acklington	103
Albany	131
Altcourse	20
Ashfield	3
Ashwell	25
Askham Grange	15
Aylesbury	15
Bedford	1
Belmarsh	5
Birmingham	15
Blantyre House	35
Blundeston	65
Brinsford	2
Bristol	7
Brixton	3
Bronzeield	5
Buckley Hall	42
Bullington	64
Bure	88
Camp Hill	40
Cardiff	31
Castington	5
Channings Wood	104
Chelmsford	7
Coldingley	65
Dartmoor	68
Deerbolt	2
Doncaster	7
Dorchester	2
Dovegate	101
Downview	6
Drake Hall	3
Durham	7
East Sutton Park	5

*Table 1: Lifers and IPPs in custody beyond their tariff expiry date as at 17 November 2010, by establishment*

<i>Establishment</i>	<i>Number</i>
Eastwood Park	2
Erlestoke	77
Everthorpe	32
Exeter	1
Featherstone	55
Ford	47
Forest Bank	6
Foston Hall	9
Frankland	172
Full Sutton	113
Garth	123
Gartree	105
Gloucester	8
Grendon/Spring Hill	121
Guys Marsh	54
Haverigg	27
Hewell	46
High Down	11
Highpoint	67
Hollesley Bay	52
Holloway	10
Holme House	24
Hull	34
Huntercombe	4
Kennet	2
Kingston (Portsmouth)	55
Kirkham	110
Kirklevington Grange	43
Lancaster	15
Lancaster Farms	10
Latchmere House	12
Leeds	7
Lewes	13
Leyhill	107
Lincoln	21
Lindholme	80
Littlehey	98
Liverpool	19
Long Lartin	76
Low Newton	17
Lowdham Grange	48
Maidstone	64
Manchester	41
Moorland Closed	32
Moorland Open	31
Mount (The)	70
New Hall	11
North Sea Camp	107
Norwich	23
Nottingham	15
Onley	24
Parc	18
Parkhurst	62
Pentonville	10
Peterborough Female	6
Peterborough Male	9
Portland	2
Preston	12
Ranby	84
Reading	2

Table 1: Lifers and IPPs in custody beyond their tariff expiry date as at 17 November 2010, by establishment

Establishment	Number
Risley	195
Rochester	2
Rye Hill	61
Send	27
Sheppey Cluster (Elmley)	47
Sheppey Cluster (Standford Hill)	27
Sheppey Cluster (Swaleside)	155
Shepton Mallet	114
Shrewsbury	4
Stafford	44
Stocken	126
Stoke Heath	3
Styal	11
Sudbury	117
Swaleside	1
Swansea	2
Swinfen Hall	104
Thorn Cross	1
Usk/Prescoed	91
Verne (The)	44
Wakefield	191
Wandsworth	32
Warren Hill	1
Wayland	88
Wealstun	20
Wellingborough	78
Wetherby	2
Whatton	244
Whitmoor	64
Winchester	4
Wolds	73
Woodhill	13
Wormwood Scrubs	8
Wymott	98
Establishment not centrally recorded/other secure custody	571
Total	6,316

Table 2: Lifers and IPPs in prison beyond their tariff expiry date as at 17 November 2010, by length of time served past tariff

	Number
Less than 6 months	695
6 months to less than 1 years	643
1 year to less than 2 years	1,288
2 years to less than 3 years	975
3 years to less than 5 years	850
5 years to less than 10 years	774
10 years+	520
Total	5,745

### Prisoners

**Priti Patel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice with reference to the provisions of Prison Service Instruction 06/2011 on Prisoner Communications—Correspondence, how many prisoners have been (a) investigated and (b) disciplined for contributing (i) directly or (ii) via a third party to (A) a social networking site or (B) a media publication in each of the last three years. [55545]

**Mr Blunt:** Any disciplinary action taken against prisoners for contributing directly or indirectly to social networking sites is dealt with and recorded locally at the prison and is not collected centrally. In order to provide these details individual prisoner's records would need to be checked and the information could be only provided at disproportionate cost.

Prisoners may write to any person or organisation, including media publications, within the rules in Prison Service Instruction 06/2011 Prisoner Communications Correspondence and Prison Service Instruction 37/2010 Prisoner's Access to the Media. A prisoner may have an article published if it conforms to guidance contained in those policies but no records are kept centrally of disciplinary action where breaches of the rules have occurred.

### Prisoners' Release

**Priti Patel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many prisoners have been released under home detention curfew in error in each year that figures are available; [55538]

(2) how many prisoners have been released early due to the incorrect calculation of their (a) home detention curfew and (b) early removal scheme eligibility dates. [55539]

**Mr Blunt:** The following table shows the number of prisoners released on home detention curfew in error, by financial year. These figures cover the period between 1 April 2005 and 31 March 2011. There are approximately 12,000 prisoners released on home detention curfew each year and those released in error make up a tiny proportion of these releases.

Table 1: Prisoners released in error on home detention curfew, by financial year

	Number
2005-06	1
2006-07	2
2007-08	1
2008-09	1
2009-10	6
2010-11	1

The following table shows the number of prisoners released in error on home detention curfew and early removal scheme as the result of a calculation error. These figures cover the period between 1 April 2005 and 31 March 2011.

Table 2: Number of prisoners released early due to incorrect calculation of (a) home detention curfew and (b) early removal scheme, by financial year

	Home detention curfew	Early removal scheme
2005-06	0	0
2006-07	0	0
2007-08	0	0
2008-09	1	0
2009-10	2	0
2010-11	0	0

These figures have been drawn from live administrative data systems which may be amended at any time. Although care is taken when processing and analysing the returns, the detail collected is subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large scale recording system.

The number of releases in error may change should further incidents be reported.

The number of releases in error from prisons generally is very small. All incidents are subject to investigation. The majority of prisoners released in error are returned to custody quickly. They are usually unaware of the error and make no attempt to evade the police.

**Priti Patel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many prisoners he estimates will have their release dates recalculated following the issuing of Prison Service Instruction 55/2010 on Sentence Calculation and HDC/ERS Eligibility Dates - Multiple Sentences Comprising Mixtures of the 1991 Act and the 2003 Act Release Provisions; whether additional costs to the public purse will be incurred as a result of any recalculated sentences; and if he will make a statement. [55542]

**Mr Blunt:** Prison Service Instruction (PSI) 55/2010 gave effect to a June 2010 Supreme Court judgment that fundamentally changed how the legislation must be applied to prisoners with multiple sentences which are subject to a mixture of release provisions (i.e. under the Criminal Justice Act 1991 and Criminal Justice Act 2003). The result has been that some prisoners have been notified of earlier Home Detention Curfew (HDC) and Early Removal Scheme (ERS) eligibility dates, while the impact on others has been later sentence and licence expiry dates. Prisons have reported that the dates for 5,651 prisoners have had to be recalculated. We have estimated that an additional 80 prison places may be required in the longer term as a direct result of implementing the judgment. These can be accommodated within planned provision. There will be some additional costs in extending the supervision period of some offenders but these are expected to be minimal. These recalculations have been necessary in order for the sentences of affected prisoners to remain lawful and in line with the Supreme Court judgment.

### Prisoners: Correspondence

**Priti Patel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) what the cost to the public purse was of postage on behalf of prisoners sending (a) statutory letters and (b) special letters in each of the last five years; and what the cost to the public purse was of the postage of letters sent overseas in each such year; [55543]

(2) what estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of the implementation of Prison Service Instruction 06/2011 on Prisoner Communications - Correspondence in each of the next three years. [55546]

**Mr Blunt:** The National Offender Management Service Agency's accounting system does not distinguish details or have separate account codes for expenditure details on postage on behalf of prisoners sending statutory letters, special letters or postage letters sent overseas.

Prison Service Instruction 06/2011 did not change the allowances or entitlements for prisoners to send or receive letters and therefore the implementation of the new instruction is cost neutral.

### Prisoners: Equality

**Priti Patel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what estimate he has made of the number and proportion of prisoners with protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010 for each type of protected characteristic in the latest period for which figures are available. [55530]

**Mr Blunt:** Applying the definitions within the Equality Act 2010, every prisoner has the protected characteristics of age, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. I am unable to estimate the number and proportion of prisoners with any of the remaining protected characteristics as this information is not collected centrally.

A breakdown of the prison population by age, race, religion or belief, and sex can be found in the Offender Management Caseload Statistics. The most recent annual bulletin can be downloaded from the Ministry of Justice website at:

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/docs/omcs-2009-complete-210710a.pdf>

### Prisoners: Foreign Nationals

**Mr Hollobone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many foreign national prisoners (a) are held in prison and (b) were so held in May 2010; and what steps he is taking to reduce the number of such prisoners. [55782]

**Mr Blunt:** Prison population statistics are published quarterly. On 31 March 2010, the foreign national prisoner population stood at 11,367. That figure had declined to 10,745 on 31 March 2011.

The Ministry of Justice and Home Office are working together to reduce the number of foreign nationals who are in our prisons.

This includes progression of plans described in the Ministry of Justice Green Paper which will allow for conditional cautions to be available as an alternative to prosecution for some foreign national offenders with the condition being that the individual leaves the UK (we are already piloting this approach with simple cautions) and plans to remove indeterminately sentenced/lifer FNPs at the point of expiry of their tariff.

A considerable amount of work aimed at reducing the FNP population is already under way. For example, we continue to operate an early removal scheme under which FNPs serving a determinate sentence can be considered for deportation up to 270 days before they would otherwise be eligible for release.

In addition, we are building on existing prisoner transfer agreements, which enable some foreign national prisoners to serve their sentence in their country of origin. The EU framework decision on prisoner transfer is due to enter into force from December, which will provide for a steady increase in the number of EU nationals transferred to their own country to serve their sentences.

The Ministry of Justice will continue to work with the Home Office to develop work to manage down overall FNP numbers and, where possible, divert foreign national offenders from the UK and our prison system.

### Prisons

**Priti Patel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the cost to the public purse was of providing activities in prisons in each of the last 10 years; and what the cost to the public purse was of the implementation of Prison Service Instruction 38/2010 on activities in prisons. [55548]

**Mr Blunt:** Prisons deliver a wide and diverse range of activities. The cost of activities is primarily met through establishment baseline funding and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost by examining expenditure locally in each establishment, disaggregating and then collating the costs. Prison Service Instruction 38/2010 on activities in prison provided updated instructions to governors on appropriate activities for prisoners. It did not mandate any specific activities or associated costs.

**Priti Patel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many staff working in prisons have been (a) investigated on suspicion of, (b) disciplined for and (c) dismissed for providing unauthorised items to prisoners in each of the last five years. [55550]

**Mr Blunt:** Central information covering formal staff disciplinary proceedings is recorded according to the type of misconduct. There is no specific category for 'providing unauthorised items to prisoners' and therefore the information requested at (a) and (b) is not held centrally. It could be obtained by manually examining individual records only at a disproportionate cost.

Records, held since January 2008, show that 32 directly employed and 66 non-directly employed staff working in prisons have been dismissed for offences relating to the conveying unauthorised items in to prisons up to 31 March 2011. Available data does not cover whether such items are actually provided to prisoners. The following table provides a yearly breakdown;

Calendar year	Dismissals of prison staff linked to the conveying unauthorised items	Exclusions of non directly employed prison staff linked to the conveying of unauthorised items
2008-09	14	22
2009-10	7	23
2010-11	10	13
2011-12	1 <sup>1</sup>	18

<sup>1</sup> To 11 May

These figures have been drawn from live administrative data systems held by the Corruption Prevention Unit, which may be amended at any time. Although care is taken when processing and analysing the returns, the detail collected is subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large scale recording system. Non directly employed prison staff are employed to work in prisons through a third party such as a local education provider, healthcare trust or other voluntary organisations. These individuals are covered by the NOMS corruption prevention strategy.

### Prisons: Drugs

**Karl Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many prison officers were reprimanded for bringing prohibited substances into prison in (a) 2006, (b) 2007, (c) 2008, (d) 2009 and (e) 2010. [55489]

**Mr Blunt:** The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only by contacting individual prison establishments and by reviewing individual employee personal files at a disproportionate cost.

**Priti Patel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many staff working in prisons have undergone treatment for substance abuse in each of the last three years; and how many staff were undergoing treatment for substance abuse on the latest date for which figures are available. [55549]

**Mr Blunt:** Data on the numbers of any staff working in prisons who may have undergone treatment for substance abuse in the last three years is not available to the National Offender Management Service, in any form.

Substance abuse by staff is not compatible with working in prisons and where this is suspected or identified, appropriate action is taken. Any treatment provided to individual staff members would be through self-referral in the community (either via the employee's own GP or privately). Medical confidentiality applies to personal sensitive data relating to treatment of this sort and as such would remain confidential to the individual member of staff and their healthcare providers and would not be available to NOMS.

### Prisons: Equality

**Priti Patel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the cost is of implementing Prison Service instruction 32/2011 on ensuring equality in 2011-12. [55529]

**Mr Blunt:** There should be no extra costs in implementing Prison Service Instruction 32/2011 on ensuring equality. The instruction contains fewer mandatory actions and prescribes less process than the orders and instructions that it replaces. It offers prison establishments the flexibility to allocate resources to equality issues in accordance with local need.

### Prisons: Security

**Priti Patel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many security breaches occurred in each prison in each of the last five years. [55557]

**Mr Blunt:** NOMS collects data on security breaches which are defined as any incident involving visitors or outsiders where the security or control of the establishment has been breached, or there has been an attempt to do so. The following table provides details of breaches and attempted breaches of security reported on the incident reporting system from 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2011. Figures exclude other specific categories of security-related incident such as drug finds, disorder-related incidents, escapes, key lock incidents and finds of mobile phones.

*Table 1: Breaches and attempted breaches of security or control by visitors or outsiders, by financial year, from 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2011*

<i>Prison name</i>	<i>2006-07</i>	<i>2007-08</i>	<i>2008-09</i>	<i>2009-10</i>	<i>2010-11</i>
Acklington	—	1	—	—	—
Ashfield	—	—	—	1	—
Ashwell	—	1	—	—	—
Askham Grange	—	—	—	—	1
Aylesbury	2	1	—	—	1
Belmarsh	—	—	—	1	—
Blundeston	2	—	—	1	—
Brinsford	—	1	—	—	—
Bristol	3	—	—	—	—
Brixton	4	—	—	3	—
Bronzefield	1	2	—	—	2
Buckley Hall	2	—	1	—	—
Bullingdon	—	1	1	1	1
Bullwood Hall	—	—	1	—	—
Cardiff	1	—	—	—	1
Chelmsford	—	2	—	—	—
Coldingley	3	—	—	—	—
Cookham Wood	—	—	—	1	—
Doncaster	—	1	—	—	—
Drake Hall	—	1	1	—	—
Durham	1	2	1	1	—
Edmunds Hill	—	—	—	1	—
Erlestoke	2	1	—	—	—
Everthorpe	1	1	—	—	—
Exeter	—	1	—	1	—
Feltham	1	—	—	—	—
Ford	1	—	2	—	2
Forest Bank	1	—	—	—	—
Foston Hall	—	—	—	1	—
Frankland	—	1	—	—	—
Full Sutton	1	—	—	—	—
Garth	—	—	—	1	—
Gloucester	4	—	1	—	—
Grendon	—	1	6	1	—
Guys Marsh	1	1	—	—	1
Haslar	—	—	1	1	—
Haverigg	1	2	—	—	—
High Down	—	—	3	—	—
Highpoint	—	2	2	—	1
Hindley	—	3	—	1	—
Hollesley Bay	—	—	1	—	—
Hull	1	—	—	—	—
Kirkham	1	1	—	—	—
Latchmere House	—	1	—	—	—
Leeds	1	1	—	—	—
Lewes	—	1	1	—	—
Leyhill	4	1	—	2	—
Lincoln	1	—	1	—	1
Littlehey	—	—	—	—	1
Liverpool	—	—	—	1	—
Lowdham Grange	—	—	—	—	1
Manchester	—	1	—	5	1
Mount	1	—	—	—	—
New Hall	1	—	—	—	—
Nottingham	—	—	2	2	—
Onley	1	—	1	—	—
Parc	4	8	7	5	—
Pentonville	4	—	1	1	—
Peterborough	20	1	—	—	1
Ranby	—	—	—	1	2
Reading	—	—	1	—	—

Table 1: Breaches and attempted breaches of security or control by visitors or outsiders, by financial year, from 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2011

Prison name	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Risley	1	—	—	—	—
Rochester	—	—	1	—	—
Rye Hill	—	—	—	—	1
Send	—	—	—	—	1
Shrewsbury	—	—	—	—	1
Stafford	—	1	1	—	—
Standford Hill	—	1	—	1	—
Stoke Heath	1	1	—	—	—
Styal	—	—	—	1	—
Sudbury	2	2	—	—	—
Thorn Cross	—	4	5	1	4
Usk\Prescoed	—	—	1	1	1
Wakefield	1	1	—	—	1
Wandsworth	—	1	—	—	—
Wealstun	—	—	1	—	—
Wellingborough	2	—	—	—	—
Woodhill	—	1	—	1	—
Wormwood Scrubs	1	—	2	4	1
Wymott	1	—	—	1	—

These figures have been drawn from live administrative data systems which may be amended at any time. Although care is taken when processing and analysing the returns, the detail collected is subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large scale recording system.

