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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Monday 13 October 2014

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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OFFICIAL REPORT

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

SIXTY-THIRD YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 586

FIFTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2014-2015

House of Commons

Monday 13 October 2014

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Police Bureaucracy

1. **Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): What steps she has taken to reduce bureaucracy in the police. [905423]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): We have cut red tape and given the police just one simple target: to cut crime. The work that we have undertaken to reduce bureaucracy could save up to 4.5 million hours of police time across all forces every year. That is the equivalent of more than 2,100 officers back on the beat.

Sir Edward Leigh: I remember that when I was a young barrister practising in Bow Street magistrates court—I could not get a better brief anywhere else—the police officers just rolled up with their note books and justice was swift and usually fair. [Interruption.] Yes, it generally was fair—if they weren't guilty of that, they were guilty of something else. Ever since then, every

single Home Secretary has tried to cut police bureaucracy, but it now takes up to a third of police time. Can we just cut through this matter and repeal the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, which started the rot?

Mrs May: I am not about to repeal the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, which contains some important safeguards in respect of the way in which the police should conduct investigations. However, my hon. Friend's overall point about the necessity of ensuring that the criminal justice system works smoothly, efficiently and effectively, not just for those who are investigating and prosecuting but for those who are brought to trial, is important. That is why the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice continue to do such work. The Minister for Policing, Criminal Justice and Victims is continuing the work that was started by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green) when he was in that position to reduce the paperwork in the criminal justice system as much as possible so that we get the police doing what everybody wants them to be doing, which is preventing and cutting crime.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): In her reply to the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), the Home Secretary said that the reduction in bureaucracy was the equivalent of 2,100 additional bobbies on the beat. How many bobbies were on the beat a couple of years ago and how many are on the beat now?

Mrs May: The purport of the hon. Lady's question is that there has been a cut in the number of police officers over the past few years as police forces have dealt with the changes in their budgets. I am pleased to say that, despite that, the proportion of police officers on the front line has gone up over the past few years.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): A couple of years ago, I was stopped for the fairly inoffensive crime of failing to clear the frost from my windscreen. The police officer who stopped me inquired what my ethnic origin was. When I asked why he wanted to know, he said that it was demanded by the Home Office. Will the

Home Secretary therefore tell me whether there are officials locally, regionally or in the Home Office itself collecting that information? Would those people not be better deployed catching criminals?

Mrs May: There are a number of circumstances in which police officers ask for the ethnicity of the individual they have stopped—for example, they record that information for stop-and-search. That is why we know that in stop-and-search cases, people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are six times more likely to be stopped than young white males. Such information has enabled us to bring about changes in stop-and-search, which I believe are absolutely right, to ensure that nobody on the streets of this country is stopped simply because of the colour of their skin.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): The Home Secretary talks about cutting bureaucracy, but does she seriously think that spending £50 million a year on the salaries and offices of police and crime commissioners is money well spent?

Mrs May: It was absolutely right to introduce police and crime commissioners. They have introduced a degree of local accountability into local policing that was not there when the police authorities were in place. I understand that the hon. Gentleman's party thinks that at local borough command level, police borough commanders should be jointly appointed by the local council and the chief constable. That would be a wrong move; it would mean the politicisation of the police, and I suggest that his party think again.

Child Abuse Inquiries

2. **Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab):** What progress her Department has made on setting up its recently announced inquiries into child abuse; and if she will make a statement. [905424]

12. **Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab):** What progress her Department has made on setting up its recently announced inquiries into child abuse; and if she will make a statement. [905435]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): On 5 September I announced Fiona Woolf as the chair of the inquiry. Ben Emmerson QC was announced as counsel to the inquiry, and Graham Wilmer and Barbara Hearn were announced as panel members. The remaining panel members and terms of reference will be announced shortly. It is important that we get this right to ensure that the inquiry is able to challenge individuals and institutions, get to the bottom of these abhorrent crimes, and ensure that they do not happen again.

Nia Griffith: The number of people barred from working with children has fallen from 11,000 in 2011 to 2,660 in 2013, which means that people convicted of serious offences against children are no longer automatically barred from working with children. Will the Home Secretary consider whether the inquiry will examine that issue, together with current child protection practices?

Mrs May: The inquiry was set up in recognition of the number of cases, both historical—and, as we have increasingly seen—ongoing, that have taken place and that have suggested significant failings and problems in certain institutional and other environments where people have frankly not been abiding by their duty of care to children. The inquiry will consider those circumstances and tell us what we need to do in future to ensure that state and non-state institutional environments maintain their duty of care to children so that these horrific crimes are not committed in the future.

Roberta Blackman-Woods: Will the Home Secretary explain why the inquiries will not consider the outcome of the forthcoming serious case reviews or the impact of cuts to local authority children's services, especially as the severity of cuts in some areas will make it impossible for local authorities to take on board the inquiries' recommendations when they eventually arrive?

Mrs May: When the terms of reference for the inquiries are published the hon. Lady will see the nature of work they will do. As I explained in response to the hon. Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith), the inquiry was set up against the background of concern about the number of historical cases of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children that we have seen. Subsequently, a number of other cases have come forward that show that sadly this is not simply a crime that occurred in the past but something that occurs in the present. It is necessary to ensure that institutions are abiding by their duty of care to children. That will involve identifying the faults and what happened in those institutional environments, and considering what lessons need to be learned from that.

Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con): Communications data are vital in child abuse and other serious cases. In a recent speech, the Home Secretary said that in a six-month period the National Crime Agency had to drop at least 20 cases in which a child was judged to be at risk of imminent harm, and the Met also had to drop 12 cases in three months. Meanwhile, the Deputy Prime Minister has said that the only issue that needs resolution is the availability of unique IP addresses. Will the Home Secretary say whether that is correct?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend raises an important point about communications data. He sat on the cross-party Joint Committee that scrutinised the draft Communications Data Bill and accepted that there was a need for legislation to improve our ability to access communications data. He mentioned the cases that I have cited recently, and among them are cases that are not just about IP address but about our inability to obtain communications data, because communications service providers based overseas do not retain the right data.

Of the NCA cases I mentioned, two were discontinued because of that problem, one of which was a case involving the distribution of indecent images of children. Of the Met cases that my hon. Friend mentioned, six were discontinued because of the lack of retained data, and of those one involved posting indecent images, one related to child protection in which there was a threat to life, and one was a kidnap where there was a threat to life. The Communications Data Bill would have addressed that problem. Therefore, while we are taking action to

address the problem caused by IP addresses, it is not true that the cases I mentioned in my speech were related simply to IP addresses. Even for cases that were discontinued because of the lack of a unique IP address, had there been such a unique IP address it would not mean that the case could have been continued—the scale of the problem probably means that no communications data would have been available for that IP address anyway.

I say to Members across the House and to our coalition colleagues that if they are serious about giving the police the capabilities they need to keep us safe, protect children and save lives, they should reconsider their position on the Communications Data Bill.

Mr Speaker: Order. We are all now better informed but at somewhat of a cost. I am keen to accommodate the interests of Back Benchers, and I know the Home Secretary will be profoundly sympathetic to that interest.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): When the terms of reference are published, could they be as wide as possible? Also, the Home Secretary will know that I have pushed for some time to try to increase the tariffs for those who abuse children and are involved in paedophilia.

Mrs May: I thank my hon. Friend. We aim to ensure that the terms of reference are able to cover everything they need to cover, but I am sure all Members of this House will recognise that we want this not to be an inquiry that just goes on ad infinitum, should the terms of reference be too wide. We need to have resolution of these issues: we need to identify the problems and we need to be able deal with them. I note the point he has made, and I know he has championed this particular cause for some time.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Will the Secretary of State listen to the innocent voices of the victims of the Kincora boys' home in Belfast, where children were abused systematically? Will they be included in the national investigation, as is their desire?

Mrs May: I have received representations in relation to the Kincora inquiry. Sir Anthony Hart is undertaking an inquiry. At the moment, I am looking at the best means of ensuring that the most thorough investigation and inquiry possible relating to the events at Kincora take place. I have not yet come to a decision on whether to bring that within this inquiry, or to make it possible for it to happen within the Kincora inquiry in Northern Ireland, but the aim of us all is the same: to make sure that the issue is investigated thoroughly and that all the elements that need to be addressed are addressed.