**Priti Patel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what arrangements are in place for the collection by his Department of reports of prison establishments which have (a) persistent breaches of security and (b) persistent areas of concern arising from the testing of security processes, procedures and equipment. [55560]

**Mr Blunt:** Governors of individual prisons have the primary responsibility for ensuring that security standards are maintained. This is monitored in a variety of ways including local audit and testing and formal audit of security procedures by the Agency's auditors.

Reports of serious failures of security are required to be reported to the centre with the most serious failures reported immediately by telephone. Less serious failures are logged locally and will be discussed routinely with the governor's manager and at regular security committee meetings held within each prison. The results of formal security audit reports are published internally and a follow up action plan must be produced by the prison to remedy any deficiencies. High priority recommendations are always followed up with individual prisons and a quarterly report, listing progress on implementation of recommendations, together with any patterns in security failures, is distributed to senior management. A NOMS Audit Committee, chaired by a non-executive director, will consider any underlying patterns, issues and specific areas of concern connected with both security and general matters.

**Priti Patel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many (a) shotgun cartridges, (b) mobile phones, (c) replica firearms, (d) blank rounds, (e) flick knives, (f) SIM cards, (g) mobile phone chargers, (h) cameras and (i) drugs were kept in each prison establishment for the purposes of testing or training in the last year for which figures are available; [55562]

(2) how many (a) shotgun cartridges, (b) mobile phones, (c) replica firearms, (d) blank rounds, (e) flick knives, (f) SIM cards, (g) mobile phone chargers, (h) cameras and (i) drugs used as training aids in prisons and designated to be stored in the security department or Governor's safe have been reported (i) missing, (ii) stolen or (iii) otherwise unaccountable at each prison establishment in each of the last five years. [55561]

**Mr Blunt:** Data relating to the number of items held in prisons for training or testing purposes are not held centrally. In order to provide this information, it would be necessary to contact each prison individually, which could be done only at disproportionate cost.

The loss or theft of official items, including bladed items, mobile phones, chargers and SIM cards is reported under the miscellaneous category on the Prison Service Incident Reporting System. The loss or theft of drugs used for training aids of drugs are recorded under a separate drugs category. Any incident relating to firearms and ammunition, including the loss or theft of items used for training would be held under a separate firearms category.

These incidents are held in a format that cannot readily be interrogated electronically. To provide the information requested would involve the manual inspection of more than 79,000 incident records for the five financial manual inspection of more than 79,000 incident records for the five financial years involved which could be achieved only at disproportionate cost.

### Prisons: Standards

**Priti Patel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many prisoners he estimates are affected by bedding standards in respect of fire retardancy set out in Prison Service Instruction (PSI) 22/2011; and what the cost to the public purse was of complying with the requirements of PSI 22/2011 in the latest year for which figures are available. [55562]

**Mr Blunt:** The fire retardancy standards set out in Prison Service Instruction (PSI) 22/2011 apply to all bedding and furnishings used by prisoners.

PSI 22/2011 has had no impact on the standard or cost of bedding officially issued to prisoners as these items already meet the fire retardancy standards specified.

The main purpose of the PSI is to introduce equivalent standards for bedding and furnishing items purchased by some prisoners using their own funds. Therefore there is no additional cost to the public purse.

#### Public Expenditure

**Mr Nicholas Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice whether his Department plans to cease to fund any of its functions over the period of the comprehensive spending review. [55183]

**Mr Kenneth Clarke:** The Ministry's function is to deliver a justice system that will punish the guilty, protect our liberties and the independence of the judiciary, and reduce the rate of reoffending by offenders. The Ministry will deliver these objectives throughout the period of the spending review.

I have developed plans that will enable the Ministry of Justice to deliver savings across the spending review period while continuing to deliver the Ministry's services. These savings are a combination of administrative efficiencies, front-line efficiencies and policy reforms.

### COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

#### Affordable Housing

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what definition of affordable housing his Department uses. [55202]

**Grant Shapps:** The definition of affordable housing for planning purposes is set out in annex B of planning policy statement 3: Planning for Housing. My Department has recently consulted on a technical change to annex B of planning policy statement 3. The consultation finished on 11 April and we intend to publish the Government response shortly.

#### Affordable Housing: Disability

**Lyn Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (1) how much funding from the public purse he allocated to the HOLD scheme in the last 12 months; [55261]

(2) if he will estimate the number of completions under the HOLD scheme in (a) London and (b) the London borough of Newham in the next 12 months. [55264]

**Grant Shapps:** Home Ownership for people with Long-Term Disabilities (HOLD) helps people whose housing needs cannot be met through the Government's mainstream new build affordable home ownership programme, due to the need to live in a specific location. The scheme enables them to select a property on the open market suitable to their needs, and purchase on shared ownership terms with a housing association.

My Department, through the Homes and Communities Agency, provides capital funding to housing providers to help them buy properties under HOLD. Registered housing providers can bid for funding from the Affordable Homes programme.

In 2010-11, the Homes and Communities Agency provided £5.7 million to registered providers for the HOLD scheme.

HOLD is a demand-led scheme and therefore we have not made an assessment of the number of likely completions in London or the London borough of Newham. As announced in the spending review, we are investing £4.5 billion to deliver 150,000 affordable homes between 2011-12 to 2014-15. This will include support for the provision of shared ownership and the HOLD scheme where this has the support of the local authority.

#### Council Tax Benefits

**Rachel Reeves:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what plans he has for the operation of the localised council tax benefit. [55773]

**Robert Neill:** The Government are committed to retaining council tax support for the most vulnerable in society and will be taking forward plans for councils to develop local rebate schemes. The detail of these plans will be developed following full consultation on the new system for local council tax rebate schemes in England, which will be undertaken in due course, led by my Department.

This reform will create stronger incentives for councils to get people back into work and so support the positive work incentives that will be introduced through the Government's plans on universal credit. Combined with other incentives—such as the New Homes Bonus and our proposals for the local retention of business rates—these changes will give councils a greater stake in the economic future of their local area, so supporting the Government's wider agenda to enable stronger, balanced economic growth across the country.

**Rachel Reeves:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what equality impact assessment he plans to undertake on his proposed changes to council tax benefit. [55774]

**Robert Neill:** In the development of the plans for local rebate schemes in England, the Department will comply fully with the relevant requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and is committed to retaining council tax support for the most vulnerable in society.

#### Departmental Responsibilities

**Mr Nicholas Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether his Department plans to cease to fund any of its functions over the period of the comprehensive spending review. [55192]

**Robert Neill:** In terms of my Department's plans to cease any of its functions, four of the Department's arm's length bodies have already been closed and a programme of reform is in place which will see another 12 either closed or their functions transferred by 2012.

For details on estimated savings costs attached to this I refer the hon. Member to the departmental press notice of 16 March 2011, which can be found at the following link:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/newsroom/1865652>

Most of the functions of the Government offices for the regions have been discontinued: a limited number of residual functions have been transferred to Departments, including this Department.

### Housing: Learning Disability

**Sheila Gilmore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what steps his Department is taking to provide new housing stock for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities; and if he will make a statement. [55294]

**Andrew Stunell:** We are investing £4.5 billion over the next four years to deliver up to 150,000 new affordable homes in England. We are giving housing associations much more flexibility on rents and use of assets, so our aspiration is to deliver as many homes as possible through our investment and reforms.

As part of the Affordable Homes Programme, the Homes and Communities Agency is positively encouraging new supply of supported housing which would include housing for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities. They will focus on ensuring that local authorities are able to shape the Affordable Homes Programme to respond to the housing needs of their communities. Affordable housing for vulnerable people can also be met through a variety of methods including floating support services which provides housing-related support to vulnerable adults to enable them to maintain their independence in their own home.

### Housing: Standards

**Alison Seabeck:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what plans he has to review the operational and enforcement guidance for the housing, health and safety rating system in the light of the recent decision by the Residential Property Service Tribunal in the case of Mr A H Kassim. [54540]

**Andrew Stunell:** There are no plans to review the operational and enforcement guidance for the Housing Health and Safety Rating System in light of the recent decision by the Residential Property Tribunal in the case of Mr A H Kassim.

The Residential Property Tribunal in the case of Mr A H Kassim concluded that there is no requirement under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System guidance that space heating should be affordable.

It is the view of the Department that the relative cost of operating a heating system is relevant to a Housing Health and Safety Rating System assessment. The operating guidance, page 27, sets this out under the heading 'Thermal Efficiency':

The dwelling should be provided with adequate thermal insulation and a suitable and effective means of space heating so that the space can be economically maintained at reasonable temperatures.

Residential Property Tribunal cases are independent of the Department for Communities and Local Government and as the decision was based on the specific circumstances of the case it does not create a binding legal precedent.

### Local Government

**Penny Mordaunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government when he plans to announce the conclusions of his review of statutory duties placed on local government. [55584]

**Robert Neill:** The invitation to respond has now closed and we have received a high volume of responses—over 5,500. The review is as much about ensuring vital duties are retained as it is about removing unnecessary burdens.

The next step will be for the Department to analyse and review the representations. Any future work on whether to remove duties or associated guidance that only serve to create overly bureaucratic burdens on councils will be a separate process, and we will consult further where necessary.

We will continue to keep the House informed of progress.

### Regional Planning and Development

**Jack Dromey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what guidance his Department is providing to private sector organisations on the abolition of regional spatial strategies. [50370]

**Greg Clark:** The Government set out information on the implications of their intention to abolish regional strategies in the Chief Planner's letter of 10 November 2010 to local authorities, and further in a press release issued on 7 February 2011. Both documents are available on the Department's website and private sector organisations can have regard to them. These documents make clear that pending abolition of regional strategies all planning decisions must be made in accordance with the "development plan", including regional strategies, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Government's intention to abolish regional strategies is a material consideration.

### Rented Housing: Private Sector

**Sadiq Khan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what data his Department collects on the activities of unscrupulous landlords in the private rented sector. [55407]

**Andrew Stunell:** The English Housing Survey and the linked Private Landlords Survey both contain extensive data about privately rented housing stock and private landlords. The most recent iterations of both surveys are due to be published in the summer.

**Sadiq Khan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether he has any plans to bring forward legislation to tackle unscrupulous landlords. [55474]

**Andrew Stunell:** The current legislative framework already contains robust measures by which tenants can be protected from landlord abuses. The Government keeps the relevant legislation under constant review but has no plans for any immediate changes.

### Travellers: Caravan Sites

**Priti Patel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government for what reason the Planning Inspectorate held a Gypsy and Traveller workshop in November 2009; who attended the workshop; what matters were discussed at the workshop; and what the outcomes were. [55253]

**Robert Neill:** Under the last Administration as part of a two day event, the Planning Inspectorate held a Gypsy and Traveller appeals workshop on Friday 13 November 2009. The aim of the workshop was to provide an opportunity for dialogue between the principal stakeholders engaged in Gypsy and Traveller appeals, to explore ways in which current appeal practice might be improved, for example, to help the smoother running of appeals, as Gypsy and Traveller casework tends to be more complex and can often result in delays and events overrunning. The workshop also addressed current issues and different perspectives. The discussions specifically did not address individual cases nor current or forthcoming appeals, being restricted to generic matters.

The matters discussed through round table discussions, were Gypsy status and consistency on application and acceptance of Gypsy status; Development Plan Matters; Procedural Matters and Personal Circumstances (eg confidentiality and sensitivity of personal data and educational and health needs).

The workshop was attended by around 50 inspectors and staff from the Planning Inspectorate and representatives from parties involved in appeals, namely a number of planning consultancies: (Anderson Planning and Dev Ltd, Green Planning Solutions, Heine Planning Consultancy, Philip Brown Associates), various legal chambers (Garden Court Chambers, 10 King's Bench Chambers, 2-3 Gray's Inn Square, Radcliffe Chambers, 1 Pump Court Chambers, Francis Taylor Buildings), a number of local authorities (Basildon, Brentwood, Bromley, Central Bedfordshire, Maidstone, Mendip, Sevenoaks, South Gloucestershire, South Somerset, and Wychavon) and DCLG. Participants were invited based on the amount of relevant casework they were involved in.

Since the workshop the Planning Inspectorate has made some minor procedural amendments, for example changes to durations, for gypsy and traveller cases. It has also trialled the use of a pre-inquiry or hearing note in some cases, but this has not been limited to just Gypsy and Traveller casework.

**Priti Patel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many (a) workshops and (b) meetings were held by the Planning Inspectorate with representatives of Gypsy and Traveller groups in each of the last five years; and if he will place in the Library a copy of each document associated with such workshops and meetings. [55254]

**Robert Neill:** The Planning Inspectorate has a record of two events involving representatives of the Gypsy and Traveller community within the last five years. Both took place under the last Administration.

On 12 November 2009, the Planning Inspectorate held a training event for inspectors specialising in Gypsy and Traveller casework. As part of the training, external stakeholders were invited to deliver presentations to the inspectors. These speakers included Siobhan Spencer, from the Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group, who delivered a presentation on Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group, Gypsy culture and planning issues for Gypsy groups and answered questions from inspectors. A copy of this presentation has been placed in the Library of the House.

The Planning Inspectorate's Enforcement Procedural staff also met with Matthew Green of Green Planning Solutions on 24 February 2009 to discuss general planning, programming and procedural matters on cases as well as changes arising from the Planning Act 2008. No notes were made of this meeting.

**Priti Patel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (1) what advice he received in advance of deciding not to proceed with option 2 of the planning for Traveller sites consultation; [55255]

(2) with reference to the publication of his planning for Traveller sites consultation, if he will consider the merits of withdrawing planning circulars 01/2006 and 04/2007 and (a) not replacing them and (b) incorporating policies for Traveller and Gypsy planning into general planning guidance. [55256]

**Robert Neill:** The Government recently published a consultation on their proposed planning policy for Traveller sites.

As Government do routinely with all policy development, we sought advice from officials and lawyers and considered views from a range of parties while writing our new planning policy. As this is a consultation, hon. Members are welcome to submit their views on these issues including the merits or demerits of the various options.

**Priti Patel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what discussions his Department had with (a) the Equalities and Human Rights Commission and (b) representatives from Gypsy and Traveller groups in advance of the publication of the planning for Traveller sites consultation. [55257]

**Robert Neill:** As is routinely the case with all policy development, the Department has had discussions with people with an interest in its policy matters. This has included speaking to a range of representatives of Traveller groups. The Department also has regular meetings with the Equalities and Human Rights Commission on a variety of matters and these have included discussion of Traveller site provision, planning policy and planning enforcement in relation to Traveller sites and poor social outcomes for Travellers.

**Priti Patel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many planning appeals involving Gypsy and Traveller sites have been (a) upheld and (b) refused by the Planning Inspectorate in each of the last five years. [55258]

**Robert Neill:** The total number of planning appeals, the number upheld and dismissed for each of the last five calendar years is detailed as follows.

Calendar year	Total decisions	Allowed	Percentage	Dismissed	Percentage
2006	106	71	67	35	33
2007	131	84	64	47	36
2008	100	52	52	48	48
2009	128	71	55	57	45
2010	84	51	61	32	39

## HEALTH

### Cancer: Drugs

**Esther McVey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent steps he has taken to improve access to drugs subject to National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence funding for cancer patients in the NHS. [55246]

**Mr Simon Burns:** Primary care trusts are legally obliged to fund drugs and treatments recommended in National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence technology appraisal guidance, within three months of guidance being published, unless the requirement is waived in a specific case.

We made an additional £50 million available to strategic health authorities in 2010-11 which has already helped over 2,000 patients to access the cancer drugs their clinicians recommended. In addition, we launched the Cancer Drugs Fund in April 2011, which makes £200 million available per year for the next three years to help thousands more cancer patients access the drugs their clinicians believe will help them.

### Care Homes

**Penny Mordaunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what support and advice his Department gives to people who wish to plan for self-funded care in later life; and if he will make a statement. [55453]

**Paul Burstow:** Local authorities have a duty to provide a needs assessment for everyone who requests one—whether supported by a council or their own funds—and, as part of this process, to sign-post them to the information and advice they need.

The Government recognise that more can be done to help self-funders plan and prepare for the care costs that they may face in later life. We have set up the Commission on Funding of Care and Support and, in its terms of reference, have asked that it provides recommendations on 'how people could choose to protect their assets, especially their homes, against the cost of care'.

We have asked the commission to report in July 2011, and will respond to its recommendations in a White Paper by the end of the year.

## Clostridium Difficile

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients contracted *c. difficile* while in hospital in Havering in the last five years. [55309]

**Mr Simon Burns:** The information is not collected in the format requested.

The figures presented are the 'trust apportioned number' referring to infections that are presumed to be to be acquired in that trust during that visit. Data apportioned to trust are only available from 2007 onwards for *Clostridium difficile* infection episodes.

Cases are trust apportioned if the location of the patient when the specimen was taken was reported as an acute hospital 'in-patient', 'day patient' or 'Emergency assessment patient' and the specimen date was on, or after, the fourth day of the admission where day of admission is equal to day one.

These data only show the number of reported *C. difficile* infections in patients aged two years and over, this does not reflect the number of different patients as one patient may have had more than one episode of infection reported. These data are reported by the acute trust.

*Number of trust apportioned cases of infections caused by C. difficile in patients aged two years and over—Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospitals NHS Trust*

April to March each year	Number
2007-08	143
2008-09	121
2009-10-	81
2010-11 <sup>1</sup>	111

<sup>1</sup> Figure is derived from monthly published data

## Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

**Jason McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to protect the blood supply from variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. [55158]

**Anne Milton:** The following precautionary measures have been implemented to protect the blood supply and products made by fractionating plasma:

From December 1997, blood components, plasma products or tissues obtained from any individual who later develops variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD), have been withdrawn/recalled to prevent their use;

From October 1999, white blood cells (which may carry a risk of transmitting vCJD) have been reduced in all blood used for transfusion, a process known as leucodepletion or leucoreduction;

Following the report of the first possible case of transmission of vCJD by blood transfusion in December 2003, individuals who had themselves received a transfusion of blood components since January 1980 were excluded from donating blood. This took effect from April 2004, and in July 2004, this exclusion criterion for blood donation was extended to include two further groups, who had received transfusions of blood components since 1980:

Previously transfused platelet donors,

Donors who were unsure if they had previously had a blood transfusion. This now applies to donors who have been transfused anywhere in the world;

Since 1999, plasma for the manufacture of fractionated plasma products, such as clotting factors, has been obtained from non-United Kingdom sources;

Since 2004, fresh frozen plasma for treating babies and young children born on or after 1 January 1996 has been obtained from non-UK sources, and from July 2005 its use was extended to all children up to the age of 16; and

Cryoprecipitate, for use in the under-16s, is now produced from imported methylene blue treated-plasma.

All of these measures were recommended or endorsed by the Advisory Committee on the Safety of Blood, Tissues and Organs (which first met in January 2008) or its predecessor committees.

Additionally, considerable effort is being extended to promote appropriate use of blood throughout the national health service, to target blood use to where it is clinically essential, and for bleeding disorder patients (such as haemophiliacs) UK plasma has not been used for the manufacture of clotting factors since 1999 and recombinant clotting factors are now available for all patients for whom they are suitable.

**Jason McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the number of people who are considered to be at risk of contracting variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease; [55157]

(2) what estimate his Department has made of the number of people carrying the infective prions that cause variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease; and what proportion of such people he estimates are registered as blood donors. [55160]

**Anne Milton:** A study published in 2004 of stored appendix and tonsil tissue samples found abnormal prion protein in three appendices out of 12,674 samples. This suggested a population prevalence of about one in 4,000, though with very wide confidence interval of between one in 1,400 and one in 20,000. A further study of over 96,000 tonsils pairs is nearing completion, and a study of 30,000 appendix samples is due to be completed in 2012. Prevalence estimates are kept under active review by the relevant expert scientific advisory committees, who will review all the evidence on the completion of these ongoing studies.

In England about 4.4% of the population are blood donors, and the prevalence of potentially infective blood donors remains unknown. Not all of the individuals in the 2004 published study would be of an age eligible to donate blood, nor is it clear whether presence of abnormal prion protein in tissues such as the appendix or tonsils indicates that the blood of such a donor would transmit variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. All precautionary measures are assessed in the context of the fundamental uncertainties about prevalence.

**Jason McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate his Department has made of the number of people diagnosed with variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. [55159]

**Anne Milton:** Since 1995 175 patients have been identified with definite or probable variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD) in the United Kingdom.

The National Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease Research and Surveillance Unit publishes monthly figures on all cases of human prion disease, including vCJD, on the website at:

[www.cjd.ed.ac.uk/](http://www.cjd.ed.ac.uk/)

## Dental Services

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists' surgeries he has visited in an official capacity in the last 12 months. [55229]

**Mr Simon Burns:** In the last 12 months my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health (Mr Lansley) has visited one community dental service in an official capacity. My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Earl Howe) leads on dentistry within the ministerial team and has visited two dental practices in the last 12 months, one in Worcester and one in London. He has also visited dentists providing oral health promotion services for children provided in a children's centre in Preston.

## Departmental Pensions

**Steve Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of his Department's budget he expects to be spent on staff pensions in each of the next five years. [54565]

**Mr Simon Burns:** In 2010-11, the Department spent approximately 16% of total staff costs on employers' superannuation contributions. This proportion is unlikely to change much in 2011-12 but it is difficult to make forecasts beyond that timeframe as the Government are considering their response to the review of public sector pensions provision, recently carried out by the Independent Public Service Pensions Commission chaired by Lord Hutton.

## Disability: Advocacy

**Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps he is taking to ensure that local advocacy services meet the needs of people with profound and multiple learning disabilities; and if he will make a statement; [55141]

(2) what steps he is taking to (a) monitor and (b) assess the quality of local advocacy services for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities; and if he will make a statement; [55142]

(3) what steps he is taking to develop skills and training of advocates for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities; and if he will make a statement; [55143]

(4) what steps he is taking to assess the local advocacy needs of people with profound and multiple learning disabilities; and if he will make a statement; [55144]

(5) what steps he is taking to ensure that advocacy services for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities are included in individual packages of care; and if he will make a statement; [55145]

(6) what steps he is taking to ensure that the interests of people with profound and multiple learning disabilities are safeguarded via the provision of local advocacy services; and if he will make a statement; [55146]

(7) what steps he is taking to assist local authorities in providing people with profound and multiple learning disabilities with high quality local advocacy services; and if he will make a statement; [55147]

(8) how much was spent from the public purse on the provision of advocacy services for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities in each year since 2000; and if he will make a statement. [55148]

**Paul Burstow:** It is up to local authorities to decide how much advocacy they commission for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities, who they commission it from and how they make it available to their local populations. The role of the Department is to provide the framework for services—to be clear about social care law and about social care policy. Therefore, we are considering the report of the Law Commission and looking to modernise the legal framework in which social care is provided.

It is for local authorities and national health service commissioning staff to ensure that advocacy services meet the needs of people with profound and multiple learning disabilities through their commissioning arrangements. They also monitor and assess the quality of advocacy and local needs and make decisions about deployment of services.

Subject to the passage of the Health and Social Care Bill, local authorities and general practitioner commissioning consortia will be required to prepare a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). This is to ensure that each area develops a comprehensive analysis of the current and future needs of their area (including those relevant to health, social care and public health). Based on the JSNA, the members of the Health and Wellbeing Board will be required to develop a joint health and well-being strategy for their area.

In its 'Vision for Adult Social Care, Capable Communities and Active Citizens', the Government say that

"councils should focus on improving the range, quality and accessibility of information, advice and advocacy available for all people in their communities—regardless of how their care is paid for—to support their social care choices".

Additionally, the Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy (IMCA) Service was created under the Mental Capacity Act (MCA) 2005. The MCA introduced a new duty to instruct advocates in certain conditions for people who lack the capacity to make decisions for themselves. The Department has funded this service by making £6 million available to local authorities to commission local services to provide the IMCA role. Nearly 10,000 people benefited from this last year and the Department published an annual report on the IMCA service in November 2010.

The Department has worked with the advocacy sector to develop a national qualification in advocacy, which is available to the sector and to commissioners. The national advocacy qualification has been part of the professionalising of advocacy and ensures that advocates are appropriately trained. The Department has also funded a 'Quality Mark' system, administered by Action for Advocacy, which enable advocacy organisations to demonstrate their services are of high quality.

The Department does not collect local information on advocacy provision and its costs.

### Disability: Housing

**Sheila Gilmore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment his Department has made of the specific housing needs of people with profound

and multiple learning disabilities; and if he will make a statement; [55292]

(2) what representations his Department has received on improvements to the quality and provision of housing for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities; and if he will make a statement. [55293]

**Paul Burstow:** Valuing People Now (2009) said that independent supported living can be enjoyed by people with profound and multiple learning disabilities because the support is tailored to their particular requirements based on an assessment of individual needs and choices. Different types of housing and support, including home ownership and assured tenancies have to be matched and coordinated with a package of care specifically designed to support the particular individual in the home of their choice.

Professor Jim Mansell's report, 'Raising our Sights', published in March 2010 identified a need for adequate housing for adults with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities. The Government's response to Professor Mansell's report recognised that there is a continuing need for new affordable housing, including supported housing. The needs and aspirations of those with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities should be considered in the provision of general housing needs, as well as in specialist provision. We expect housing associations and local authorities to work closely to identify the type of provision that will most appropriately meet the locally identified needs. They will also have the best understanding of how any new provision will fit with, and complement, existing services and supported housing locally.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will be issuing a consultation paper on the payment of housing costs for people living in supported and sheltered housing classified as exempt accommodation. DWP intend to publish this shortly.

### Preventable Diseases: South Asian Communities

**Keith Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps he is taking to tackle preventable diseases in South Asian communities; [55305]

(2) what steps he is taking to provide information on diabetes to South Asian communities. [55306]

**Paul Burstow:** In the public health White Paper, "Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Our strategy for public health in England", we announced radical reforms to how public health is managed in future. From April 2013, local authorities will be given responsibility, backed by a ring-fenced public health grant, and new freedoms, to make a major impact on improving people's health and tackling health inequalities in every community.

We remain fully committed to the NHS Health Check programme, which is aimed at everyone in England between the ages of 40-74. It is a risk assessment and risk management programme, which assesses people's risk of heart disease, stroke, kidney disease and diabetes and supports people to reduce or manage that risk through individually tailored advice. In rolling out this programme, some primary care trusts targeted high-risk groups first such as South Asian populations who are at particularly high risk of diabetes.

The recently published National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence guidance, "Preventing type 2 diabetes: population and community-level interventions in high-risk groups and the general population", makes recommendations for the provision of culturally appropriate messages about preventing Type 2 diabetes. The guidance underlines the action that we are already taking to improve public health and reduce the risk of people developing Type 2 diabetes. It is for the national health service at a local level to determine the needs of their local population and to allocate resources appropriately to meet these needs.

To raise awareness of the importance of maintaining a healthy weight, the Government developed a national movement called "Change4life" to help parents make healthier food choices for their children and encourage more activity.

### GP Surgeries

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GP surgeries he has visited in an official capacity in the last 12 months. [55230]

**Mr Simon Burns:** In the last 12 months my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health (Mr Lansley) visited eight general practitioner practices in an official capacity.

### Health Centres: Greater London

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many (a) nurses and (b) allied health professionals work in GP clinics in each London borough. [55224]

**Mr Simon Burns:** Information is not collected in the format requested.

The following table provides a headcount of general practitioner (GP) practice nurses and direct patient care staff in each primary care trust (PCT) area as at 30 September 2010.

GP practice nurses and direct patient care staff headcount in selected region, as at 30 September 2010

		GP practice nurse	Headcount Direct patient care
Q36	London strategic health authority	2,930	1,244
5A4	Havering PCT	67	22
5A5	Kingston PCT	109	10
5A7	Bromley PCT	126	44
5A8	Greenwich Teaching PCT	121	44
5A9	Barnet PCT	124	53
5AT	Hillingdon PCT	104	37
5C1	Enfield PCT	96	19
5C2	Barking and Dagenham PCT	77	16
5C3	City and Hackney Teaching PCT	72	70
5C4	Tower Hamlets PCT	76	34
5C5	Newham PCT	115	20
5C9	Haringey Teaching PCT	89	0
5H1	Hammersmith and Fulham PCT	47	36
5HX	Ealing PCT	135	71

GP practice nurses and direct patient care staff headcount in selected region, as at 30 September 2010

		GP practice nurse	Headcount Direct patient care
5HY	Hounslow PCT	90	59
5K5	Brent Teaching PCT	103	54
5K6	Harrow PCT	93	20
5K7	Camden PCT	39	57
5K8	Islington PCT	61	32
5K9	Croydon PCT	154	51
5LA	Kensington and Chelsea PCT	54	16
5LC	Westminster PCT	71	58
5LD	Lambeth PCT	136	97
5LE	Southwark PCT	76	82
5LF	Lewisham PCT	182	16
5LG	Wandsworth PCT	108	57
5M6	Richmond and Twickenham PCT	58	34
5M7	Sutton and Merton PCT	128	74
5NA	Redbridge PCT	85	19
5NC	Waltham Forest PCT	99	28
TAK	Bexley Care Trust	35	14

#### Notes:

1. Data is not available for London boroughs. PCT boundaries correspond exactly to London boroughs.

2. In the 2010 GP practice census, headcount figures on direct patient care were reported for the first time. Direct patient care contains all qualified staff excluding general practitioners and practice nurses. Similarly to the staff group 'Allied Health Professionals' on the non-medical census, staff in the direct patient care category contain those such as physiotherapists, speech therapists, chiropodists etc.

3. Figures are for staff working in GP practices in London SHA.

#### 4. Data Quality:

The NHS Information Centre for health and social care seeks to minimise inaccuracies and the effect of missing and invalid data, but responsibility for data accuracy lies with the organisations providing the data. Methods are continually being updated to improve data quality where changes impact on figures already published. This is assessed, but unless it is significant at national level, figures are not changed. Impact at detailed or local level is footnoted in relevant analyses.

#### Source:

The NHS Information Centre for health and social care General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.

### Health Centres: Greater London

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GPs practise in each London borough. [55225]

**Mr Simon Burns:** Information is not collected in the format requested.

The following table provides a headcount of general practitioners (GPs) in each primary care trust area as at 30 September 2010.