Dr Julian Huppert (Cambridge) (LD): The Home Secretary will be aware of the failure of the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre in the Project Spade case, where 2,500 names of people buying child abuse images were passed on by the Canadian police but not looked at. A doctor at Addenbrooke's hospital in Cambridge was abusing children and was on that list. Had CEOP acted with the powers it already had, a number of children would not have been abused. What does the Home Secretary have to say to those children about the failure of the police on her watch?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise a level of concern about the action taken in relation to Project Spade and the information that CEOP received from the Toronto police. The NCA has referred the matter to the Independent Police Complaints Commission. It is looking into this issue and I am sure that he, like me, will await with interest the outcome of its inquiry.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The NCA knows of 20,000 people it thinks are accessing online child abuse, but it lacks the resources to follow that up. Many police forces also have a huge backlog, according to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. The hon. Member for Cambridge (Dr Huppert) has just referred to the case of the Cambridge doctor who was also a deputy head, who had 15 months more in the classroom before conviction because information was not passed on. We currently have separate lists of people suspected of posing a risk to children and of those working closely with children. Will the Home Secretary explain why those lists are not being cross-checked, and why last year the police referred only 108 cases to the Disclosure and Barring Service of people they were concerned about?

Mrs May: The hon. Lady cites a number of figures in her question. It is right that a significant number of people have been identified as accessing child abuse images. I think it is true to say—I have made this point more generally in the past—that we are not yet fully aware of the scope of the nature of the problem of child abuse, either in terms of people accessing images or of child abuse that takes place, and the implications. The NCA has recently made a significant number of arrests of individuals in relation to Operation Notarise. It operates on a very clear basis to ensure that it is dealing first with those cases where it considers there is particular harm to children. It is right that it should prioritise in that way, but this issue is wider than suggested by the sort of figures she cites and wider than the response from the NCA.

Rape Cases (Cheshire)

3. **Helen Jones** (Warrington North) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the findings of the report by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary on Cheshire police's handling of rape cases; and if she will make a statement. [905425]

The Minister for Policing, Criminal Justice and Victims (Mike Penning): This is my first opportunity as the new Policing Minister to say how proud I am to be at the Dispatch Box. However, I am not proud of what was disclosed by the investigation in Cheshire.

The Government are committed to improving the police response to rape, and it is vital that police-recorded crime statistics are robust, especially for the victims of such abhorrent offences. That is why the Home Secretary asked Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary to carry out an all-force investigation of crime recording practices—this is how the Cheshire situation arose—and I expect the police and crime commissioner and chief constable to use the findings to improve the service to victims in Cheshire.

Helen Jones: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply, but the chief constable was quoted as saying:

“HMIC questioned the administration process of recording the crimes at fault, not the investigations into them.”

Does that not show that he has failed to grasp the seriousness of the situation? With a chief constable who is so complacent and a police and crime commissioner who has been unusually silent on this issue, how can any woman in Cheshire have the confidence that if she reports a rape it will be treated seriously?

Mike Penning: No matter what type of rape it is—whether it is rape against a woman or against a male—it must be treated seriously across the country as a whole. The hon. Lady says the police and crime commissioner is being quiet, but this is a quote from him:

“I am committed to ensuring that victims are at the heart of policing”

in Cheshire. I expect him to adhere to that.

Caroline Dineneage (Gosport) (Con): Horrifyingly, one in five women will experience sexual violence during their life, yet only 15% of the victims of the most serious sexual offences report those crimes to the police. Does the Minister agree that if more victims are to come forward, the police up and down the country need to send out a robust message that these crimes will be taken very seriously?

Mike Penning: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. When people come forward, they must have confidence in the force and the police officers who are dealing with their complaint. I hope that that is why more people are having the confidence to come forward these days.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): Police performance in dealing with crimes of rape is getting worse, not better. Last year there were 4,000 more crimes recorded in the UK, but on this Government's watch since 2010 we have seen hundreds fewer prosecutions and convictions, and there is a postcode lottery around the country. In Suffolk, for example, we know from freedom of information requests that the police have no-crime more reports of rape than detected rapists. In Lincolnshire, the no-crime rate for rape is over 20%. Does the Minister agree that this is unacceptable, and will he now back Labour's plan for a commissioner on domestic and sexual violence to raise standards across every police force in this country?

Mike Penning: I congratulate the hon. Lady on what I think is her first outing at the Dispatch Box with her new portfolio, but I can agree with hardly anything she said, apart from that we must take rape very, very seriously, whether it be against women or men, and we want more and more people to come forward and to be confident that the investigation will be robust. That is what we need, not running down the police time and again.

Stephen Mosley (City of Chester) (Con): Working with the Cheshire rape and sexual abuse support centre and St Mary's sexual abuse referral centre, Cheshire police have established a dedicated rape unit. Does my right hon. Friend agree that work between the police

and third sector organisations is one way of improving the support available to rape victims and helping to encourage them to come forward and report the crime?

Mike Penning: This cannot be done by the police alone; they have to work with partners across communities. I shall be visiting this particular part of the world in the near future, and I hope to look at this scheme so that we can possibly see how it can be done elsewhere in the country.

Police Emergency Response Times

4. **Steve Rotheram** (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): What steps she is taking to improve police emergency response times. [905426]

The Minister for Policing, Criminal Justice and Victims (Mike Penning): This Government's reforms have freed forces from a top-down approach and placed more power in the hands of local people through police and crime commissioners, who can set local priorities and decide how to respond to emergency calls.

Steve Rotheram: We said that the 20% cut to police budgets would affect front-line services, but the Secretary of State disagreed. Does she accept that the increase in police response times could be the difference between catching the criminal in the act or someone getting away—and in extreme cases, the difference between life and death?

Mike Penning: Coming from a blue-line emergency service background, I probably know more about response times than most people in this House. That is not being patronising; it is being absolutely honest. I think there are ways in which we can improve response times, particularly if we get more of the police cars out of the stations where they tend to spend more time—that is, getting police officers away from bureaucracy—but crime has fallen under this Government, and that is something Opposition Members cannot get away from.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): There is considerable concern in my Cleethorpes constituency that response times may be affected by a proposal to close the Grimsby control room. Will the Minister meet me to discuss the impact of this?

Mike Penning: I shall be in my hon. Friend's constituency in the near future, so rather than him coming to me, I shall come to him.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): When he did not turn up for work on Friday 22 August, my late constituent Mr Joseph McIntosh's employers alerted Merseyside police, as they were concerned about his well-being. The police called at his home and, finding him to be in need of medical attention, called an ambulance. When no ambulance had turned up after an hour, the police took Mr McIntosh to the local hospital themselves. Sadly, he later passed away. I have raised this matter with the Health Secretary, who accepts that North West Ambulance Service's response did not meet the required standard. The chief constable of Merseyside police has referred the matter to the Independent Police Complaints Commission. As the Merseyside police and

crime commissioner, Jane Kennedy, has said, the only body being held to account for Mr McIntosh's sad death so far is Merseyside police. Will the Minister make it clear that the police are neither trained nor equipped to act as a substitute for the ambulance service?

Mike Penning: The police are no substitute for the ambulance service or for any other emergency service. The Health Secretary has explained exactly what the situation is, and the matter will be looked into. However, I was out on patrol in Holborn in north London recently when someone with a mental health illness was reported to the police. The police could have arrested that gentleman for a public order offence, or taken him to the hospital where he could receive the care that he needed. He went to the hospital with the police.

Mr Speaker: We are making rather leisurely progress today, and we need to speed up if I am to get to colleagues further down the Order Paper.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Hear, hear!

Mr Speaker: I have the hon. Gentleman's interests in mind; he need not worry.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): The first duty of any Government is the safety and security of their citizens, but with the Home Secretary having imposed the biggest cuts to the police service of any country in Europe, including a cut of 8,000 from response alone, the police are taking up to 30% longer to respond to calls for help. Does the Home Secretary accept that she is failing in her duty and that, as a result of her swingeing cuts to our police service, sometimes desperate citizens dial 999 only to be let down in their hour of need?

Mike Penning: I have great respect for the hon. Gentleman, and outside the Chamber we are actually quite good friends. I am sure he would agree that the police service do an absolutely fantastic job. There has been a reduction in police officers, and there has been a reduction in crime. Two thousand police officers who were in back-office roles are now in front-line roles, and that is what we want to see, along with crime coming down.

Serious and Organised Crime

5. **Nigel Adams** (Selby and Ainsty) (Con): What steps she is taking to tackle serious and organised crime. [905427]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Karen Bradley): Serious and organised crime is a threat to the UK's national security, and damages communities across the country. The Government are committed to tackling this threat. One year ago, we launched a comprehensive new strategy to tackle serious and organised crime and a powerful new crime-fighting organisation—the National Crime Agency—which is already making a difference. We are driving forward reform, including through the Serious Crime Bill, which will strengthen our ability to disrupt and prosecute serious and organised criminals.