GPs (excluding retainers and registrars) in selected region as at 30 September 2010

		Headcount
Q36	London Strategic Health Authority	5,340
5A4	Havering PCT	130
5A5	Kingston PCT	119
5A7	Bromley PCT	215
5A8	Greenwich Teaching PCT	157
5A9	Barnet PCT	226
5AT	Hillingdon PCT	149
5C1	Enfield PCT	192
5C2	Barking and Dagenham PCT	110
5C3	City And Hackney Teaching PCT	200

GPs (excluding retainers and registrars) in selected region as at 30 September 2010

	Headcount	
5C4	Tower Hamlets PCT	198
5C5	Newham PCT	196
5C9	Haringey Teaching PCT	179
5H1	Hammersmith And Fulham PCT	128
5HX	Ealing PCT	213
5HY	Hounslow PCT	141
5K5	Brent Teaching PCT	207
5K6	Harrow PCT	152
5K7	Camden PCT	182
5K8	Islington PCT	152
5K9	Croydon PCT	224
5LA	Kensington And Chelsea PCT	108
5LC	Westminster PCT	146
5LD	Lambeth PCT	266
5LE	Southwark PCT	197
5LF	Lewisham PCT	194
5LG	Wandsworth PCT	252
5M6	Richmond And Twickenham PCT	121
5M7	Sutton and Merton PCT	256
5NA	Redbridge PCT	136
5NC	Waltham Forest PCT	157
TAK	Bexley Care Trust	118

**Notes:**

1. Data not available for London boroughs. PCT boundaries correspond exactly to London boroughs.

2. The new headcount methodology for 2010 data is not fully comparable with previous years' data due to improvements that make it a more stringent count of absolute staff numbers. Further information on the headcount methodology is available in the Census publication here:

[www.ic.nhs.uk/webfiles/publications/010\\_Workforce/nhsstaff0010/Census\\_Bulletin\\_March\\_2011\\_Final.pdf](http://www.ic.nhs.uk/webfiles/publications/010_Workforce/nhsstaff0010/Census_Bulletin_March_2011_Final.pdf)

3. Headcount totals are unlikely to equal the sum of components.

**4. Data Quality:**

The NHS Information Centre for health and social care seeks to minimise inaccuracies and the effect of missing and invalid data but responsibility for data accuracy lies with the organisations providing the data. Methods are continually being updated to improve data quality where changes impact on figures already published. This is assessed but unless it is significant at national level figures are not changed. Impact at detailed or local level is footnoted in relevant analyses.

**Source:**

The NHS Information Centre for health and social care General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

### Hospitals: Infectious Diseases

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients contracted MRSA while in hospitals in Havering in the last five years. [55310]

**Mr Simon Burns:** The information is not collected in the format requested.

The figures presented are the "trust apportioned number" referring to infections that are presumed to be acquired in that trust during that visit. Data apportioned to trust is only available from 2008 onwards for methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) bacteraemia episodes.

Cases are trust apportioned if the location of the patient when the specimen was taken was reported as an acute hospital "in-patient", "day patient" or "emergency assessment patient" and the specimen date was on, or after, the third day of the admission where day of admission is equal to day 1.

These data only show the number of reported MRSA bloodstream infections, this does not reflect the number of different patients as one patient may have had more than one episode of infection reported.

These data are only available by financial year.

Trust apportioned cases of bloodstream infections caused by MRSA—Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospitals NHS Trust, April to March each year

	Number
2008-09	20
2009-10	19
2010-11 <sup>1</sup>	15

<sup>1</sup> Figure is derived from monthly published data.

### Hospitals: Manpower

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS (a) doctors, (b) nurses, (c) paramedics and (d) dentists have been injured on duty by a patient in the last five years. [55210]

**Mr Simon Burns:** The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Information on the number of reported physical assaults against national health service staff is contained in tables as follows:

'Tables showing number of reported physical assaults on NHS staff from 2004-05 to 2007-08, broken down by NHS trust/PCT'

'Tables showing number of reported physical assaults on NHS staff in 2009-10, broken down by NHS trust/PCT'

'Tables showing number of reported physical assaults on NHS staff in 2008-09, broken down by NHS trust/PCT'

The above tables have been placed in the Library.

The tables show the number of reported physical assaults, but do not specify professional categories, whether an injury was sustained, or whether the member of staff was on duty when the assault took place.

### Hospitals: Parking

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pieces of correspondence his Department received (a) in favour of and (b) against removing hospital car parking charges in England in the latest period for which figures are available. [55218]

**Mr Simon Burns:** On 16 September 2010, the Department published their response to the consultation carried out by the previous Government on national health service car parking charges. The response made clear that such charges are a matter for local decisions based on local circumstances but that patients have a fundamental right to fair and appropriate car parking concessions, where needed, and hospital trusts are expected to deliver them.

Since 6 May 2010, according to the Department's central correspondence system, the Department has received 364 items about hospital car parking charges. Of those, 338 expressed concern about one or more aspects of how the NHS charged for car parking.

### Hospitals: Security

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether his Department has plans to increase security in hospitals; [55208]

(2) what recent discussions he has had on security in hospitals. [55209]

**Mr Simon Burns:** Adequate levels of security provision are for national health service bodies to establish on a local basis, according to assessment of the security risks they face.

NHS Protect has national responsibility for leading work to protect NHS staff and resources from crime and provides advice and guidance to NHS bodies on assessing security risks and taking effective action. This includes support provided regionally by Area Security Management Specialists.

All NHS bodies are required to nominate an executive director with overall responsibility for security management and a non-executive director to support this work at board level. All NHS bodies must also nominate a Local Security Management Specialist to take forward security management work locally.

### Hospitals: Visits

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals he has visited in an official capacity in the last year. [55334]

**Mr Simon Burns:** In the last 12 months my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health (Mr Lansley) visited 33 hospitals in an official capacity.

### John Radcliffe Hospital: Blood Transfusions

**Frank Dobson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the development of the electronic blood transfusion system at the John Radcliffe Hospital was first initiated. [55502]

**Anne Milton:** The information requested is not held centrally. The right hon. Member may wish to approach the trust directly to retrieve the information required.

### Liverpool Primary Care Trust: Advertising

**Rosie Cooper:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much has been spent on (a) advertising promotions and (b) promotions by Liverpool Primary Care Trust in each of the last five years; [55778]

(2) what the cost to the NHS was of advertising by Liverpool Primary Care Trust (a) in the Liverpool Echo and (b) on radio related to (i) NHS Healthcheck, (ii) cancer symptoms and (iii) dentistry in the latest period for which figures are available. [55777]

**Mr Simon Burns:** It is for each primary care trust to determine how best to spend their allocated funding in the best interests of their local populations.

### Medical Equipment

**Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what clinical studies are required in respect of new high risk implantable devices to be used in surgery; and if he will make a statement; [55903]

(2) what evidence of quality and reliability is required before new hip joints, stents and pacemakers are used in surgical procedures in the NHS. [55904]

**Mr Simon Burns:** Before a medical device can be placed on the market the manufacturer has to show that he has met the safety, quality and performance requirements laid down in the EC medical devices directives. This will include having clinical data to support any claims made for the device. For high risk devices, such as hip joints, stents and pacemakers, the clinical data is assessed by an independent conformity assessment organisation, known as a notified body, designated by the competent authority of the member state where they are located. On the basis of the notified body's conformity assessment the manufacturer can affix the CE marking (denoting compliance with the directive requirements) on the device.

Since March 2010, when the 2007 revision of the EC medical devices directive came fully into force, manufacturers of high risk devices have to justify, to the notified body, not conducting a specific clinical trial of their product to obtain the clinical data. Where this is because the manufacturer is relying on data relating to a similar device, the manufacturer has to demonstrate equivalency between the devices and thus the relevance and appropriateness of the data used.

### Ophthalmology

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many opticians' premises he has visited in an official capacity in the last 12 months. [55228]

**Mr Simon Burns:** In the last 12 months the Secretary of State for Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr Lansley), has not visited any opticians premises in an official capacity.

### Public Expenditure

**Mr Nicholas Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department plans to cease to fund any of its functions over the period of the comprehensive spending review. [55185]

**Mr Simon Burns:** The Department has not ceased to fund any of its functions since the beginning of the current spending round, as the functions of the Department have not changed. The Department continues, for example, to fulfil its Department of State functions of accountability to the public and Parliament; to provide strategic oversight of health and social care policy; and to be accountable for the funding of the national health service.

Subject to the passage of the Health and Care Bill, the Department's functions will change as a result of the modernisation process. We will be reviewing the Department's operating model to determine which functions the Department should continue to fulfil, and which should be moved. It is therefore likely that some functions will be transferred to other organisations and the Department will take on some new ones. The exact timing and nature of these changes will not be confirmed until the outcome of the listening exercise is known.

### Ritalin

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been prescribed Ritalin in England in each of the last five years. [55214]

**Mr Simon Burns:** Information on the number of people prescribed a medicine is not collected. The following table shows the number of prescription items dispensed for methylphenidate hydrochloride, of which Ritalin is a brand.

*Number of methylphenidate hydrochloride prescription items written in the United Kingdom and dispensed in the community in England, 2006-2010*

	<i>Methylphenidate Hydrochloride (thousand)</i>	<i>Of which Ritalin (thousand)</i>
2006	456.9	26.5
2007	535.3	25.5
2008	573.4	22.8
2009	610.2	20.2
2010	661.5	18.8

Source:  
Prescription Cost Analysis system

### Seasonal Affective Disorder

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received on seasonal affective disorder and the NHS. [55211]

**Paul Burstow:** We are not aware of any recent representations.

### Smoking

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the predominant determinants of smoking initiation. [55077]

**Anne Milton:** There is a growing body of published, peer reviewed research evidence on the determinants of smoking initiation. The Department monitors all relevant evidence in this area because of the crucial need to reduce the take up of smoking by children.

The recently published Tobacco Control Plan for England includes references to some of this evidence such as Gervais, A. et al. (2006). "Milestones in the natural course of cigarette use among adolescents" in *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 175(3).

A copy of the plan has already been placed in the Library.

### Surgery: Private Sector

**Frank Dobson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations on NHS patients were carried out by private sector organisations in each year since 2000. [55665]

**Mr Simon Burns:** The information requested is in the following table.

*A count of finished consultant episodes<sup>1</sup> where a main operative procedure or intervention<sup>2</sup> was performed at independent sector providers; 2000-01 to 2009-10<sup>3</sup>*

	<i>FCEs with an operative procedure</i>	
	<i>Carried out by independent sector providers</i>	<i>Carried out by all organisations (including independent sector providers)</i>
2000-01	11	6,509,425
2001-02	11	6,435,022
2002-03	438	6,612,582
2003-04	4,936	6,772,074

*A count of finished consultant episodes<sup>1</sup> where a main operative procedure or intervention<sup>2</sup> was performed at independent sector providers; 2000-01 to 2009-10<sup>3</sup>*

	<i>FCEs with an operative procedure</i>	
	<i>Carried out by independent sector providers</i>	<i>Carried out by all organisations (including independent sector providers)</i>
2004-05	13,109	6,847,589
2005-06	16,051	7,215,286
2006-07	61,125	7,888,074
2007-08	87,027	8,606,493
2008-09	159,249	9,274,423
2009-10	208,693	9,747,584

<sup>1</sup> Finished Consultant Episode (FCE)

A finished consultant episode (FCE) is a continuous period of admitted patient care under one consultant within one healthcare provider. FCEs are counted against the year in which they end. Figures do not represent the number of different patients, as a person may have more than one episode of care within the same stay in hospital or in different stays in the same year.

<sup>2</sup> Main procedure or intervention

The first recorded procedure or intervention in each episode, usually the most resource intensive procedure or intervention performed during the episode. It is appropriate to use main procedure when looking at admission details, (eg time waited), but a more complete count of episodes with a particular procedure is obtained by looking at the main and the secondary procedures.

<sup>3</sup> Assessing growth through time

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) figures are available from 1989-90 onwards. Changes to the figures over time need to be interpreted in the context of improvements in data quality and coverage (particularly in earlier years), improvements in coverage of independent sector activity (particularly from 2006-07) and changes in national health service practice. For example, apparent reductions in activity may be due to a number of procedures which may now be undertaken in out-patient settings and so no longer include in admitted patient HES data.

Note:

Data quality

HES are compiled from data sent by more than 300 NHS trusts and primary care trusts in England and from some independent sector organisations for activity commissioned by the English NHS. The NHS Information Centre for health and social care liaises closely with these organisations to encourage submission of complete and valid data and seeks to minimise inaccuracies. While this brings about improvement over time, some shortcomings remain.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), The NHS Information Centre for health and social care.

### Tobacco

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) pursuant to the written ministerial statement of 9 March 2011, *Official Report*, columns 66-68WS, on the Tobacco Control Plan (England), what evidence his Department has examined on the targeting of tobacco promotion on young people; [55154]

(2) with reference to his Department's publication "Healthy Lives, Healthy People: a tobacco control plan for England", what evidence his Department has examined to support the view that tobacco companies are seen to promote tobacco products through entertainment media. [55201]

**Anne Milton:** We have published six pages of Resources for Comprehensive Tobacco Control as an appendix to the Tobacco Control plan for England. This appendix includes links to the growing body of evidence of the targeting of tobacco promotion to young people and the promotion of tobacco products through entertainment media. Amongst the resources are:

"Preventing the uptake of smoking by children and young people" (NICE public health guidance 14) and "School based interventions to prevent smoking" (NICE public health guidance 23).

A copy of the plan has already been placed in the Library.

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with representatives from the tobacco industry in the last 12 months. [55216]

**Anne Milton:** We have had no discussions with the tobacco industry. We take very seriously the United Kingdom's obligations as a party to the World Health Organisation's framework convention on tobacco control (FCTC). The FCTC places obligations on parties to protect the development of public health policy from the vested interests of the tobacco industry. We have made our commitment on this very clear in chapter 10 of the Tobacco Control Plan for England.

A copy of the plan has already been placed in the Library.

### Tobacco: Regulations

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether he plans to make available the conclusions of the proposed consultation on plain packaging of tobacco products before the entry into force of regulations on the display of tobacco products; [55177]

(2) if he will commission an independent report on the effects of plain packaging of tobacco products in Australia before implementation of any such requirements in England. [55178]

**Anne Milton:** The Government have committed to consult on options to reduce the promotional impact of tobacco packaging, including plain packaging, before the end of 2011. A report on the consultation exercise will be published, including confirmation of the proposed way forward, following the consultation. The timing of publication of this report is unrelated to the commencement of the legislation ending displays of tobacco products in shops in England.

The Department's approach to plain packaging will be set out in the consultation document, including consideration of the available evidence about whether plain packaging would have an additional public health benefit.

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to include a sunset clause in any amended regulations on the display of tobacco products in retail premises; [55179]

(2) whether he plans to submit for scrutiny amended draft regulations on the display of tobacco products to (a) the Regulatory Policy Committee and (b) the Reducing Regulation Committee. [55203]

**Anne Milton:** As with all new legislation that impacts on business, amended regulations on the display of tobacco products are subject to the Government's regulatory framework. This includes consideration by the Reducing Regulation Committee, as advised by the Regulatory Policy Committee, and consideration of the Government's policy on sunseting.

## WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

### Directors: Females

**David Mowat:** To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities when she plans to respond to Lord Davies' recommendations on increasing the numbers of female directors; and if she will make a statement. [55822]

**Lynne Featherstone:** We strongly welcomed Lord Davies' report and his recommendations for a business-led strategy to improve the gender diversity of corporate boards. We do not plan to issue a formal response.

We are working with key stakeholders, including chair persons of companies, company secretaries, academics and business representative organisations to encourage companies to adopt the measures set out by Lord Davies, including publishing aspirational targets for the number of women on their boards in 2013 and 2015.

## DEFENCE

### Security Situation: Pakistan and Afghanistan

6. **Mr Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions on security and defence issues he has had with his counterparts in the US Administration, Pakistan and Afghanistan following the death of Osama bin Laden. [55360]

**Dr Fox:** I regularly discuss a number of security and defence issues with my counterparts in the US, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The death of Osama bin Laden is a positive development in terms of our counter-terrorism effort but does not change our strategy in Afghanistan. We remain committed to our military, diplomatic and development work to build a stable and secure Afghanistan.

### Strategic Defence and Security Review

18. **Mr Iain Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment he has made of the future capacity of the armed forces following the decisions made in the strategic defence and security review. [55372]

**Dr Fox:** As they are showing every day in Afghanistan, in Libya and in other operations as tasks around the world, our armed forces remain highly capable and flexible, able to carry out a wide range of operations at some distance from the UK. This will continue as we progress towards Future Force 2020.

### Defence Equipment: Afghanistan

20. **Mr Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the equipment available to the armed forces in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [55374]

**Peter Luff:** The delivery of capability to our armed forces in Afghanistan is our top priority and equipment requirements are kept under constant review. As we have made clear on many occasions, this Government are determined to make sure that our service personnel have all the equipment and protection they need for the vital work they are undertaking in Afghanistan and that is exactly what we are doing.

### Defence Exports

21. **Eric Ollerenshaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to increase UK defence exports. [55375]

**Mr Gerald Howarth:** As I reported to the House during questions on 31 January 2011, we are supporting defence exports through an active and innovative cross-Government defence diplomacy initiative, working closely with the UKTI Defence and Security Organisation. Exports help to build and enhance relations with allies, to support UK defence industry, and to reduce the cost of equipment for Britain's armed forces. They are also an essential element of the Government's export-led growth strategy.