Nigel Adams: I am grateful to the Minister for her reply. Two families in Selby have lost their entire life savings as a result of a sophisticated organised phone-fraud scam. In both cases, the victims quickly realised that they were being scammed and alerted their banks and the police. After a bit of cajoling and arm-twisting, some of the banks involved have reacted well and returned the money, but the Yorkshire building society and the TSB have so far not been as helpful as they perhaps could have been. What action does the Minister plan to take to protect our constituents from these fraudsters? Will she meet me to discuss a way forward?

Karen Bradley: My hon. Friend raises an important point. This Government take economic and financial crime extremely seriously, which is why the Home Secretary set up the economic crime command within the National Crime Agency and why she and I have been working with banks and other financial institutions to ensure that we can give everyone security in their financial operations. I congratulate my hon. Friend on his great work as a constituency MP and on achieving the recovery of money for one of his constituents. I would be more than happy to meet him to discuss what else we can do.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): If the Minister is to tackle serious and organised crime, will she consider looking at the competency and fitness for purpose of the Serious Fraud Office? Its recent history does not fill many of us with confidence. The fact of the matter is that, because of a lack of resources, the SFO has increasingly had to listen to the big accountancy firms, which is leading us into terribly dangerous waters.

Karen Bradley: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments and assure him that, through the inter-ministerial anti-corruption group, we are looking carefully at how we can tackle all economic crime in the most effective way.

Border Controls

6. **Ian Austin** (Dudley North) (Lab): What recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of UK border controls. [905428]

The Minister for Security and Immigration (James Brokenshire): Britain's border controls are among the toughest in the world. All passengers arriving at passport control are checked carefully before they are allowed to enter the country. Last year, 17,000 people were refused entry and more than 3,000 people were arrested as a result of border system alerts. Substantial quantities of illegal goods and cash have also been seized.

Ian Austin: The Government have completely failed to meet their immigration target; despite what the Minister says, the number of people who have been stopped at the border and sent home has actually fallen by 45%. Why will the Government not bring in checks to count people in and out? Why will they not bring back fingerprint checks for illegal migrants at Calais? Why do the Government not stop people claiming benefits for children abroad? Why will they not change the law to make it easier to deport EU criminals for a first offence when they first arrive?

Mr Speaker: Order. Even though I have known the hon. Gentleman for 30 years, since university, may I say that it is the height of cheekiness on his part to try a sort of fourfold question, to which the Minister is somehow expected to provide a brief and pithy answer?

James Brokenshire: I shall certainly try to be pithy, as you request, Mr Speaker. I say to the hon. Gentleman that we are introducing exit checks from next spring and they will do what he has sought, which is counting people out—the previous Government got rid of that. On benefit reforms, I hope he will welcome the fact that we have introduced changes to ensure that people from the EU cannot claim benefits until they have been here for three months and that then that benefit entitlement is limited to six months, reducing to three months next month.

Mr James Clappison (Hertsmere) (Con): Will the Minister confirm that, notwithstanding the socialist taxation policies of its Government, which some in this place would seek to introduce here, France remains a safe and wonderfully civilised country, as no doubt are the many other countries that have been crossed by those who are camped at Calais and seeking to launch asylum applications in this country?

James Brokenshire: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the Dublin regulations and the fact that we do return people to other EU member states, because it is right that people seeking humanitarian protection should claim it in the first country in which they arrive. Obviously, we are stepping up security around Calais, and he will be aware of the announcement the Home Secretary made last month about the work we are doing with the French Government to ensure greater security around the port of Calais. Indeed, we are working very closely with the French authorities.

Passport Office

7. Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con): What steps she is taking to improve the service offered by the Passport Office. [905429]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): I have today issued a written ministerial statement which confirms that, with effect from 1 October 2014, Her Majesty's Passport Office ceased to be an Executive agency of the Home Office and now reports directly to Ministers. That follows a review I commissioned and it has been done so that there will be more effective oversight, robust forecasting and the right level of trained staff to ensure that families and business people do not face the same problems as this year.

Gordon Henderson: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for her answer. Like many other right hon. and hon. Members, I received a large number of complaints during the summer about delays in obtaining passports. My staff found the experience of using the MPs hotline very frustrating. They often had to wait ages for the phone to be answered and when they did get through the person who answered said that they would ring back and never did. Will she take steps to ensure that if there

is to be an MPs hotline, the staff answering the phones are properly trained to respond in a timely and helpful fashion?

Mrs May: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that point. Following my statement to the House in June, we introduced more staff and more telephone lines for the MPs hotline. A number of MPs were complimentary about the service they received, but I recognise that he had a different experience. We want to make sure we learn all the lessons necessary for the future, and we will be reviewing the service.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I warmly commend the Home Secretary for her decision to abolish the agency status of the Passport Office, which occurred 10 days after it was recommended by the Home Affairs Committee—we look forward to her accepting our recommendations on other matters as promptly. Last month, however, it emerged that officials at the Passport Office received £674,000 in bonuses, whereas citizens had to pay £103 for a fast-track passport before she allowed that process to go away free. Will she stop those bonuses and instead give the money to those who suffered so badly over the summer?

Mrs May: As I pointed out in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Gordon Henderson), I did commission a review of the status of the Passport Office. I think that the report of the right hon. Gentleman's Home Affairs Committee came in between considering the response to that review and the decision, but we are at one in thinking that the correct action was taken. A number of people did receive some financial help. Following my statement to the House, people whose holidays were in danger of being cancelled as a result of the problems at the Passport Office received free upgrades in relation to the handling of their passports. It is important that we ensure that the forecasting at the Passport Office is right and that the office is able to deal with people in an appropriate time scale, so that we do not see a repeat of the problems that we had this summer.

Asylum and Indefinite Leave to Remain (Illegal Immigrants)

8. Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): How many illegal immigrants have been granted asylum or indefinite leave to remain in the UK since 2010. [905430]

The Minister for Security and Immigration (James Brokenshire): We grant humanitarian protection only when it is genuinely needed. Sometimes that includes people who have overstayed their permission to be here, or who have entered the country without permission. Since 2010, 18,000 such people have been granted asylum.

Philip Davies: Surely anybody who enters this country illegally should not be able to remain here with indefinite leave or be granted asylum, but should go through the proper processes. Will the Minister explain how many such cases have occurred as a result of the Human Rights Act, dating back to 1997? Is it not the case that that Act, rather than giving any meaningful rights to

decent, law-abiding citizens in this country, is a charter for illegal immigrants? Is it not time that that wretched Human Rights Act was scrapped?

James Brokenshire: I say to my hon. Friend that it is right that appropriate process is undertaken, but that this country is proud of its record of providing humanitarian protection for those in genuine need. He makes an important point about the Human Rights Act. As he will know, the Prime Minister and others have underlined our commitment to see that Act reformed so that actions and matters are dealt with in our courts rather than elsewhere.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): As the Minister will know, asylum seekers who successfully achieve refugee status have a 28-day move-on period before asylum support is withdrawn, in which to sort out a job, housing, benefits and so on. A recent report by the British Red Cross has, however, highlighted the fact that many successful claimants of refugee status find 28 days to be insufficient time in which to get all those arrangements in place. What discussions is the Minister having with other Departments, specifically the Department for Work and Pensions, to improve procedure so that such refugees are not left destitute?

James Brokenshire: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for highlighting the issue of ensuring a smooth transition for genuine claimants who have been granted asylum. We keep such issues under careful review. Under the new contract put in place on 1 April, Migrant Help provides appropriate support and advice.

Nicola Blackwood (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): Detention plays a necessary role in our immigration asylum system, but detention centres must be sensitively designed and appropriate to their location. Plans to double the size of Campsfield House are neither and, as such, they are unsurprisingly opposed by both the independent monitoring board and the people of Kidlington. Will the Minister reconsider his plans as they will not work for the detainees or for the local community?

James Brokenshire: I certainly recognise the local issues that my hon. Friend has highlighted and which she and I have discussed outside this House. It is right that the Government have the appropriate immigration detention facilities in place in the right parts of the country, and that is part of the overall reforms that we are putting in place to secure and achieve that. None the less, I note her comments and we will continue to reflect on them.

Cybercrime

9. **Julie Hilling (Bolton West) (Lab):** What steps her Department is taking to prevent cybercrime. [905431]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Karen Bradley): The national cyber-security programme provides £860 million over five years to transform our response to cyber threats. We are strengthening law enforcement capabilities through the National Crime Agency's national cybercrime unit and

establishing regional organised crime unit cyber-teams. We fund the "Cyber Streetwise" campaign, which provides advice on safer online behaviour.

Julie Hilling: My constituent, Sandra Moss, lost £6,000 when she bought a non-existent car from a non-existent garage on eBay. She got no help from anybody, apart from being referred to an online fraud number through which she could not speak to the police or find out what was happening. After intervention from me, action is now being taken but she is unlikely to see her money again. Does the Minister agree that the system and staffing of fraud investigation are inadequate? What will she do to fix that?

Karen Bradley: I sympathise with the hon. Lady's constituent, and I am sure that we would all go out of our way to help a constituent who suffered a similar loss. City of London police have taken charge of Action Fraud and I urge the hon. Lady to ensure that in future all instances of cybercrime are reported to Action Fraud, which is a central hub to ensure that we get the right level of information and the right level of reporting. We are working with the College of Policing to ensure that front-line police officers have the right training, which is also vital.

Asylum Regulations

10. **Mr Henry Bellingham (North West Norfolk) (Con):** What plans she has to tighten up asylum regulations; and if she will make a statement. [905433]

The Minister for Security and Immigration (James Brokenshire): The UK has a proud record of providing protection to those who need it, but we also take firm action to prevent illegal migration and deter abuse. We are addressing asylum shopping by sending back those who should have claimed asylum in another EU country, we are working with France to strengthen border security at Calais and we are working internationally to stem the flow of illegal migrants into and across Europe.

Mr Bellingham: Further to the question that will be asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone), does the Minister agree that if all those asylum seekers claimed asylum in the first European country they came to it would solve the crisis in Calais? How many asylum seekers who have come from Calais and France have been returned to France or to other countries?

James Brokenshire: I recognise my hon. Friend's important point. Asylum seekers cannot travel through safe countries illegally and then choose where to claim asylum. If we have evidence that an asylum seeker has travelled through another European country before claiming asylum in the UK, we will seek to return them under the Dublin regulations. Since those regulations came into force in 2003, 12,000 asylum claimants have been so returned.

Immigration

11. **Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con):** What assessment she has made of the reasons for the rise in immigration from (a) EU and (b) non-EU countries between March 2013 and March 2014. [905434]

The Minister for Security and Immigration (James Brokenshire): Our reforms have cut net migration by a quarter since the peak under the previous Government and have led to net migration from outside the EU falling to levels close to those last seen in the 1990s. However, the latest statistics from the Office for National Statistics show a rise in long-term immigration from EU nationals coming to the UK for work-related reasons.

Mr Turner: Will my hon. Friend acknowledge that all immigrants to the United Kingdom, from countries within and outside the EU, must get approval in future from the Home Secretary? Anything else will cause us to be regarded as a soft touch.

James Brokenshire: I underline the reforms that the Government have made, which have been effective in cutting net migration from outside the EU. My hon. Friend raises the issue of EU migration and free movement. It is absolutely right that the Prime Minister has underlined the need for reform of free movement, and how, if we are elected as the next Government, that will be at the heart of our renegotiation with the EU.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): The Minister said in an article on 6 September—he has said again just now—that the Government have cut net migration by a quarter. Has he had a chance to see the letter to me, dated 9 October, from the chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Andrew Dilnot? It says that net migration was 244,000 in June 2010 and is now, four years later, 243,000—just 1,000 lower. Will he explain to the House how he came to that conclusion and, while he is at it, does he expect to meet the Government's manifesto commitment made at the last election?

James Brokenshire: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for highlighting the poor record of the previous Labour Government. On their watch, 2.5 million people were allowed to come into this country. It is absolutely right that our focus remains on returning net migration to sustainable levels, from the hundreds of thousands to the tens of thousands. I know that the shadow Home Secretary has said that she wants to talk more about immigration, but the Labour party's record says it all.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Our membership of the European Union brings with it a right to free movement into this country for people from other EU countries, and that brings with it a feeling that our friends in Commonwealth countries are being completely discriminated against. Is not the only solution to that problem for us to leave the European Union and be free of these rules once and for all?

James Brokenshire: My hon. Friend makes his clear point, which he has made consistently over the years. He is right that to say we need to focus on net migration from outside the EU, as well as the implications of free movement. That is why we made the changes that we have made to reform benefit entitlements. I say again that free movement is absolutely one of the aspects on which we will want renegotiation to take place.

Islamic Extremism on the Internet

13. **Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con):** What steps she is taking to tackle Islamic extremism on the internet; and if she will make a statement. [905436]

The Minister for Security and Immigration (James Brokenshire): The Home Office works with the internet industry and police to restrict access to terrorist and extremist material. Since 2013, over 32,000 pieces of unlawful terrorist-related content have been removed from the internet. We are also working with industry to build the capacity and skills of civil society groups to counter online extremism.

Michael Fabricant: My hon. Friend will know that the servers that provide this information and encourage people to become jihadist extremists originate abroad, often in countries over which we have no control, so could he explain in a little more detail precisely how we can stop those servers producing such websites?

James Brokenshire: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The counter-terrorism internet referral unit, which is at the heart of our response in taking down these unlawful websites, is working with the providers that are obviously hosting this material, and there are successes in taking them down. But he highlights the need for more to be done. That is what we are doing through discussions with the internet service providers and other EU partners as well, which is what I was in Luxembourg to do last week.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): Many in Bristol, particularly within the Somali community, are concerned about the whereabouts of 15-year-old Yusra Hussien, who has disappeared and is rumoured to be on her way to Syria to try to join the jihadis. Her aunt has blamed internet grooming for her disappearance. What is the Minister doing to protect young people from that risk?

James Brokenshire: Obviously, we recognise the pressures and dangers that are on the internet. That is precisely why the counter-terrorism internet referral unit is doing the work that it is doing to prevent material from being there and it is working with the industry to filter out much of this material, which may not cross an illegality threshold. The hon. Lady highlights the broader need to work with families and communities, which we are doing, so that if people have concerns about an individual who may be at risk, they can come forward to report that, knowing that their concerns will be appropriately considered and support can be provided to help prevent that from happening.

Terrorist Threat

14. **Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con):** What steps she is taking to protect the UK from the threat posed by terrorism. [905437]

15. **Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con):** What steps she is taking to protect the UK from the threat posed by terrorism. [905438]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear in his statement to the House on 1 September, we will be bringing forward further powers to disrupt terrorists, particularly those who travel abroad to fight in Syria and Iraq. We have already introduced a range of measures to protect the UK from terrorism, including seizing passports, barring foreign nationals

suspected of terrorism from re-entering the UK, and enacting recent emergency legislation to safeguard the retention of communications data.

Jack Lopresti: Will my right hon. Friend inform the House about her work with the aviation sector in particular to ensure that it complies with our aviation security measures, such as advance passenger information, no-fly lists and security screens?

Mrs May: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for alerting the House to the important relationship that the Government have with the aviation sector in relation to aviation security. We have done a lot of work with this sector over the years. We have taken the decision now that we need to bring some capabilities into a legislative framework, but we continue to talk to the industry and work with its members on the best possible means of ensuring that we can provide the greatest security for people travelling by air.

Mr Walker: Hundreds of thousands of British Muslims have come together to say that the actions of ISIL and other terrorist organisations have nothing to do with the peaceful and dignified religion that they follow. What message does the Home Secretary have for those British Muslims, including many in Worcester, who have stood up and said, “Not in my name”?

Mrs May: Certainly, I and, I am sure, the whole House would want to congratulate those British Muslims in Worcester and across the whole country who have stood up and said that the actions of ISIL and, indeed, other terrorist organisations are not taking place in their name. Indeed, across the country, it has been good to see increasing numbers of Muslims coming forward with that message. I was very pleased recently to share with a number of Muslim women from across the UK the inspired programme of #makingastand, saying that this is, again, “Not in our name.”

Topical Questions

T1. [905388] **Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): ISIL’s brutal and barbaric acts continue to demonstrate the very deadly threat that we face from terrorism. More than 500 British citizens have travelled to fight in Syria and Iraq. The Government have already taken action to combat these threats, as I have just outlined, by toughening the royal prerogative power that allows us to remove the passports of British citizens who want to travel abroad to engage in terrorism. We have used it to stop people travelling to Syria in over 20 cases. So far this year, just over 100 people have been arrested for Syria-related offences, 24 have been charged and five have been successfully prosecuted. We must do more. That is why we have announced plans to introduce legislation to deal with this increased terrorist threat, and we will engage in cross-party consultation on these proposals and intend to introduce this urgently needed legislation at the earliest opportunity.