Ministers and officials from across Government, including the Prime Minister, continue actively to promote British defence exports overseas.

### Operation Ellamy

22. **Mr Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of the commitment to Operation Ellamy; and if he will make a statement. [55376]

**Dr Fox:** The UK remains committed to Operation Ellamy and the ongoing mission in support of UN Security Council resolution 1973. We are clear—we will end military action when the regime obeys international law and UN Security Council resolutions and lifts the threat to the Libyan people.

### Franco-British Co-operation

23. **Stephen Gilbert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in developing a work programme for increased Franco-British co-operation on the acquisition of (a) submarine technologies and (b) unmanned aerial systems. [55377]

**Peter Luff:** We have made significant progress in these areas of Franco-British co-operation. We have, with our French colleagues, identified a number of potential areas for co-operation around submarine enterprise management and some specific equipments and technologies. Detailed proposals will be put to national authorities for consideration, taking into account extant international agreements and obligations. We are also taking forward joint work on some of the equipment and technologies on unmanned aerial systems, along with the other strands of co-operative work which we announced following the summit in November 2010.

### Technical Training

24. **Alun Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of defence technical training; and if he will make a statement. [55378]

**Nick Harvey:** The future location or locations of Defence Technical Training are currently being considered as part of the Defence Technical Training Change

Programme. This process is subject to full internal scrutiny and a final decision is expected before the end of this year.

### Afghanistan: Peacekeeping Operations

**Mr Sanders:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British-based private security companies were employed in operations in Afghanistan in the latest period for which information is available; and what regulations govern the conduct and use of such companies by commissioners other than the British Government. [53867]

**Dr Fox:** The British Government specifically the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, currently have three contracts with British-based private security companies in Afghanistan.

An international code of conduct for private security companies was signed in November 2010. Over 90 companies, many British-based, have signed up to observe this voluntary code. Signatory companies commit themselves to:

“responsible provision of security services so as to support the rule of law, respect human rights of all persons, and protect the interests of their clients.”

The Government are now working with others to establish an international mechanism to monitor compliance with the code.

### RFA Largs Bay

**Caroline Dinenge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of RFA Largs Bay. [55204]

**Peter Luff:** Following a competition to market RFA Largs Bay for continued military use, the Australian Government have been selected as the preferred bidder to buy the ship. Detailed discussions are now taking place with the Australian Department of Defence to complete the sale.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Departmental Correspondence

**Sir Gerald Kaufman:** To ask the Prime Minister (1) for what reason letters are sent from his office to hon. Members giving information which cannot be true; [55783]

(2) what responsibility he takes for replies sent to letters from hon. Members from his Office purportedly signed by individuals who do not exist. [55784]

**The Prime Minister:** Correspondence was handled under arrangements put in place in 2005 when on security advice, following an incident in which a member of staff was personally targeted and threatened, members of staff were advised not to use their names. After review this approach will no longer be used.

### Ministers

**Ian Lucas:** To ask the Prime Minister on which occasions he has met the First Minister of (a) Wales, (b) Scotland and (c) Northern Ireland since his appointment. [50852]

**The Prime Minister:** I met the First Ministers of Wales, Scotland and the First and deputy First Ministers of Northern Ireland at Downing street on 8 June 2010. I also met the First Minister for Wales on 17 May 2010, the First Minister for Scotland on 14 May 2010 and 14 February 2011, and the First and deputy First Ministers for Northern Ireland on 20 May 2010. I, and Secretaries of State, are in regular communication with them. Following the 5 May elections I have spoken to the First Ministers of Wales and Scotland, and the First and deputy First Ministers of Northern Ireland.

### Prime Minister: Meetings

**Mr Amess:** To ask the Prime Minister what matters were discussed during his meeting with the Prime Minister of Israel; who attended the meeting; what the duration of the meeting was; and if he will make a statement. [55251]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made by a No.10 spokesperson after my meeting with the Prime Minister of Israel. A copy of the statement can be found on the No. 10 website at:

<http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/latest-news/2011/05/pm-welcomes-prime-minister-netanyahu-to-number-10-2-63463>

## TREASURY

### Business: Government Assistance

**Chi Onwurah:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to receive state aid approval from the European Commission for the proposed changes announced in the 2011 Budget to (a) research and development tax credits for small and medium-sized enterprises, (b) the Enterprise Investment Scheme and Venture Capital Trusts and (c) the climate change levy. [55707]

**Justine Greening:** The Government have submitted notifications to the European Commission regarding the changes proposed in the 2011 Budget to the research and development tax credits for small and medium-sized enterprises, the Enterprise Investment Scheme, Venture Capital Trusts and the climate change levy.

The Government expect to receive a response from the Commission in due course.

### Credit Unions

**Andrew Stephenson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he (a) has taken and (b) plans to take to support credit unions. [55572]

**Mr Hoban:** The Government are bringing forward detailed proposals to foster diversity, promote mutuals and create a more competitive banking industry.

On 12 April, the Treasury made the Mutual Societies (Electronic Communications) Order 2011. This allows credit unions and other mutuals to communicate with their members electronically.

On 3 March, the Department for Work and Pensions announced a £73 million Modernisation Fund to help credit unions expand their services.

The Legislative Reform (Industrial and Provident Societies and Credit Unions) Order 2011 will be re-laid before Parliament in due course and will present new opportunities for credit unions to develop their services and expand their membership.

The Government will then bring forward proposals to commence sections of the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies and Credit Unions Act 2010.

### EU Budget

**Mr Carswell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the potential change to (a) the EU budget and (b) UK contributions to the EU budget arising from any sovereign defaults on loan payments by Greece. [55180]

**Justine Greening:** There are no contributions to the May 2010 international financial assistance package for Greece from the EU budget or from the European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism, which is backed by the EU budget.

### Financial Institutions: Redundancy

**Richard Fuller:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been paid in redundancy or other severance compensation to each senior executive and director of a UK financial institution that has received financial support from the public purse since July 2007. [55496]

**Mr Hoban:** The terms and provisions of the remuneration contracts in place for individuals who were employed at Lloyds Banking Group, HBOS, the Royal Bank of Scotland and Northern Rock are a matter for the individuals and the banks' management.

Quoted companies are required to produce a directors' remuneration report containing information on the remuneration paid to their directors.

### Income Tax

**Mr Timpson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of people resident in Crewe and Nantwich constituency who will no longer pay income tax consequent on the proposed increase in the personal allowance from April 2011. [55565]

**Mr Gauke:** The June 2010 Budget announced a £1,000 cash increase in the personal allowance for under 65s to £7,475 in 2011-12 (£820 above the previous Government's plans), with the benefits focused on individuals on low and middle incomes through accompanying changes to the basic rate limit and national insurance upper earnings and profit limits.

As a result of these measures, the Government estimate that 830,000 of the lowest income taxpayers will be removed from income tax altogether, of which 100,000 are in the north-west and Merseyside region.

These estimates are based on the 2007-08 Survey of Personal Incomes, projected using economic assumptions consistent with the Office for Budget Responsibility's March 2011 economic and fiscal outlook.

Reliable estimates are not available at the parliamentary constituency level, due to greater uncertainties in projections for small geographical areas and small sample sizes.

#### **Libya: Public Expenditure**

**Caroline Lucas:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the size is of the Treasury reserve he plans to provide for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1973. [54986]

**Danny Alexander** [*holding answer 10 May 2011*]: The Treasury continues to work closely with the MoD to review expenditure associated with the UK commitment to UN Security Council Resolution 1973. Given the nature of the military operations, the additional costs are not fixed and will continue to be met from the Reserve. Current estimates of likely expenditure are within the range described by the Chancellor in the House on 22 March 2011, *Official Report*, column 850.

#### **Loans: Portugal**

**Jonathan Evans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the potential effects of the EU financial rescue package for Portugal on the (a) integrity of the eurozone and (b) UK economy. [54835]

**Mr Hoban:** A strong and stable euro area is in the UK national interest—more than 40% of the UK's exports are to the euro area. Further, we must also be alive to the risks that the current uncertainty poses, because of financial sector linkages, well beyond the euro area. Treasury officials closely monitor developments in Portugal and the rest of the euro area, as with all major economies, as part of the normal policy development process.

#### **National Insurance Fund**

**Mr Reed:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the surplus of the National Insurance Fund was in each of the last five years; and what proportion of receipts of the National Insurance Fund was allocated to funding the mandatory state pension in each of the last five years. [55283]

**Mr Gauke:** The information requested is available in the published Great Britain National Insurance Fund Accounts and the Northern Ireland National Insurance Fund Accounts, 2006-07 to 2009-10, copies of which are in the House Library.

#### **Smuggling: Northern Ireland**

**Mr Donaldson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when HM Revenue and Customs plans to complete its review of the use of vehicle stop and search powers in Northern Ireland. [55768]

**Mr Gauke:** HM Revenue and Customs hope to complete the review by 30 June 2011.

#### **Social Security Benefits: EU Nationals**

**Martin Vickers:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate his Department has made of the cost to the Exchequer of social security payment transfers to be made under the provisions of EU Regulation 883/2004 in 2011-12. [54866]

**Chris Grayling:** I have been asked to reply.

There are two elements to the payments, social security benefits and healthcare claims.

*Social security benefit expenditure.*

Under the EU rules that coordinate the social security rights of persons who move within the EEA and Switzerland, some benefits acquired in one member state must be paid to people who live outside that state but within the EEA or Switzerland. Generally the benefits are acquired because someone is, or has been, working in the United Kingdom and has paid the relevant national insurance contributions.

These regulations apply to benefits for old age, sickness and invalidity, unemployment, family responsibilities, death and survivors, and industrial injuries, and lay down the circumstances in which a person retains social security benefits when they move between EEA member states. Winter fuel payments are covered by these rules.

Figures for the cost to the Exchequer for social security payment transfers made under the provisions of EU Regulation 883/2004 for the year 2011-12 are not available.

*Healthcare claims.*

Health is a benefit in kind for the purpose of the regulations. member states reimburse each other on an annual basis for care provided to each other's citizens. The costs are for claims for medical costs made under the European Health Insurance Card scheme, for healthcare provided to posted workers, for planned treatment and for health care costs relating to state pensioners. State pensioner costs account for around 80% of the total spend.

The UK pays out far more than it receives mainly due to the large number of UK state pensioners that retire overseas in comparison to the very low number of state pensioners from other EEA countries that retire to the UK.

Estimated totals for claims by and against the UK for healthcare benefits in kind made under the regulation for the year 2011-12 are £60 million and £952 million respectively.

**Martin Vickers:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate his Department has made of the amount transferred in social security payment transfers under the provisions of EU Regulation No 1408/71 in each of the last 10 years. [54867]

**Chris Grayling:** I have been asked to reply.

I will let the hon. Member have such information as is available as soon as possible.

*Substantive answer from Chris Grayling to Martin Vickers:*

There are two elements to the payments, social security benefits and health care claims.

#### *Social security benefit expenditure*

Under the EU rules that coordinate the social security rights of persons who move within the EEA and Switzerland, some benefits acquired in one member state must be paid to people who live outside that state but within the EEA or Switzerland. Generally the benefits are acquired because someone is, or has been, working in the United Kingdom and has paid the relevant national insurance contributions.

These regulations apply to benefits for old age, sickness and invalidity, unemployment, family responsibilities, death and survivors, and industrial injuries, and lay down the circumstances in which a person retains social security benefits when they move between EEA member states. Winter fuel payments are covered by these rules.

#### *Health care expenditure*

Health is a benefit in kind for the purpose of the regulations. Member states reimburse each other on an annual basis for care provided to each other's citizens. The costs are for claims for medical costs made under the European Health Insurance Card scheme, for health care provided to posted workers, for planned treatment and for health care costs relating to state pensioners. State pensioner costs account for around 80% of the total spend.

The UK pays out far more than it receives mainly due to the large number of UK state pensioners that retire overseas in comparison to the very low number of state pensioners from other EEA countries that retire to the UK.

The amounts transferred in respect of social security benefits and health care claims under the provisions of EU Regulation 1408/71 are shown in the following tables. The figures are rounded to the nearest £ million.

#### *Social security payments*

	<i>Total</i>	<i>£ million Of which state pension</i>
2000-01	607	536
2001-02	667	592
2002-03	775	691
2003-04	844	755
2004-05	979	887
2005-06	1,073	977
2006-07	1,146	1,048
2007-08	1,261	1,158
2008-09	1,361	1,252
2009-10	1,485	1,373

*Source:*

DWP statistical and accounting data.

Figures for family benefits (child benefit and child tax credit) are not available separately from overall expenditure.

#### *EEA health care costs*

	<i>Member states' claims against the UK</i>	<i>Claims against member states</i>
2002-03	250	32
2003-04	314	25
2004-05	382	31
2005-06	463	35
2006-07	526	38
2007-08	630	46
2008-09	710	47
2009-11	838	57
2010-11	925	58

Totals for claims by and against the UK for health care benefits in kind provided for years 2002-03 to 2010-11 are set out in the table given on 12 July 2010, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column WA100. Comparable data for years prior to 2002-03 are not available.

State pension could be paid in the EEA under domestic legislation but the amount payable would be different as it would not be uprated in all cases. Therefore the total amount of SRP is ultimately paid as a result of the EU regulations

The figures for health care costs are already in the public domain. The Resource Outturn totals (which represent the total claims) that DH provided have in the past been used for the Health Select Committee and are reflected in the DH Resource Accounts that are published each year, and have been used in several PQs (Commons and Lords).

The most recent PQ containing this information was asked by Lord Laird on 12 July 2010, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column WA100 (reference HL952).

## **Tax Avoidance**

**Mr Meacher:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evidence his Department has evaluated relating to allegations of UK tax avoidance by (a) Vodafone, (b) Arcadia, (c) Diageo, (d) Shell and (e) Barclays over the last 10 years. [55623]

**Mr Gauke:** I cannot comment on the tax affairs of any individual or corporate taxpayer.

The Government are committed to tackling tax avoidance and set out action being taken at Budget in the document "Tackling Tax Avoidance" which is available at

[http://cdn.hm-treasury.gov.uk/2011budget\\_taxavoidance.pdf](http://cdn.hm-treasury.gov.uk/2011budget_taxavoidance.pdf)

The Government have shown their strong support for HMRC in its operational work by investing £917 million over the spending review period to tackle avoidance, evasion and criminal attack with the objective of bringing in around £7 billion per year in additional revenue by 2014-15.

## **VAT: Alcoholic Drinks**

**Tom Blenkinsop:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment he has made of the potential effect on (a) social clubs and (b) working men's clubs of the (i) increase in the rate of value added tax and (ii) changes in the rate of duty on alcohol. [54247]

**Mr Gauke [holding answer 5 May 2011]:** Economic effects are considered on the whole package of Budget measures by the Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR). Individual measures and their impact on specific sectors are not considered in isolation.

## **ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

### **Departmental Billing**

**Gordon Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many invoices his Department received in respect of goods or services supplied by tier 1 suppliers between 1 May 2010 and 1 April 2011; and how many of those invoices were not paid within the period of time specified in the Government's Fair Payment guidance. [55869]

**Gregory Barker:** The Department of Energy and Climate Change received 15,829 invoices from its suppliers between 1 May 2010 and 1 April 2011, of which, 1,146 (7.2%) were not paid within the Government's payment target of five days. Of these payments, 8,100 were made by Government procurement card at the point of purchase.

**Gordon Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what mechanism his Department has established to ensure its payments are passed through the supply chain to each tier in accordance with the last date for payment defined in the Government's Fair Payment guidance. [55892]

**Gregory Barker:** The Department of Energy and Climate Change sets contractual terms and conditions to ensure that its payments are passed through the supply chain in accordance with the timescales set out in the Government's Fair Payment guidance. The Department's contracts include standard clauses undertaking to pay correctly submitted invoices within 30 days of receipt and requiring that contractors make payment within 30 days to any sub-contractors used to perform services on their behalf under the contract.

In making payments to Tier 1 suppliers, the Department exceeds the Government's more stretching target to pay over 80% of valid invoices within five days of receipt.

#### Departmental Data Protection

**Eric Ollerenshaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many contracts his Department holds which allow contractors to store personal data of UK citizens overseas; to which contracts this applies; in which countries the data for each such contract is held; and how many people have their data stored overseas under each such contract. [55739]

**Gregory Barker:** DECC holds no contracts which allows contractors to store the personal data of UK citizens overseas.

#### Departmental Legal Costs

**Mr Slaughter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how much his Department paid in (a) damages, (b) claimant costs and (c) defendant costs in respect of all civil claims brought against his Department in which the claimant was successful or the Department settled since its inception. [54642]

**Gregory Barker:** The Department has spent the following amounts:

	<i>Amount October 2008 to March 2011 (£ million)</i>
Damages	162.66
Claimant costs	19.59
Defendant costs	96.32
Total	308.57

Nearly all the above payments relate to injury related claims connected with the health liabilities of British Coal that now rest with the Department. The vast majority of these claims have been handled under the supervision of the High Court. However, the coal health figures relate to claims issued in all jurisdictions, even

though the Department has assumed that the term "civil claims" in the question refers to claims issued in England and Wales, in the courts of civil jurisdiction (the High Court and the county courts). Data on coal health claims payments and costs relating solely to claims issued in England and Wales could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The Department of Energy and Climate Change was established in October 2008. In relation to coal health claims, the amounts included in the table for 2008-09 are pro rata estimates, based on total payments and costs that year.

The figures included on other (non-coal health) claims relate to claims issued in England and Wales, in the courts of civil jurisdiction, and do not therefore include employment-related claims pursued through the employment tribunals. In one of these cases, the Department used the case handling services of another Government Department, and the cost of those services could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

#### Departmental Pay

**Mr Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what additional pay he plans to provide to officials in his Department in the period from 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2013 to reflect (a) seniority, (b) promotion and (c) performance. [55412]

**Gregory Barker:** For the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012, the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) continues to be subject to a pay freeze and will not be awarding any consolidated pay increases to staff earning more than £21,249. We plan to award consolidated pay increases of at least £250 in line with Treasury guidance to staff earning less than £21,000, although the final amount has not yet been determined.

For the period 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013, DECC has not yet considered what increases will be awarded to staff, as the Department will make decisions in line with central pay guidance that has not yet been published.

(a) DECC does not currently award additional pay to reflect seniority and has no plans to do so.

(b) Where staff are promoted from one grade to another the Department awards a 10% increase in pay, except where this results in a lower salary than the grade minimum at the higher grade, where the grade minimum is paid instead. We expect this policy to remain unchanged during the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2013.

(c) The value of any non consolidate performance awards payable between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2013 are yet to be determined.

#### Departmental Responsibilities

**Mr Nicholas Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change whether his Department plans to cease to fund any of its functions over the period of the comprehensive spending review. [55188]

**Gregory Barker:** DECC is not ceasing any major functions. The Department is though going through a process of restructuring including reducing from five director general groups to four. We have also undertaken a business planning process that has involved reallocation of resources to ensure we have sufficient capacity and the right skills to deliver our key priorities.

**Energy: Housing**

**Gordon Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (1) what his policy is on the setting of installer qualification requirements under the Green Deal; [55656]

(2) whether installers who will be legally responsible for signing off on electrical work under the Green Deal will have to be qualified to level 3 or above; [55657]

(3) what arrangements are in place to ensure that installers who will be legally responsible for signing off on electrical work under the Green Deal are appropriately qualified; [55658]

(4) when his Department plans to consult on (a) the specific qualifications requirements for installers working under the Green Deal and (b) the installation works that will be included under the Green Deal funding arrangements. [55664]

**Gregory Barker:** We have commissioned the British Standards Institute (BSI) to develop a Green Deal standard by the end of this year. This will bring together the existing standards—including those for installation of electrical works—and new standards where necessary. BSI will develop the standard with industry and also publicly consult in late summer. Only installers who meet this standard will be allowed to install measures under the Green Deal.

We will use UK Accreditation Service (UKAS) will provide independent accreditation of installers.

To support this, we have already announced that we will fund at least 1,000 dedicated Green Deal apprenticeships, in addition to the many apprenticeships that already exist in trade sectors—including electrical contracting and building services.

**Gordon Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change whether an installer registered under the Green Deal will also be able to act as an assessor under that scheme. [55663]

**Gregory Barker:** Should someone meet all of the relevant standards and codes of practice to be both an installer and assessor, they may fulfil both functions under the Green Deal. In every case, there will be specific safeguards to protect consumers and retain the integrity of both processes.

**Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what assessment he has made of the effect of the new Green Deal on suppliers of cavity wall insulation; and if he will make a statement. [55816]

**Gregory Barker:** Our current estimates, as published in the Energy Bill Impact Assessment, are that from October 2012, when the Green Deal is introduced, 4 million cavity walls are feasible.

We believe suppliers will benefit from the Green Deal or the Energy Company Obligation in accessing this remaining potential.

**Feed-in Tariffs**

**James Wharton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (1) how much he estimates the feed-in-tariff scheme would cost energy consumers if the rules on eligibility and tariff levels remained unchanged in each of the next five years; [55434]

(2) how much he estimates the feed-in-tariff scheme would cost energy consumers if large-scale solar power plants remained eligible for the scheme in each of the next five years. [55435]

**Gregory Barker:** The estimated costs to electricity consumers of the feed-in tariffs scheme if no changes are made to the scheme as it was announced in February 2010 are provided in the following table. These projected costs are based on original analysis carried out for the February 2010 final impact assessment and recent analysis undertaken on large scale solar PV and farm-scale AD for the fast-track review of FITs.

It is important to note that these figures do not take into account further evidence obtained since the launch of the fast-track review. We are in the process of reviewing this evidence, but early indications are that it would lead to an increase in the estimates.

*Estimated costs to consumers of FITs (2011 prices, discounted)*

	£ million
2011-12	90
2012-13	180
2013-14	290
2014-15	420
2015-16	580

*Notes:*

1. Impacts are presented as additional to baseline, where baseline costs are those costs expected to occur for sub-5MW uptake under the renewables obligation in the absence of FITs.
2. Figures have been rounded.
3. Cost to consumers is the net subsidy cost of the scheme, i.e. total generation and export tariff payments minus the value of exports to suppliers.
4. Each annual figure is cumulative, i.e. includes payments against projects that joined the feed-in tariffs scheme in previous years.

The first comprehensive review of FITs as announced by Government in February 2011 is currently under way and may provide revised estimates of future FIT costs to consumers.

**Fuels: Prices**

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what assessment he has made of the effect on the independent petrol retailing sector of the varying cost to the sector of premium branded fuels across the UK. [55843]

**Charles Hendry:** The UK has a diverse, open and competitive fuel retail market that we consider to be in the wider long-term interest of consumers. The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) regulates markets in the UK through enforcement of competition law, to ensure that markets work well for the benefit of consumers.

I recognise the importance of the independent petrol retailing sector to the UK, and if independent petrol retailers have evidence of anti-competitive behaviour in the cost to the sector of premium branded fuels, I would urge them to write, enclosing as much detailed evidence as possible, to the OFT.

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change whether the UK (a) Government and (b) downstream oil industry will be consulted on the terms of reference for the investigation by G20 countries of (i) Argos and (ii) Platts. [55844]

**Charles Hendry:** The terms of reference for this investigation were established by the Communiqué issued by the G20 summit in Seoul of November 2010:

“We also request the IEF, IEA, OPEC and IOSCO to produce a joint report, by the April 2011 Finance Ministers’ meeting, on how the oil spot market prices are assessed by oil price reporting agencies and how this affects the transparency and functioning of oil markets.”

A preliminary report to G20 Finance Ministers was made in April, with the final conclusions to be ready for Finance Ministers when they meet in October.

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change whether the UK (a) Government and (b) downstream oil industry will be involved in the investigation by G20 countries into the workings of (i) Argos and (ii) Platts. [55845]

**Charles Hendry:** This investigation was initiated by the G20 summit in Seoul of November 2010, which asked the International Energy Forum, the International Energy Agency, OPEC and the International Organization of Securities Commissions to produce a joint report on how the oil spot market prices are assessed by oil price reporting agencies (“PRAs”).

Neither G20 members nor the downstream oil industry are directly involved in this investigation.

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change when he expects the Downstream Oil Industry Forum report to be published; and to whom it will be circulated. [55846]

**Charles Hendry:** Work has been conducted to examine the resilience of the downstream oil industry by a task group of the Downstream Oil Industry Forum; a study carried out by Wood Mackenzie on behalf of DECC on this topic has been completed, is available on DECC’s internet site and was placed in the Library of the House on 26 April. In addition, a related report conducted for DECC by Deloitte LLP has also been placed in the Library of the House and is available on DECC’s website.

### Renewable Energy

**James Wharton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what proportion of the energy supply was generated from renewable energy sources in the UK in (a) 1997 and (b) 2010. [55421]

**Gregory Barker:** The following table shows the proportion of primary energy supply from primary renewable energy sources for 1997 and 2009 (data will be available for 2010 in July 2011).

	Percentage	
	1997	2009
Renewable energy proportion of primary energy supply	1.0	3.4

### Renewable Energy: Manpower

**Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what recent estimate he has made of the number of people employed in the renewable energy sector in the UK in each of the last three years; and what estimate he has made of the numbers who will be employed in the sector in (a) 2011 and (b) 2012. [54239]

**Mr Prisk:** I have been asked to reply.

Independent analysis commissioned by this Department and its predecessors estimates that in 2008/09 the renewable energy sector (including its supply chain) employed over 266,000 people, reflecting a marginal increase on 2007/08.

Growth rates for employment are difficult to estimate, but the commissioned analysis estimated (in December 2009) average annual growth rate in market value of 5.0% for the renewable energy sector in the UK between 2009/10 and 2015/16.

### Sellafield

**Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what assessment he has made of the section of the report to the Radioactive Substances Committee of the OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic by the expert panel in relation to radioactive discharges from Sellafield into the Irish Sea since 2008. [55780]

**Charles Hendry:** The Government welcomed the report of the expert panel and remain committed to meeting their obligations under the OSPAR convention’s radioactive substances strategy. Significant progress has been made by Sellafield in reducing radioactive discharges to the Irish sea. While annual discharge levels do fluctuate and indeed increased in 2008 and 2009, I expect this overall downward trend to continue as a result of new technology and abatement techniques though managing the legacy wastes at Sellafield remains a challenging task.

**Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what recent discussions he has had with representatives of (a) the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority and (b) Nuclear Management Partners on the changes to the levels of (i) alpha-emitting radioactive discharges, (ii) tritium discharges, (iii) beta discharges and (iv) technetium 99 discharges from Sellafield. [55781]

**Charles Hendry:** No recent discussions have taken place with representatives of either the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority or Nuclear Management Partners on changes to the levels of discharges from Sellafield of these radionuclides. However, officials from my Department continue to work with Sellafield and other Government Departments to monitor the level of radioactive discharges from Sellafield.

### Wind Power: Finance

**Gordon Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how much each wind farm (a) operator and (b) site received in constraints payments in the last two financial years. [55659]

**Charles Hendry:** National Grid advises that the total level of constraint payments made to wind farms over the last two financial years is as follows:

<i>Wind farm site</i>	<i>Wind farm operator</i>	<i>Constraint payment (£)</i>
Beinn Tharsuinn	Scottish Power	31,950.00
Black Law	Scottish Power	134,960.24
Whitelee	Scottish Power	466,396.47
Farr	RWE nPower Renewables	263,484.11
Hadyard Hill	Scottish and Southern	152,698.51
Millennium	Flack Renewables	32,533.80

No other wind farms have received constraint payments.

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change whether he plans to modify the constraints payments to wind farm operators as part of his plan for electricity market reform. [55660]

**Charles Hendry:** Reducing or increasing the output of generators is a routine part of National Grid's role to balance supply and demand. One of the tools used to do this is the "Balancing Mechanism", where in the final hour before real time National Grid can accept "bids" and "offers" from all types of generators for the payment they require to alter their output.

This is a competitive market where National Grid will pick the most cost-effective way to deliver what they need. This is being kept under review, but it is a matter for Ofgem who are responsible for monitoring developments in the market and facilitating any changes that may be required.

DECC does not plan to consider constraints payments to wind farm operators as part of plans for electricity market reform.

## CABINET OFFICE

### Departmental Data Protection

**Eric Ollerenshaw:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many contracts his Department holds which allow contractors to store personal data of UK citizens overseas; to which contracts this applies; in which countries the data for each such contract is held; and how many people have their data stored overseas under each such contract. [55733]

**Mr Maude:** Cabinet Office policy does not allow data to be stored overseas. Departmental electronic and paper records show that the Cabinet Office does not hold any contracts which allow contractors to store personal data of UK citizens overseas.

### Departmental Information Officers

**Pete Wishart:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many (a) press officers, (b) internal communications officers, (c) external communications officers, (d) communications strategy officers and (e) other positions with a communications remit were employed by (i) his Department, (ii) its agencies and (iii) each other non-departmental public body sponsored by his

Department on the most recent date for which figures are available. [38966]

**Mr Maude:** The number of staff employed in press and communications within the Cabinet Office (including No. 10) was 115, as at April 2010.

In December 2010 it was agreed to integrate the Cabinet Office, No. 10, OGC and DirectGov communications team into a single central communications function.

The new structure now in place, which also includes teams supporting the Deputy Prime Minister and the National Security Council, has 95 posts as follows:

	<i>Number</i>
Press officers	28
Internal communication officers	6
External communications officers	44
Communication strategy officers	8
Other	9

Commission for the Compact and Capacitybuilders, the non-departmental bodies sponsored by the Cabinet Office, ceased to exist as of the 31 March 2011. Data for communications professionals in both organisations were not available to answer this question.

**Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many (a) press officers, (b) internal communications officers, (c) external communications officers, (d) communications strategy officers and (e) officers in other positions with a communications remit his Department employed on the most recent date for which figures are available. [45537]

**Mr Maude:** The number of staff employed in press and communications within the Cabinet Office (including No. 10) was 115, as at April 2010.

In December 2010 it was agreed to integrate the Cabinet Office, No. 10, OGC and DirectGov communications team into a single central communications function.

The new structure now in place, which also includes teams supporting the Deputy Prime Minister and the National Security Council, has 95 posts as follows:

	<i>Number</i>
Press officers	28
Internal communication officers	6
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Communication strategy officers	8
Other	9

### Government Departments: ICT

**Jon Trickett:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of retendering Government contracts for IT suppliers since May 2010. [43220]

**Mr Maude:** The Government have not retendered contracts centrally with IT suppliers. This has been left to Departments to manage where appropriate. The Cabinet Office has not collected information relating to the costs involved in this process.

However, since July last year, the Cabinet Office has carried out a programme of renegotiation with Government's top suppliers, of which, 17 were IT suppliers. Over £800 million of savings have been delivered from this programme within 2010-11.

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Attendance Allowance: Norwich City Council

**Simon Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people were in receipt of attendance allowance in the Norwich city council local authority area in the latest period for which figures are available; and what average weekly level of benefit was paid to those claimants in the latest period for which figures are available. [53582]

**Maria Miller:** The information requested is in the following table:

<i>Attendance allowance recipients, August 2010</i>		
<i>Area</i>	<i>Total number of claimants</i>	<i>Average amount (£ per week)</i>
Norwich local authority	3,540	60.67

**Notes:**

1. Caseload figures are rounded to the nearest 10; average amounts are shown as pounds per week and rounded to the nearest penny.
2. Figures do not include people with entitlement where the payment has been suspended, for example if they are in hospital.
3. These figures are published at: <http://83.244.183.180/100pc/tabtool.html>

**Source:**

DWP Information Directorate: Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study.

### Bread: Asthma

**Mrs Riordan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of cases of asthma caused by high exposure to flour within the baking industry. [55278]

**Chris Grayling:** Statistics specifically about the number of cases of asthma caused by high exposure to flour within the baking industry are not available. Published statistics do not allow the causative agent for cases of occupational asthma to be identified within a specific occupational group. Statistics for the occupational group 'bakers and flour confectioners' are provided and these reflect the role of flour dust as a cause of occupational asthma.

Based on reports by chest physicians to the Surveillance of Work Related Occupational Respiratory Disease (SWORD) scheme and reports to the Occupational Physicians Reporting Activity (OPRA) scheme, the incidence of occupational asthma among 'bakers and flour confectioners' during 2007-09 was estimated to be 18 cases per year. However, these statistics are subject to under-reporting.

Other statistical data sources suggest that the overall incidence of occupational asthma may be as much as tenfold higher than estimated by SWORD and OPRA.