Paul Flynn: The police and courts recommended that an asylum seeker and London gang leader should be deported because he represented a danger to the public, especially to young children. He was not deported; he was relocated to my constituency, where in the summer he was arrested in possession of an illegal drug in a children’s play area. Is the Government’s failure to deport Mr Joland Giwa typical of their immigration policy, which is boastful in promises but impotent in action?

Mrs May: That is a bit rich coming from an Opposition Member. [Interruption.] I will answer the question. This Government have tightened up and improved our ability to deport people from this country, but there remain certain countries where it is difficult for us to deport. That is why we have continued the programme of deportation with assurances from a number of countries, to enhance our ability to deport people. There are still a number of countries where it is not possible for us to deport people, but we continue to work on that to make sure that we can do so in the future.

T3. [905390] **Mr Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): Are the Home Secretary and her team aware that crime in Norfolk has fallen by a welcome 11% since 2010? Will she and her team join me in congratulating the Norfolk constabulary on the part that it has played in this achievement? Will the Policing Minister find time to come up to Norfolk to build on this very good work?

The Minister for Policing, Criminal Justice and Victims (Mike Penning): Mr Speaker, you will be pleased to know that I will visit Norfolk in the very near future. Even though there has been a small reduction in the number of police in Norfolk, there has been an 11% reduction in crime, and I congratulate the chief constable and the police and crime commissioner.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Home Secretary and the whole House will want to express to the families of David Haines and Alan Henning our thoughts and prayers. Both men were helping innocent people caught up in conflict, and that is how we will remember them.

ISIL’s actions are barbaric—killing and torturing anyone who gets in its way—and the Home Secretary is rightly concerned about British citizens who are going to fight, but may I ask her about those who are returning? Will she tell the House whether the Government agree with reports that between 200 and 300 people have returned from fighting to Britain and whether the police and Security Service believe that they know who and where those people are? She referred to only 24 people being charged. Will she tell the House whether any of the others are now subject to terrorism prevention and investigation measures and what proportion of them are engaged in the Channel deradicalisation programme?

Mrs May: I echo the right hon. Lady’s comments about the absolutely brutal beheadings of David Haines and Alan Henning and, of course, of James Foley and Steven Sotloff, the two Americans who have been beheaded by ISIL. Our thoughts are with all their friends and families at this very difficult time.

The Government are, as the right hon. Lady knows and as I have just said in a previous answer, looking at a number of extra powers that we can introduce to deal with these issues and with those who are returning, as well as preventing people from going to Syria in the first place. Some people have returned from Syria—not all of them will have been involved in fighting, of course—and the Security Service and our police do everything that they can to ensure that they maintain the safety and security of citizens here in the United Kingdom. They do an excellent job, day in and day out.

Yvette Cooper: I thank the Home Secretary for her answer, but it would be helpful to have more information, as and when she is able to give it, about the scale of the problem and what is being done. More action is needed against those returning. Has she looked at making it a requirement that those returning from fighting engage with the Channel deradicalisation programme? When TPIMs were introduced, she took the decision, which we opposed, to remove relocation powers; can she confirm that she will reintroduce those powers at the earliest opportunity—before Christmas—in the legislation that she plans to bring forward?

Mrs May: We are looking at a number of ways of dealing appropriately with those returning from Syria. Part of that will be through measures brought forward in the legislation to which I referred. As the Prime Minister made clear in the House, we are looking at the question of relocation, and at exclusion zones and the extent to which they can be used. We will put Channel and Prevent on to a statutory footing, but it is important that we look on a case-by-case basis at what action is appropriate for returning individuals, rather than assuming that one route is always the right way of dealing with them. Of course, in the consultation on the legislation, the right hon. Lady will be appropriately briefed, on Privy Counsellor terms.

T6. [905393] **Damian Collins** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): Recently, 130 people who are in the asylum system were placed in temporary hotel accommodation in Folkestone, with little or no notice for the local authority. Will the Minister tell me what the Home Office is doing to review the situation to make sure that this type of temporary accommodation is not used in future?

The Minister for Security and Immigration (James Brokenshire): We have certainly made it clear to our contractual providers that the use of hotels is only ever acceptable as a short-term measure. The Home Office does not decide which hotels providers use, but we are clear that asylum seeker accommodation must comply with strict contractual standards relating to safety and habitability. We are working with our providers to increase the range of provision available. The hotel in my hon. Friend's constituency to which he referred was vacated last week.

T2. [905389] **Nia Griffith** (Llanelli) (Lab): A growing number of charities and businesses are echoing Labour's call for the Modern Slavery Bill to include measures relating to the supply chains of large companies operating in the UK. Charities say that that will change corporate behaviour, and British businesses

want legislation to create a level playing field, so will the Home Secretary tell us why she is resisting these calls?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Karen Bradley): The hon. Lady has perhaps not had a chance to see a copy of the letter that I put in the House of Commons Library, in which I confirmed that the Government will bring forward a world-leading provision in the Modern Slavery Bill to ensure that we tackle slavery within supply chains.

T7. [905394] **Mr Robin Walker** (Worcester) (Con): I welcome the new Policing Minister to his post. Will he join me in praising the proactive work of the West Mercia police, who, in Operation Fuchsia, have taken the fight against burglary and drug dealing into the homes of the perpetrators?

Mike Penning: I congratulate West Mercia police, not only in general, but on their recent operation, in which I believe they used chainsaws to get into certain premises and reach villains who had thought that they could get away with it. Also, I praise the West Mercia police for a 17% reduction in crime since 2010, and a 3% reduction this year alone.

T4. [905391] **Mr Stephen Hepburn** (Jarrow) (Lab): Northumbria police's budget has been cut by a third, which has meant that violent crime in my area has increased by 25%. When will the Government get their priorities right and treat crime as an important issue in this country, rather than giving filthy rich tax cuts to companies?

Mike Penning: Crime in my hon. Friend's constituency—he is a friend of mine—has gone down by 19% since 2010.

T8. [905395] **Mr Andrew Robathan** (South Leicestershire) (Con): My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will know that in one part of the United Kingdom, namely Northern Ireland, the writ of the National Crime Agency does not run. What discussions has she had with the Minister of Justice and others in the Northern Ireland Executive about extending the NCA to Northern Ireland? In particular, will she speculate on the opposition from, for instance, Sinn Féin, to cracking down on serious crime?

Karen Bradley: The restrictions on NCA activities in Northern Ireland clearly create a major gap in tackling serious and organised crime, put additional pressures on the Police Service of Northern Ireland and inhibit the recovery of criminal assets. Organised crime groups on both sides of the Irish sea cannot be properly investigated. We are committed to resolving this fully, and fully support the proposals that Northern Ireland's Justice Minister has put to the political parties—proposals that provide the transparent accountability that they seek.

T5. [905392] **Karl Turner** (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): The Government's deportation of fewer foreign criminals than the previous Labour Government has nothing to do with the Human Rights Act but everything to do with the Home Office issuing fewer deportation

notices. When will the Home Secretary stop blaming the law and start deporting more foreign criminals?

James Brokenshire: We are deporting foreign criminals and there is work across Government to achieve that. The hon. Gentleman may say that there are no obstacles, but he should be aware of some of the issues on documentation and proving identity. That is what we are doing with our colleagues in the Foreign Office and with other overseas Governments to ensure that those who have offended in this country are removed.

T9. [905396] **Stephen Mosley** (City of Chester) (Con): Crime is down in Chester but there has recently been a spate of burglaries aimed at members of the Asian community in the belief that they have gold and jewellery at home. The local police believe that this has been done by a national gang. Will my right hon. Friend reassure my constituents that this is being taken seriously at the centre of Government and that the resources have been put in place to tackle these horrific crimes?

The Minister for Crime Prevention (Norman Baker): Good afternoon, Mr Speaker.

May I give my hon. Friend the assurance that we are taking these matters seriously? In fact, the issue of family gold has been considered by one of the crime prevention panels that I have established and we are well on top of that particular issue.

Mr Speaker: The Minister has been saved up, perhaps as a specialist delicacy. The House will take its own view of him, I feel sure.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Well, what an embarrassment of riches. Mr Stephen Doughty.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The Home Secretary will no doubt agree that co-ordination in the fight against ISIL and extremists in this country is crucial. Will she therefore explain why, to my dismay, it appears that the Secretary of State for Education and the Minister for Universities, Science and Cities have yet to meet their Welsh counterparts and other devolved counterparts to discuss tackling extremism in schools and universities throughout our country?

James Brokenshire: Through the extremism task force there is work that is chaired by the Prime Minister on combating extremism and terrorism. This work is ongoing, and putting Channel and Prevent on to a statutory basis will ensure that we have that co-ordination at a local level and that there is consistent priority across the country.