## Departmental Mobile Phones

**Mike Freer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many officials in his Department are provided with mobile communication devices; and how much his Department spent on mobile telephones and related data services in the last year for which figures are available. [51493]

**Chris Grayling:** The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) had 16,077 mobile telephones, 19,22 BlackBerries and 6,077 3G mobile data cards—figures for March 2011.

The total spend for the 2010-11 financial year on mobile related services, including rental, call charges and data usage, was £3.4 million plus VAT.

The Department's business units are responsible for issuing mobile communication devices to their staff based on DWP business need. DWP is currently reviewing the use of all mobile devices and this will result in a significant reduction in the overall number of devices across the Department. All business units are expected to continuously review their requirement, with an emphasis on cost reduction.

Through the Cabinet Office, the Department has recently taken advantage of the new central Government framework on mobile tariff rates, introduced from 1 April 2011. However, the tariffs are being applied retrospectively from 1 October 2010 as part of the contractual agreement completed in autumn 2010. These new rates offer significant savings on rental and call charges. These savings are not included in the 2010-11 spend but will be brought to account during the 2011-12 financial year.

The Department has separately negotiated further reductions in the cost of its BlackBerry rental charge. These reduced rates were agreed in autumn 2010 and came into effect from April 2011.

## Departmental Travel

**Maria Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much his Department has spent on ministerial travel by (a) ministerial car, (b) train, (c) bus, (d) commercial aircraft and (e) private aircraft since May 2010. [50207]

**Chris Grayling:** Section 10 of the Ministerial Code provides guidance on travel for Ministers and makes clear that Ministers must ensure that they always make efficient and cost-effective travel arrangements. The ministerial team has led the Department's travel cost reduction programme by example, as shown by the reduction in overall travel expenditure by Ministers in the categories listed. This has decreased from £566,000 to £106,000 overall.

This is broken down as follows, with comparative figures provided from May to February 2009-10 provided for the purpose of illustration:

<i>Expenditure category</i>	<i>Period</i>		<i>Percentage reduction</i>
	<i>May 2010 to February 2011 (£)</i>	<i>May 2009 to February 2010 (£)</i>	
Ministerial Car	89,361.60	527,081.74	83

Expenditure category	Period		Percentage reduction
	May 2010 to February 2011 (£)	May 2009 to February 2010 (£)	
Train	7,405.22	26,952.43	73
Bus	0.00	0.00	n/a
Commercial Aircraft	9,001.25	11,967.73	25
Private Aircraft	0.00	0.00	n/a
Total	105,768.07	566,001.90	81

### Departmental Work Experience

**Chi Onwurah:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what advice his Department provides to those wishing to (a) work as an intern, (b) undertake a work experience placement and (c) work as a volunteer in his Department. [52808]

**Chris Grayling:** The Department provides paid summer internships to students from under-represented groups to encourage them to apply for the civil service Fast Stream. The Fast Stream is the civil service graduate development programme and the purpose of the Summer Internship programme is to encourage students from ethnic minorities and those from under-represented social-economic backgrounds to gain experience of working in stretching assignments that will prepare them to apply for the Fast Stream when they have graduated.

The Department will also be offering paid internships through the Whitehall Internship Programme announced as part of the Social Mobility Strategy. To complement the existing Fast Stream Summer Diversity Internships two new schemes will be piloted in summer 2011 and are targeted at students from under-represented groups including Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority communities and people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds:

at sixth-form college level, providing placements to Year 12 students to increase professional experience and workplace skills, and

at secondary school level, running day-long programmes within Whitehall, providing an opportunity for students to meet Ministers and senior civil servants.

As part of the Government's Get Britain Working Work Experience initiative the Department is looking to offer a number of eligible young people short-term work experience. Initial advice to candidates on the programme will be provided by their Jobcentre Plus adviser. When people start with us we will provide a structured induction with advice and support which will help them settle into the Department and the working environment.

There are no other specific programmes in the Department for work experience or for people to work as volunteers but there may, on occasions, be local opportunities for short spells of work experience. In such cases advice and guidance to participants would be specific to the individuals and roles involved.

Everyone who works in the Department, in whatever capacity, is subject to baseline security checks and will receive any essential training as is appropriate to their role.

### Disability Living Allowance

**Mr Crausby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many responses he has received to his Department's consultation document on the reform of disability living allowance. [55928]

**Maria Miller:** We consulted on the reform of disability living allowance from 6 December 2010 to 18 February 2011. We had a large response to the public consultation, receiving over 5,000 individual responses and over 500 responses from representative organisations.

We published our response to the consultation on 4 April 2011. The full response can be viewed at:

[www.dwp.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/consultations)

### Employment Agencies

**Mike Freer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much his Department spent on (a) recruitment agency fees, (b) outplacement agency fees for displaced or redundant staff and (c) staff training in the last year for which figures are available. [51409]

**Chris Grayling:** The information is as follows:

#### Recruitment agency fees

DWP spent £11.3 million on recruitment agency fees in 2009-10 which is the last year a full 12 months figures are available.

#### Outplacement agency fees

DWP spent £893 on outplacement agency fees in 2009-10 which is the last year a full 12 months figures are available.

The service provides advice and support for employees who are considering applying for voluntary redundancy, or have had an application accepted.

#### Staff training

DWP spent £18.7 million on staff training in 2009-10 which is the last year a full 12 months figures are available.

### Employment and Support Allowance

**Stephen Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of recipients of employment and support allowance there would be in the (a) work related activity group and (b) assessment phase (i) with and (ii) without time-limiting in place for each financial year from 2011-12 to 2015-16. [55205]

**Chris Grayling:** The first table shows the estimated future recipients of contributory employment and support allowance (ESA) in the work related activity group (WRAG) with and without time-limiting in force.

	Contributory ESA caseload in the WRAG	
	With time-limiting in force	Without time-limiting in force
2011-12	200,000	200,000
2012-13	260,000	400,000
2013-14	200,000	590,000
2014-15	160,000	730,000
2015-16	40,000	720,000

The second table shows the estimated future recipients of contributory ESA in the assessment phase with and without time-limiting in force.

<i>Contributory ESA caseload in the assessment phase</i>		
	<i>With time-limiting in force</i>	<i>Without time-limiting in force</i>
2011-12	180,000	180,000
2012-13	110,000	190,000
2013-14	180,000	190,000
2014-15	170,000	180,000
2015-16	160,000	170,000

Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10,000 claimants and are based on Budget 2011 forecasts for the ESA time-limiting proposal. Caseloads for contributory ESA have been given as people on income-related ESA or credits only ESA will be unaffected by the time limiting proposal.

For those who leave the contributory ESA as a result of the time limit, it is estimated that around 60%, or approximately 400,000 people by 2015-16, are expected to be fully or partially compensated by income-related ESA, so will retain entitlement to ESA. And those who don't qualify for income-related ESA may remain on ESA on a credits-only basis.

**Stephen Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the proportion of contributory employment and support allowance claimants in (a) the work-related activity group and (b) the assessment phase who would, in a steady-state without time-limiting, have a duration of 12 months or more. [55206]

**Chris Grayling:** It is estimated that in steady state, without time-limiting, around 77% of contributory employment and support allowance (ESA) claimants in the work related activity group or assessment phase would have duration of 12 months or more. This breaks down as 94% of contributory ESA claimants in the work related activity group and 6% of contributory ESA claimants in the assessment phase.

For those who leave contributory ESA as a result of the time limit, it is estimated that around 60%, or approximately 400,000 people, are expected to be fully or partially compensated by income-related ESA, so will retain entitlement to ESA.

#### Employment Schemes

**John Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many of the new Work programme contractors his Department estimates are planning to sub-contract to voluntary sector organisations in (a) Glasgow North West constituency, (b) Glasgow city, (c) Scotland and (d) the UK. [52740]

**Chris Grayling:** The Work programme competition is still under way with post tender discussions being undertaken with preferred bidders. Contracts have not yet been signed and the information you have requested, therefore, cannot be provided at this time. When contracts have been signed, further information, including details of the prime contractors and their subcontractors, will

be published on the Contracts Finder website as part of the ongoing commitment to the Transparency agenda.

However, I can tell you that there are 57 third sector organisations within the supply chains of the preferred bidders within the Contract Package Area covering the constituencies you are inquiring about. Nationally there are over 300 first tier third sector organisations. In addition, there is a significant number of organisations providing ad hoc support as customer requirements dictate.

**John Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what account his Department took of (a) price and (b) previous performance in the assessment of bids for contracts for the Work programme. [52742]

**Chris Grayling:** The Department assessed all tenders for the Work programme mini competitions from the Framework for the Provision of Employment Related Support Services against the published evaluation criteria, this was based both on quality, including performance, and financial aspects of the tenders. The evaluation was conducted without prejudice based entirely on the evidence contained within the tenders.

The preferred bidders were publicly announced on the basis of the most economically advantageous tender in each contract package area, i.e. those that, in the opinion of DWP, offered the optimum combination of quality, financial capacity and acceptable level of risk.

#### Employment: Private Sector

**Jonathan Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the sustainability of the increase in the level of private sector employment which took place during the quarter to February 2011; and if he will make a statement. [54077]

**Chris Grayling:** The Government's aim is to achieve lasting growth in employment by tackling the deficit, improving the competitiveness of the economy and encouraging the growth of new businesses.

Private sector employment rose 77,000 in November 2010-January 2011 compared to the previous quarter. This continues the recent trend that has seen it rise in each of the last four quarters and by 428,000 over the last year as a whole. The latest Office for Budget Responsibility forecast is for market based employment to rise by around 1.3 million between 2010 and 2015.

#### Health: Young People

**Margaret Curran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what benefits are available to 16 to 18-year-olds with long-term health conditions who are (a) in employment, (b) unable to work as a result of their condition, (c) seeking work and (d) in education. [52748]

**Maria Miller:** The following table summarises which benefits may be available to people in the four groups quoted in the question:

Benefits available to 16 to 18-year-olds with long-term health conditions who are:

	(a) in employment	(b) unable to work as a result of their condition	(c) seeking work	(d) in full-time education
Working tax credit	Yes	—	—	—
Employment and support allowance	—	Yes	—	—
Disability living allowance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jobseekers allowance	—	—	Yes	—
Income support	—	—	—	Yes

Working tax credit is designed to remove barriers to work and to top up earnings of working people on low to moderate incomes. People with children or a disability can claim it from age 16, provided they work at least 16 hours a week. Others must be aged 25 and work 30 or more hours a week to qualify. This reflects the fact that people without children or a disability face fewer barriers to work and should, therefore, be expected to work more hours per week than those with children or a disability.

Employment and support allowance (ESA) is payable to people aged 16 to 65 whose ability to work is limited by ill-health or disability, subject to other qualifying conditions being met. ESA has both contributory and income-related elements; entitlement to contributory ESA is linked to a person's national insurance record with income-related ESA providing a means tested level of support.

Disability living allowance is a cash benefit for children and adults with long-term impairments, which contributes towards the extra costs associated with their disability. It can be paid whether the recipient is in employment, unable to work as a result of their condition, seeking work or in education. It is not means tested and does not require a record of national insurance contributions.

Young people under 18, who are available for work and training, can get jobseeker's allowance in certain situations—in particular if the young person would suffer severe hardship if the allowance were not paid. Under this power, all the individual circumstances of the young person are taken into account and it is therefore an effective safety net for those young people who are the most vulnerable. The young person will need to meet certain labour market rules and register with Connexions.

Certain groups of young people who are still in relevant education can claim income support. These include lone parents and those who are still in full time non-advanced education (up to A Level/NVQ Level3 and equivalents) but estranged from their parents, or those acting as their parents, for reasons of abuse or family breakdown.

### Housing Benefit

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Denbighshire were in receipt of housing benefit in each of the last five years. [54922]

**Steve Webb:** The number of people in Denbighshire local authority who were in receipt of housing benefit in each of the last five years is as follows:.

Table 1: Housing benefit recipients in Denbighshire local authority (LA) as at February 2007

	Caseload
February 2007	6,000

Notes:

1. The data refer to benefit units, which may be a single person or a couple.
2. The figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.
3. Quarterly aggregate clerical "stock count" returns were replaced by monthly electronic "individual level" scans from SHBE. The final quarterly return was for August 2007 and the first monthly data from SHBE was November 2008.
4. The February 2007 data have been used in this instance, in order to provide a closer time-series with the later SHBE data.

Source:

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System Quarterly data—100% data taken in February 2007

Table 2: Housing benefit recipients in Denbighshire local authority (LA) as at the dates shown

	Caseload
November 2008	6,520
January 2009	6,610
January 2010	7,270
January 2011	7,640

Notes:

1. The data refer to benefit units, which may be a single person or a couple.
2. The figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.
3. SHBE is a monthly electronic scan of claimant level data direct from local authority computer systems. It replaces quarterly aggregate clerical returns.
4. The data are available monthly from November 2008 and January 2011 is the most recent available.
5. Data from SHBE incorporate the local authority changes from 1 April 2009.
6. These figures are available from the Department's tabulation tool at:

<http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?paae=tabtool>

Source:

Single Housing Benefit Extract (SHBE)

### Industrial Accidents: Eyesight

**Mr Nicholas Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the policy of the Health and Safety Commission is on investigation by the Health and Safety Executive of each industrial accident that results in the permanent blinding of one or both eyes. [55081]

**Chris Grayling:** HSE policy is to select for potential investigation all work-related permanent blinding injuries that are reportable under the Reporting of Injuries Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995. The decision to investigate is made on a case-by-case basis and will depend upon whether any investigation is practical, there are reasonably practicable precautions that could have been taken to prevent the incident or other priorities take precedence.

**Jobcentre Plus**

**Paul Uppal:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether his Department monitors the effectiveness of Jobcentre Plus centres in providing long-term employment. [55432]

**Chris Grayling:** DWP monitor the effectiveness of Jobcentre Plus via a range of performance mechanisms, including performance against the Cabinet Office Structural Reform Plan and its own internal Performance Management Framework.

The main measure of Jobcentre Plus performance is the rate at which people leave jobseeker's allowance, income support and employment and support allowance and move into employment. The measure supports the Department for Work and Pensions 2011-15 business plan and the coalition Government's structural reform priorities. Jobcentre Plus provides regular monthly progress and performance reports to the Department and Ministers, and makes performance data available to the public through the DWP website.

For the very large numbers of Jobcentre Plus customers, it is not cost effective or appropriate to routinely monitor what happens to them after they have been successful in finding work. Jobcentre Plus has mechanisms in place to help identify those customers who return quickly to benefit and who experience difficulties remaining in work. The Department also undertakes a range of evaluation activity of its programmes to assess the impact on long-term employment.

From June, we will implement the Work Programme where customers at most risk of longer dependency on welfare will receive additional help and support delivered through private companies. Work programme providers will receive additional financial rewards for achieving job outcomes which are sustained.

	<i>Verbal assault</i>	<i>Attempted assault</i>	<i>Actual assault</i>	<i>Unknown</i>	<i>Total</i>
2005-06	8,800	1,180	360	720	11,060
2006-07	13,330	1,130	480	540	15,480
2007-08	14,300	1,230	440	250	16,220
2008-09	13,340	1,010	420	240	15,010
2009-10	12,340	820	340	210	13,710

Due to the phased nature of the rollout of the Jobcentre Plus organisation, the information provided is from April 2005, when the capture of information became uniform across the business.

The information has been collated from Department of Work and Pensions Accident and Assault Database (AAD) and have been rounded to the nearest 10. Please note that the data supplied is derived from unpublished management information which was collected for internal Departmental use only, and has not been quality assured to National Statistics or Official Statistics publication standard.

**Mortgages: Government Assistance**

**Mark Durkan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of people whose claim for Support for Mortgage Interest ceased as a consequence of the rules on the two year limit on awards in each month of 2011 to date. [51376]

**Jobcentre Plus: Crimes of Violence**

**Mr Darling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many assaults occurred at Jobcentre Plus establishments and their predecessor benefit offices in each year from 1997 to 2010. [54039]

**Chris Grayling:** The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the chief executive of Jobcentre Plus, Darra Singh. I have asked him to provide the hon. Member with the information requested.

*Letter from Darra Singh:*

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question asking how many assaults occurred at Jobcentre Plus establishments and their predecessor benefit offices in each year from 1997 to 2010. This is something that falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus.

Jobcentre Plus works hard to mitigate all Health and Safety risks and whilst no assault is acceptable, it is important to review these figures in context—Jobcentre Plus staff are involved in around 60m face to face meetings with clients every year and any incident should be viewed in light of this fact. Jobcentre Plus has a robust Risk Assessment methodology to deal with this volume of customer interactions, with suitable and sufficient control measures in place to manage the majority of those contacts. The majority of incidents reported are verbal. Jobcentre Plus employs approximately 73,000 staff. It takes the safety of staff very seriously. For this reason, it encourages staff to report all incidents of unacceptable customer behaviour. Where incidents do occur we provide support through our Employee Assistance Programme. All incidents are also investigated so that, if appropriate, lessons can be learned.

The information is not available in the format requested. The available information is in the table below. This information is not available for years prior to the inception of Jobcentre Plus and includes incidents involving Customer Care Officers (CCO) who are employed under contract by Group 4 Securitas.

All figures are reported in operational years rather than calendar years.

**Steve Webb:** We do not have an estimate of the number of people whose Support for Mortgage Interest has ceased as a result of the two-year limit.

We carried out a scan of the jobseeker's allowance payment system in January to identify those claimants with a two-year limit date for Support for Mortgage Interest to March 2012. The scan identified the following numbers of claimants to date:

	<i>Claimants with a two-year limit date</i>
2011	
January	192
February	279
March	302
April	386

It is important to note that these figures do not represent the number of claimants whose Support for Mortgage Interest has stopped. Those figures will be lower than the numbers in the table because a proportion of the claimants identified will have left benefit, for example, to move into work.

### National Insurance

**Mr Ruffley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many national insurance numbers were (a) issued and (b) current in each year since 2007. [53421]

**Chris Grayling:** The figures for the number of national insurance numbers (NINOs) registered in each year since 2007 is in the following table.

Period	NINo registrations	Total (million)
2007-08		1.4
2008-09		1.5
2009-10		<sup>1</sup> 1.4

<sup>1</sup> Around.

#### Notes:

- Figures are for all NINo registrations in the UK (including Northern Ireland).
- Period refers to the annual reporting period (1 April to 31 March) and the date the NINo was registered on NPS.
- HM Revenue and Customs no longer undertake a full scan of NINOs registered to UK nationals. The figure provided is an estimated figure for overall NINo registrations, based on the number of NINo cards issued.

#### Source:

100% extract from HM Revenue and Customs National Insurance and PAYE (NPS) system.

Information is not available for the number of current national insurance numbers in each year since 2007. However, the latest available figures (February 2011) shows a total of 83.36 million national insurance number (NINo) records on DWP's Customer Information System (CIS). These consist of:

63.73 million live NINo accounts

19.63 million NINo accounts with a date of death applied.

Once a NINo is allocated it needs to remain on the Department's computer system. This is because the NINo provides a permanent numerical link between the individual and their national insurance contribution record, which determines entitlement to contributory benefits and state pension. In the case of deceased individuals, a partner may make a claim for a contributory benefit, which is dependant on the contribution record of the deceased individual.

### Pension Credit

**Rachel Reeves:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has for the operation of the new housing element of state pension credit. [55728]

**Steve Webb:** In the Welfare Reform Bill, we are taking powers to introduce a housing credit within pension credit and the intention is that this will operate on broadly similar lines to the current rules that apply in housing benefit. Detailed arrangements are still under consideration.

**Rachel Reeves:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether any future recipients of welfare payments to couples where one person is above

the qualifying age for state pension credit and their partner is entitled to universal credit will be worse off under the system proposed in the Welfare Reform Bill; and if he will make a statement. [55832]

**Steve Webb:** In the Welfare Reform Bill, we are taking powers to restrict access to pension credit for couples so that couples with one member below the qualifying age for pension credit will be required to claim universal credit if they need support through the benefits system.

We believe it wholly appropriate that people below the pension credit qualifying age should receive the support that will be available through universal credit to encourage and enable work. We are still considering the support that will be available for couples in this position. However, we also recognise that it is important not to undermine the stability and outcomes for existing pension credit customers, so the change will only apply to new claims and not to couples already in receipt of pension credit.

### Sick Leave

**Pamela Nash:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the contribution to meeting his Department's planned efficiency savings which will be made by reducing sickness absence. [51718]

**Chris Grayling:** No financial estimate of the contribution of reducing sickness absence to the Department's efficiency plans has been made. However, the Department has a strong track record in reducing sickness to increase the resource available to deliver public services, and strives to continually improve its performance in this area, having reduced sickness absence from a level of 11.1 days per employee per year in March 2007 to 8.1 days per employee per year currently.

### Social Security Benefits: Fraud

**Mr Ruffley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many fines were issued for benefit fraud in each year since 2006; and how much was received from such fines in each such year. [53368]

**Chris Grayling:** Fines for benefit fraud can be issued only by the courts and are managed by Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service.

However, the Department does have the power to issue administrative penalties as a punishment for benefit fraud, which are similar to fines. The following tables provide information on the number of administrative penalties issued and the amount that has been recovered from these penalties:

	Number of administrative penalties issued
2006-07	9,810
2007-08	8,566
2008-09	7,160
2009-10	7,249

#### Note:

Data are not yet available for 2010-11.

#### Source:

Fraud and Error by Sector (FIBS) and Fraud Referral and Intervention Management System (FRAIMS). The figures are Management Information (MI) collected for the purpose of routine administration, and therefore have not been subjected to the rigorous quality assurance that is applied to DWP official statistics.

	<i>Total recoveries from administrative penalties (£ million)</i>
2008-09	1.8
2009-10	1.7
2010-11	1.6

*Note:*

Data on the amount recovered prior to 2008-09 are not available.

*Source:*

The figures provided are from Shared Services Debt Manager via Business Objects computer system and are subject to rounding. The figures are Management Information (MI) collected for the purpose of routine administration, and therefore have not been subjected to the rigorous quality assurance that is applied to DWP official statistics.

### Social Security Benefits: Lone Parents

**Ms Buck:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate his Department has made of the likely effect of the cap on benefit entitlement on the financial incentives and disincentives for couples comprising two lone parents to live apart in separate households. [53716]

**Chris Grayling:** No assessment has been made of the likely effect of the cap on benefit entitlement on the financial incentives and disincentives for couples comprising two lone parents to live apart in separate households.

Our introduction of universal credit will reduce the couple penalty for many low income couples, particularly single earner couples. It will provide an enhanced earnings disregard which, along with the reduced taper, will allow couples to keep more of their income in work. Couples will also receive the higher personal allowance available in the current out-of-work benefits within their universal credit to ensure they are not disadvantaged relative to working single people.

### State Retirement Pensions

**Mr Reed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate his Department has made of the likely change in the number of people eligible to receive a state pension in each of the next 10 years. [55284]

**Steve Webb:** The following table presents projections of the UK population above state pension age under the currently legislated state pension age timetable and that proposed in the Pensions Bill 2011.

	<i>Pensions Act 2007 timetable</i>	<i>Pensions Bill 2011 timetable</i>
2011	12,178,000	12,178,000
2012	12,279,000	12,279,000
2013	12,362,000	12,362,000
2014	12,416,000	12,416,000
2015	12,460,000	12,460,000
2016	12,493,000	12,458,000
2017	12,527,000	12,403,000
2018	12,561,000	12,348,000
2019	12,601,000	12,137,000
2020	12,686,000	12,019,000

*Note:*

Projections rounded to the nearest 1,000. These projections, based on ONS' 2008 UK principal population projections, do not include estimates of overseas claims and possible deferral or non take-up of state pension.

## DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

### Elections

**Helen Jones:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what consideration he has given to bringing forward proposals to ensure that returning officers meet agreed standards in the (a) organisation and (b) timing of election counts; and if he will make a statement. [55815]

**Mr Harper:** Under provisions in the Electoral Administration Act 2006, the Electoral Commission has determined and published performance standards for returning officers who are responsible for the conduct of elections, including the arrangements for the counting of votes.

The Electoral Commission's performance standards for returning officers cover a range of areas in relation to the delivery of elections, including ensuring that returning officers have sufficient skills and knowledge to carry out their statutory duties, have developed robust planning processes for an election and provide appropriate training for all staff used at an election, which will be of relevance to the returning officer's function in relation to the counting of votes.

The commission advised in their assessment of returning officers' performance at the 2010 general election that they were encouraged both by the overall level of performance against the standards, and the willingness of returning officers and their teams to use the performance standards framework as a basis for continued improvement. The commission found that 95% of returning officers met or exceeded all three of the standards relating to 'planning and organisation' ('skills and knowledge of the returning officer', 'planning' and 'training') and 98% either met or exceeded the first standard relating to 'skills and knowledge' of the returning officer.

We look forward to the commission's reports for the 2011 referendum and elections.

## BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

### Business: Taxation

**Alison McGovern:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what research his Department has (a) commissioned and (b) evaluated assessing any correlation between levels of business taxation and private sector investment in (i) research and development and (ii) new technology. [55987]

**Mr Willetts:** The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) has not commissioned any research assessing the correlation between overall levels of business taxation and private sector investment in research and development (R&D) or new technology. The impact of the tax regime on business decisions is a matter for the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

In November 2010, a qualitative report jointly commissioned by BIS and HM Revenue and Customs looking at the impact of R&D tax credits on businesses' processes for making decisions on R&D was published. This report found that for the businesses interviewed R&D tax credits had little effect on decisions to conduct individual projects but that they did increase the overall amount of research and development conducted.

### Exports: United Arab Emirates

**John Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many export licences have been granted to AssetCo plc for the sale of equipment to the Government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for use by the (a) army, (b) police and (c) fire service in the UAE in the last five years for which figures are available. [54831]

**Mr Prisk:** I refer the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) on 10 May 2011, *Official Report*, column 1190W.

### Green Investment Bank

**Zac Goldsmith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills on what date he applied for EU state aid approval for the creation of the Green Investment Bank. [54369]

**Mr Prisk:** The UK has begun the process of engaging with the EU Commission over the Green Investment Bank proposals to ensure their compatibility with the state aid provisions in the EU treaty. We expect substantive pre-notification discussions will take place over the summer with the aim of submitting a formal state aid notification later this year.

### Havering

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many of his Department's employees work out of premises in the London borough of Havering. [55231]

**Mr Davey:** The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills currently has no employees located in premises in the London borough of Havering.

### Higher Education: Admissions

**Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what discussions he has had with the right hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark on the implications of his proposals for off-quota university places. [55646]

**Mr Willetts:** Both the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, my right hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Vince Cable), and I have had a number of discussions on how we assure fair access. Core to our principles for considering options for enabling off-quota recruitment is to ensure that all places would comply with the principles of fair access without any reduction in entry standards. I have not yet discussed specific off-quota options with my right hon. Friend the Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Simon Hughes) but we have discussed the numbers of applicants that in recent years have been unable to secure a place at university.

**Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills whether public schools will be able to sponsor off-quota places in universities under his proposals; and if he will make a statement. [55649]

**Mr Willetts:** We want to make it easier for employers and charities to sponsor students at universities, and to create a greater incentive for universities to set up sponsorship arrangements by allowing sponsored places to be additional to their student number allocations. We will only consider options that uphold the principle that admission to university must be on ability to learn, not on ability to pay. That is why any such scheme would need to comply with the conditions that the principles of fair access must apply, there would need to be genuine additional places, and there would be no reduction in entrance standards.

Therefore it is clearly not the intention that independent schools should be able to sponsor places for their own pupils and after consultation we will ensure that there is a framework in place to prevent this.

### Higher Education: Reading Berkshire

**Alok Sharma:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many and what proportion of schools in Reading West constituency sent at least one pupil to the university of (a) Oxford and (b) Cambridge in each of the last 13 years. [55721]

**Mr Willetts:** Information has been provided by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and is shown in the following table.

*Schools in Reading West with applicants accepted to full-time undergraduate courses at Oxford university or university of Cambridge via UCAS*

Year of entry	Schools with acceptances			
	Oxford university		University of Cambridge	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
2001	3	33	1	11
2002	3	43	0	0
2003	1	14	0	0
2004	2	29	0	0
2005	0	0	1	17
2006	1	13	2	25
2007	1	13	1	13
2008	2	25	1	13
2009	2	29	1	14
2010	2	25	1	13

Source: UCAS.

Schools have been identified as those with a postcode in the Reading West parliamentary constituency. The figures cover schools classed by UCAS as comprehensive, grammar, independent and other secondary schools in England. Other kinds of centres have not contributed to this analysis. Only schools from which UCAS received applications in the cycle concerned have contributed to the proportion calculation. Figures do not account for students accepted to Oxford or Cambridge who applied directly, rather than via UCAS.

Detailed data on applications via secondary schools is only available from 2001. Data for earlier years has not been provided as the necessary reference data is not available.

### Office of Fair Trading

**Tony Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of resources available to the Office of Fair Trading to carry out the investigations that the Head of that Office considers necessary. [55417]

**Mr Davey:** The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) is a non-ministerial Government Department and secures its budget allocation via the HM Treasury-led spending review process. As required by the spending review 2010 (SR10), the OFT submitted its plans for delivering its objectives within a reduced budget. The OFT's SR10 settlement was announced in October 2010. The OFT's budget for 2011-12 was set at £56 million. Internally, the OFT has allocated available resources in line with its published annual plan.

#### **Regional Development Agencies: Redundancy Pay**

**Mr Nicholas Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what his policy is on the calculation of redundancy pay for staff of regional development agencies in circumstances where there is a previous continuous service with a local authority employer; and what discretion he may exercise over the way in which such payments are determined. [55173]

**Mr Prisk:** Regional development agency (RDA) staff are covered by the Civil Service Compensation Scheme (CSCS) as amended on 22 December 2010. The RDAs are also covered by the Redundancy Payments (Continuity of Employment in Local Government, etc.) (Modification) Order 1999.

Where a local authority employee was transferred into an RDA under TUPE regulations, at the time of redundancy the RDA would pay the individual the better of:

- (a) his redundancy entitlement under CSCS terms for the period of employment with the RDA only;
- (b) redundancy entitlement under the terms of previous employment with the local authority for the full period of his continuous service with the local authority and the RDA; or
- (c) redundancy entitlement under any other terms reflecting a ministerial undertaking given at the point of transfer.

Where a local authority employee joined an RDA voluntarily, at the time of redundancy the RDA would pay the individual the better of either (a) above; or the redundancy entitlement under statutory redundancy terms for the full period of continuous service with the local authority and the RDA. I have no authority to exercise discretion over the way redundancy payments are calculated.

#### **Space: Industry**

**David Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what contribution the funding allocated to science centres in the 2011 Budget will make to the space industry. [55792]

**Mr Willetts:** Of the £100 million additional investment in science announced in the Budget, £10 million was earmarked to accelerate the development of the International Space Innovation Centre with the start of a National Space Technology Programme with industry.

#### **Students: Fees and Charges**

**Bill Esterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will assess the potential effect of changes to higher education tuition fees on the ability of graduates to secure a mortgage. [55775]

**Mr Willetts:** The Council for Mortgage Lenders have advised that a student loan is very unlikely to materially impact on an individual's ability to get a mortgage. The reduction in net income as a result of loan repayment results in a commensurate reduction in the amount a mortgage lender is willing to lend. That is one reason why our proposal to increase the repayment threshold from £15,000 to £21,000 reduces the amount borrowers need to repay each month, and therefore increases the amount of net monthly income available to them which could be helpful to them when applying for a mortgage.

#### **Students: Loans**

**Mr Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what prominence he plans to give to information on the absence of any requirements for students to pay tuition fees upfront in his recently announced advertising campaign relating to student loans. [55942]

**Mr Willetts:** The Department considers it essential to ensure that prospective students and their families know about the full package of support available, to support access to higher education. One of the key messages for the campaign is that students will not have to pay up front. This message features in both our radio and digital advertising.

#### **Technology and Innovation Centres**

**Chi Onwurah:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills pursuant to the answer of 4 March 2011, *Official Report*, column 715W, on innovation, with which centres funded by regional development agencies his Department has had direct contact in the course of its consideration of the future of such centres. [55755]

**Mr Willetts:** The Department has in recent times invested significant funding in a number of centres via the Strategic Investment Fund. These centres include the National Renewable Energy Centre, Wave Hub, the Centre for Process Innovation, and the National Composites Centre, and these have been the primary focus of our direct discussions. Officials across this Department also have formal and informal contacts with a number of centres in the context of their work although there is no formal record of these interactions.

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