Tessa Munt (Wells) (LD): Last week, a retired RAF officer was found guilty by a court martial in Bulford of 21 cases of child sexual abuse 25 years ago on a German RAF base. Although he is retired, his address was given as RAF Northolt, and he escaped the usual rigours of being tried in an open civil court. Will the Home Secretary refer this matter and the use of courts martial for child sexual abuse cases to the independent panel to

ensure that the process of courts martial does not allow the services to keep such hearings unreported and under wraps?

Norman Baker: I am grateful to my hon. Friend who discussed that matter with me last week, and I share her concern about the particular case to which she refers. There is an issue there that needs to be looked at, but she will understand that such matters have to be considered carefully, so I will, if I may, get back to her in writing.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): Further to her answer earlier on the inquiry panel in relation to child abuse, what steps has the Home Secretary taken to ensure that the security services are making sure that no documents of theirs are destroyed or removed, that all information will be made available to the inquiry panel, and that former officers and agents have every encouragement and confidence in coming forward with their information?

Mrs May: As I said in reply to the earlier question, in relation to Kinchora particularly, but it goes across the board, we want an inquiry that is able to look properly into the events of child abuse that have taken place in the past, particularly, obviously, in state institutions, although we will cover non-state institutions as well. It is important therefore that the information is made available to the inquiry, and steps are being taken with a number of departments and agencies across Government to make sure that that happens.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): In 2010, just 1,162 asylum seekers were deported from the UK under the Dublin convention. In 2013, that number had fallen to 757. Given that Calais is heaving with illegal immigrants, all of whom have gone through safe countries to get there, why are we not deporting tens of thousands of asylum seekers each year under the Dublin rules?

James Brokenshire: We are working with other European partners to ensure that they take all the steps necessary to be able to document people and show where they first arrived in the EU in order to uphold the Dublin regulations. There are issues relating to litigation and, in particular, the ruling by the European Court of Human Rights in 2011 that returns to Greece breached article 3 of the convention, but I can assure my hon. Friend of the focus and attention we are giving to that very subject.

Mr Speaker: Last but not least, Mr Stephen Twigg.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Home Secretary recognise the real public concern about how long it is taking to establish the child sex abuse inquiry and, in particular, the fact that we have not yet seen the terms of reference? When we will see the terms of reference?

Mrs May: I fully understand the degree of concern that the hon. Gentleman refers to. We want to ensure that we get the balance of the panel's membership and the terms of reference right. As I said earlier, I expect to be able to announce the remaining members of the panel and the terms of reference shortly, because I am as keen as he is to ensure that the panel inquiry starts its work and that we get some answers for the victims who suffered those horrendous crimes.

NEW MEMBERS

The following Members took and subscribed the Oath, or made and subscribed the Affirmation, required by law:

Liz McInnes, for Heywood and Middleton
Douglas Carswell, for Clacton.

Business of the House

3.39 pm

The First Secretary of State and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr William Hague): With permission, I should like to make a short statement on the business of the House:

TUESDAY 14 OCTOBER—General debate on devolution following the Scotland referendum.

The business for the rest of the week remains unchanged:

WEDNESDAY 15 OCTOBER—Opposition day (6th allotted day). There will be a debate on the minimum wage, followed by a debate on the NHS. Both debates will arise on an Opposition motion.

THURSDAY 16 OCTOBER—Debate on a motion relating to progress on the all-party parliamentary cycling group's report "Get Britain Cycling", followed by a general debate on the national pollinator strategy. The subjects for both debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 17 OCTOBER—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the week commencing 20 October will now include:

MONDAY 20 OCTOBER—Remaining stages of the Social Action, Responsibility and Heroism Bill, followed by a motion to approve a Church of England measure relating to women bishops.

TUESDAY 21 OCTOBER—Second Reading of the Recall of MPs Bill.

I will announce further business, as usual, during the business statement on Thursday.

3.40 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for his business statement. I welcome tomorrow's debate on devolution following the Scottish referendum and the Command Paper on further powers that has just been published by the Scottish Secretary. After Scotland's historic decision to remain part of the United Kingdom, we must now honour our commitment to deliver further powers within the promised timetable.

It is also right that as we debate further powers to Scotland we consider further devolution to the rest of the UK to help to address the declining trust in our politics and the widespread feeling of disempowerment. However, Labour Members believe that, instead of petty partisan games and 7 am announcements, we need a considered process that seeks to achieve broad public support as well as cross-party agreement. That is why a partisan fix in Westminster just will not wash.

I thank the Leader of the House for announcing our Opposition day debates on the minimum wage and on the NHS this Wednesday. During the NHS debate, perhaps senior Tories can use the occasion to explain to the House and have the guts to admit on the record what they have told *The Times* today—that their top-down reorganisation of the NHS has been their biggest mistake. If they did that, for once there would be something on which we could all agree.

Mr Hague: I take that as a warm welcome for the change of business, and I am grateful to the hon. Lady. She is right: my right hon. Friend the Scottish Secretary

will be making a statement, coupled with the publication of the Command Paper that has indeed just taken place. Across the Government, and I think across the House, we are all very determined that the commitments made to the people of Scotland will be honoured. She said it is right that we should consider further devolution and its consequences for the rest of the UK. That is quite right. No one is looking for a partisan fix, but equally no one should imagine that the question of the consequences for England can now be evaded. Many of us will want to make that point in tomorrow's debate.

As I said, I will give the details of further business on Thursday.

Mr John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): If the Liberal Democrats agree to a simple amendment to Standing Orders on a Government motion as soon as possible, so that we can have English votes for English issues, can that be tabled urgently? When will the Leader of the House know whether the Liberal Democrats want justice for England?

Mr Hague: This is a matter of fairness for the whole of the United Kingdom. My right hon. Friend raises now, and has raised before, this very important issue. Discussions are taking place within the Government under the auspices of the committee that I chair. I have also invited Labour Members to attend that committee and put forward their own proposals. As I have said publicly, I believe we need to set a deadline and say that if we do not have cross-party agreement by the end of November—the same timetable as that for Scotland—then it will be important to test the opinion of the House.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): On 5 September, the House granted a Second Reading to the Affordable Homes Bill, which will go some way towards getting rid of the bedroom tax. So far the Government have not yet tabled the money resolution that would allow it to go into Committee. Will the Leader of the House please commit this afternoon to tabling it by the end of business tomorrow?

Mr Hague: I will not make any commitment about that. Two private Members' Bills went through in September. The Government are examining the money resolutions in the usual way, and we will make announcements in the usual way.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): When will the Government's response to the McKay commission report, which is over 18 months late, be produced, and will it be produced in time for tomorrow's debate?

Mr Hague: I will seek to open tomorrow's debate and much of what I will say will be updated following the events of the Scotland referendum and comprise the Government's response to those issues. Given that the situation has changed considerably, even since the McKay report was produced, it would be right for us to take stock of opinion in the whole House and for us all to be able to express our views.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): May I thank the Leader of the House for responding so positively to my request for a full day's debate tomorrow? Does he agree that the debate has to be about the solemn vow, promise and guarantee made by the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition? The people of Scotland will be appalled

if the debate is hijacked by English Members of Parliament making it about English votes for English laws. Should it not be the Prime Minister who stands at the Dispatch Box tomorrow in order to look the Scottish people in the eye and tell them that the vow will be honoured without condition, caveat or any reference to any other external issue?

Mr Hague: I hope the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that all three leaders of the pro-Union UK parties have made it very clear that the commitments will be honoured. He should not go about his business by trying to frighten the people of Scotland into thinking that they will not be honoured when all of the political parties are absolutely determined that they will be. My right hon. Friend the Scottish Secretary will make a statement later about the Scottish issues, but let me make it clear to the hon. Gentleman that tomorrow's debate is for all Members in the United Kingdom. It is about the consequences for Wales, Northern Ireland and England as well as for Scotland, and that is entirely appropriate in the United Kingdom Parliament.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I hope the Leader of the House will agree that, given that the party leaders have already decided what is going to happen about Scottish devolution, surely tomorrow's debate must primarily be about English votes for English laws.

Mr Hague: Of course, the debate will primarily be about what the House will make it about, but this is about the whole of the United Kingdom following the Scotland referendum. Therefore, it is a debate for all Members, including those who wish to raise the vital issue of English votes for English laws, as it has become known.

Michael Connarty (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House assure the 55.3% of the people who voted to keep the Union that his committee will not do anything further to threaten the Union, including changing the franchise for UK Members of Parliament from Scotland?

Mr Hague: The hon. Gentleman and I support the 55.3% and, indeed, the Union being able to work successfully, not just for them but for everyone in Scotland. For the great majority of us, all of our business should very much be about strengthening the United Kingdom, but the hon. Gentleman should not think that strengthening the United Kingdom will be achieved by indifference or insensitivity to the needs of other parts of it. This is a matter of fairness for the whole United Kingdom.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): Will the Leader of the House confirm that tomorrow's debate will be not only for those who represent the 45% who wanted independence for Scotland and the 55% who wanted to remain part of the United Kingdom, but for those who represent the 85% of the population of the United Kingdom who want to see English votes for English laws?

Mr Hague: As the questions go on, we are beginning to have tomorrow's debate. It will be an opportunity to discuss all of those issues, including, as my hon. Friend rightly points out, views about the governance of England as well as of the rest of the United Kingdom.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): Although I recognise that this is a matter entirely for English MPs, does the Leader of the House not recognise that English votes for English laws is a certain slippery slope to the break up of the United Kingdom?

Mr Hague: That may well be a topic of debate tomorrow. That is why we are having the debate, so that such issues can be aired and all points of view can be put. Many of us would emphasise that fairness to all parts of the United Kingdom, including the voters of England, is a necessary part of keeping the United Kingdom together.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Although I understand the import of debating the Command Paper and the new devolution settlement, the Leader of the House is effectively replacing a day's debate on a major Government Bill on the recall of MPs with an admittedly important but general debate. Would it not have been better to replace Thursday's Backbench Business day with the Scottish debate, thus not only preserving the Government's legislative timetable this week, but advancing Scottish and English issues?

Mr Hague: I try, whenever possible, not to remove the days selected by the Backbench Business Committee. I have announced that the Second Reading of the Recall of MPs Bill will take place a week tomorrow—just one week later than intended, so the Government's legislative programme will remain on track—while also facilitating the debate tomorrow.

Ebola

3.50 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to update the House on the Government's response to the Ebola epidemic in west Africa.

I shall start with the chief medical officer's assessment of the current situation in the affected countries. As of today, there have been 4,033 confirmed deaths and 8,399 confirmed, probable and suspected cases of Ebola recorded in seven countries, although widespread transmission is confined to Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. The number is doubling every three to four weeks. The United Nations has declared the outbreak an international public health emergency.

The Government's first priority is the safety of the British people. Playing our part in halting the rise of the disease in west Africa is the single most important way of preventing Ebola from infecting people in the UK, so I would like to start by paying tribute to the courage of all those involved in this effort, including military, public health, development and diplomatic staff. I would particularly like to commend the 659 NHS front-line staff and the 130 Public Health England staff who have volunteered to go out to Sierra Leone to help our efforts on the ground. You are the best of our country and we are deeply proud of your service.

Among the three most affected countries, the UK has taken particular responsibility for Sierra Leone, with the US leading on Liberia and France focusing on Guinea. British military medics and engineers began work in August on a 92-bed Ebola treatment facility in Kerry Town, including 12 beds for international health workers. In total we will support more than 700 beds across the country, more than tripling Sierra Leone's capability. With the World Health Organisation, we are training more than 120 health workers a week and piloting a new community approach to Ebola care to reduce and, hopefully, stop the transmission rate. We are also building and providing laboratory services and supporting an information campaign in-country.

We are now deploying the Royal Navy's RFA Argus and its Merlin helicopters along with highly skilled military personnel, bringing our military deployment to 750. They will support the construction of the Kerry Town Ebola treatment centre and other facilities, provide logistics and planning support, and help establish and staff a World Health Organisation-led Ebola training facility to increase training for health workers.

Taken together, the UK contribution stands at £125 million, plus invaluable human expertise: that is the second highest bilateral contribution after the US's. However, we do need other countries to do more to complement our efforts and those of the US and France. On 2 October, the Foreign Secretary held an international conference on defeating Ebola in Sierra Leone during which more than £100 million and hundreds of additional health care workers were pledged.

I now move on to the risks to the general public in the UK. The chief medical officer, who takes advice from Public Health England and the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, has this morning confirmed that it is likely that we will see a case of Ebola in the UK. This could be a handful of cases over the next three months.

She confirms that the public health risk in the UK remains low and that measures currently in place, including exit screening in all three affected countries, offer the correct level of protection. However, while the response to global health emergencies should always be proportionate, she also advises the Government to make preparations for a possible increase in the risk level. I can today announce that the following additional measures will take place.

On screening and monitoring, rapid access to health care services for anyone who may be infected with Ebola is important not only for their own health, but to reduce the risk of transmission to others. Although there are no direct flights from the affected region, there are indirect routes into the UK, so next week Public Health England will start screening and monitoring UK-bound air passengers identified by the Border Force as coming in on the main routes from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. This will allow potential Ebola virus carriers arriving in the UK to be identified, tracked and given rapid access to expert health advice should they develop symptoms. These measures will start tomorrow at Heathrow terminal 1, which receives about 85% of all such arrivals across the whole airport. By the end of next week, they will be expanded to other terminals at Heathrow and Gatwick, and to the Eurostar, which connects to Paris and Brussels-bound arrivals from west Africa.

Passengers will have their temperature taken and will complete a questionnaire about their current health, their recent travel history and whether they might be at potential risk through contact with Ebola patients. They will also be required to provide contact details. If neither the questionnaire nor the temperature reading raises any concerns, passengers will be told how to make contact with the NHS should they develop Ebola symptoms within the 21-day incubation period, and allowed to continue on their journey. It is important to stress that a person with Ebola is infectious only if they are displaying symptoms. Any passenger who reports recent exposure to people who may have Ebola or symptoms, and any passenger who has a raised temperature will undergo a clinical assessment and, if necessary, be transferred to hospital. Passengers identified as having any level of increased risk of Ebola but without any symptoms, will be given a Public Health England contact number to call should they develop any symptoms consistent with Ebola within the 21-day incubation period. Higher risk individuals will be contacted daily by PHE. Should they develop symptoms, they will have the reassurance of knowing that this system will get them first-class medical care—as the NHS demonstrated with nurse William Pooley—and the best possible chance of survival.

We expect these measures to reach 89% of the travellers we know have come to the UK from the affected region on tickets booked directly through to the UK, but it is important to note that no screening and monitoring procedure can identify 100% of people arriving from Ebola-affected countries, not least because some passengers leaving those countries will not be ticketed directly through to the UK. Today, I can therefore announce that the Government, working with the devolved Administrations, will ensure that highly visible information is displayed at all entry points to the UK, asking passengers, in their own best interests, to identify themselves if they

have travelled to the affected region in the past 21 days. This information for travellers will be available by the end of this week.

We are taking other important measures. We tested operational resilience with the comprehensive exercise that took place on Saturday, which modelled cases in London and the north-east of England. Local emergency services across England will hold their own exercises this week and share lessons learned. It is vital that the right decisions on Ebola are made following any first contact with the NHS, so we have put in place a process for all call handlers on NHS 111 to ask people who report respiratory symptoms about their recent travel history so that appropriate help can be given to higher risk patients as quickly as possible. During recent months, the chief medical officer has issued a series of alerts to doctors, nurses and pharmacists setting out what to do when someone presents with relevant symptoms. We will also send out guidance to hospital and GP receptionists.

The international profile of the UK as a favoured destination inevitably increases the risk that someone with Ebola will arrive here so, working closely with the devolved Administrations, a great deal of planning has gone into procedures for dealing with potential Ebola patients in the UK. All ambulances are equipped with personal protective equipment. If a patient is suspected of having Ebola, they will be transported to the nearest hospital and put in an isolation room. A blood sample will be sent to Public Health England's specialist laboratory for rapid testing. If they test positive for Ebola, they will be transferred to the Royal Free hospital in north London, which is the UK's specialist centre for treating the most dangerous infectious diseases. We also have plans to surge Ebola bed capacity in Newcastle, Liverpool and Sheffield, making a total of 26 beds available in the UK.

I will always follow medical advice on whether any measures that we adopt are likely to be effective and are a proportionate response to the risk. However, I believe that we are among the best and most prepared countries in the world.

Lastly, we are harnessing the UK's expertise in life sciences to counter the threat from Ebola. The UK Government, alongside the Wellcome Trust and the Medical Research Council, have co-funded clinical trials of a potential vaccine, which might be pivotal in the prevention effort. We are working actively with international partners to explore how we might appropriately make further vaccine available.

We should remember that the international community has shown that if we act decisively, we can defeat serious new infectious disease threats such as SARS and pandemic flu. The situation will get worse before it gets better, but we should not flinch in our resolve to defeat Ebola both for the safety of the British population and as part of our responsibility to some of the poorest countries on the planet. Our response will continue to develop in the weeks and months to come, guided by advice from the chief medical officer, Public Health England and the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies.

I commend the statement to the House.

4.1 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for the advance copy of his statement and commend him for making it at the first opportunity.

[*Andy Burnham*]

We have all been horrified by the devastating scenes from west Africa and our hearts go out to the communities that are confronting this threat on a daily basis. Public concern about Ebola is rising here and it is important that people have reliable facts and regular updates.

There are parallels between the current situation and the 2009 swine flu pandemic with which I dealt. I was grateful for the helpful approach of the then Opposition, particularly the right hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr Lansley), and I aim to provide the Secretary of State with the same approach. However, we do have a role in scrutinising the Government's approach and I will do that today in a constructive spirit.

I echo the Secretary of State's tribute to the many NHS staff, Public Health England staff and members of the armed forces who have helped on the ground in west Africa. We have a duty to protect them in any way we can. I want to start with the advice that is given to those who are treating people with the disease. People will be worried by the reports of a second case of Ebola in a health worker, this time in Dallas. We have seen protests in Spain by clinical staff who feel that a colleague has been unfairly exposed to infection. In the light of that, will the Secretary of State say whether he has confidence in the official advice that is being given to those who are treating the disease, and whether it needs to be reviewed?

Let me turn to the risk to the public here. The Secretary of State says that it remains low and the chief medical officer predicts a handful of cases. A handful is not a very scientific term. Will he be more precise and give the House the full range of figures that the advisory group has considered, including the worst case scenario? I recall agonising over whether to publish the official predictions for swine flu and about the risk of worrying the public unnecessarily. However, I think that the public interest lies in openness. Will the Secretary of State confirm that he is planning for the worst case scenario, so that there is no sense of complacency?

Let me turn to our preparedness to deal with an outbreak. There has been confusion about screening at point of entry. Last Thursday, the Department of Health said:

“Entry screening in the UK is not recommended by the World Health Organization, and there are no plans to introduce entry screening for Ebola in the UK.”

Screening was also ruled out by the Secretary of State for Defence. However, just 24 hours later, we were told that screening was to be introduced. Will the right hon. Gentleman say what prompted that about-turn? What official advice has he received from the chief medical officer and Public Health England on entry screening? Based on the science, do they think that it is necessary? Do the arrangements he has announced for temperature checks fully comply with that advice?

As there are currently no direct flights from the affected countries, will the Secretary of State say exactly who will be screened? Will it be all arrivals from those countries? How many people a day or week do we expect that to be, and how will they be identified? Have front-line Border Force staff been properly briefed about what is expected of them, and are they being trained in what to look for and in screening procedures? Why is

there only partial coverage of ports of entry? What about sea ports and other UK airports? Will he say where the checks will take place on Eurostar, given that it stops at a number of places en route to London?

On the exercise this weekend, as the Secretary of State will know, a patient was transferred from Newcastle where there are beds in negative pressure isolation units to the Royal Free hospital, which has Trexler isolators. Do the Government believe that Ebola is better handled in Trexler beds, and is the Secretary of State satisfied that the two NHS beds—both at the Royal Free—are sufficient? Given that in addition to the two Trexler beds there are already 24 negative pressure isolation beds, which make up the 26 beds he referred to, will he say what he means by “surge Ebola bed capacity”? If it becomes necessary to treat Ebola cases more widely in isolation beds, is he satisfied that there is adequate provision across England? Is he satisfied that all relevant NHS staff, including GPs, ambulance and 111 staff, know how to identify Ebola, the precautions to take in any potential presentation, and the protocols for handling it? He mentioned symptoms a few times in his statement. For the public watching this statement, will he tell the House simply what those symptoms are?

On treatment, the British nurse who was successfully treated here was offered and took an experimental medication called ZMapp. Will it be standard practice to offer all affected patients ZMapp, and if so, are there sufficient supplies in the NHS to do that? The Secretary of State rightly focused on a vaccine, which would of course be the best reassurance we could give the public. During the swine flu pandemic, huge effort went into compressing the timetable for the development of a vaccine. Is he confident that everything that can be done is being done to speed that up?

Finally, as the Secretary of State said, the best way to protect people here is to stop Ebola at source. The UK has rightly pledged £125 million to assist Sierra Leone, but with cases doubling every three to four weeks there is wide agreement that the response of the wider international community has been slow and inadequate. The window to halt Ebola before it runs out of control all together is closing fast. What assessment has been made of the resilience of neighbouring countries such as Guinea and Liberia, and what help is being offered to them? The International Development Committee report was clear that the lack of proper health coverage allowed the outbreak to grow unchecked for so long. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that improving global health systems is the best way to prevent these outbreaks, or at least ensure that they are caught before they get out of control? Many countries support placing universal health coverage at the centre of global development, yet the UK is currently opposing such plans at the UN. Will he say a little more about the Government's position on that, and whether they are prepared to reconsider it in the light of recent events? Knowing from my experience how difficult these situations are, I assure the Secretary of State that the offer of help is genuine, but on behalf of the House I ask him for regular updates and maximum openness in the weeks and months to come.

Mr Hunt: I thank the shadow Health Secretary for the constructive tone of his comments. That is totally appropriate and I am grateful. I will start with the point on which he finished, because the most crucial thing we

can do to protect the UK population is deal with the disease at source and contain it in west Africa. That is why I am working extremely closely with the International Development Secretary, and she is working closely with me because the role of NHS volunteers is important. The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: the initial international response has focused on taking the three worst affected countries and giving them a partner country in the developed world to help them—we are helping Sierra Leone, America is helping Liberia, and France is helping Guinea.

That has worked up to a point, but we need more help from the rest of the international community. I had a conversation earlier today with US Health Secretary Burwell. We talked about a co-ordinated international response for the whole of west Africa, because we will not defeat this disease if we operate in silos. We need to recognise that this disease does not recognise international boundaries; the right hon. Gentleman was absolutely right to make that point.

Let me try to give the right hon. Gentleman some of the information he requested. First, he is absolutely right to raise the issue of the protection of health workers. That has to be our No. 1 priority both here in the UK and abroad. That is why we are building a dedicated 12-bed facility in Sierra Leone that will give the highest standards of care, equivalent to NHS standards of care, for health care workers taking part in the international effort to contain the disease there. That is also very relevant to health care workers here: events in both Spain and the US will have caused great concern.

I am satisfied that the official advice to health care workers is correct. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the US, the US equivalent of Public Health England, believes that breaches in protocol led to the infection of the US nurse—the case we have seen in the media recently—but it is investigating that. The advice is always kept under review and if that advice changes we would, of course, respect that. It is important that we follow the scientific advice we have, but that the scientists themselves keep an open mind on the basis of new evidence as it emerges. I know that they are doing that.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about the full range of figures. He is absolutely right to say that we will maintain public confidence in the handling of this by being totally open about what we know. The reason we have stuck carefully to the formula of “a handful of cases” is because it is genuinely very difficult to predict an accurate exact number. Let me say this: we would not have used the formula of “a handful of cases” if we thought that the number of cases over the next three months would reach double figures. However, it is also important to say that that was a current assessment. That assessment may change on the basis of the evidence. I will, of course, keep the House informed if it does change.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about screening. It is important to deal with a misunderstanding. Why did the policy change on Thursday? The answer is that it changed because the clinical advice from the chief medical officer changed on Thursday. Her advice changed not on the basis that the risk level in the UK had changed—she still considers it to be low—but because she said that we should prepare for the risk level going up. That is why we started to put in place measures, but they are not

measures primarily intended to pick up people arriving in the UK who are displaying symptoms of Ebola. We think that most of those people should be prevented from flying in the first place. The measures are designed to identify people who may be at risk within the incubation period of developing the disease, so that we can track them and make sure they get access to the right medical care quickly.

As I mentioned, we think we will reach 89% of people arriving in the UK from the affected countries. We will continue to review that. If the numbers increase and the risk level justifies it, we have contingency plans to expand the screening, for example to Birmingham and Manchester. The reason we have included Eurostar at this early stage is because there are direct flights from those three countries to Paris and Brussels, from where it is easy to connect to Eurostar. We will use the tracking system for people who are ticketed directly through to the UK in order to identify, where we can, people who then independently get a Eurostar ticket. It is important to say that because they are changing the mode of transport in Paris and Brussels, it is not as robust as it would be for people taking a direct flight to the UK. We will not be able to identify everyone, which is why need to win the support of people arriving in the UK from those countries, so that they self-present, in their own interest, to give us the best possible chance of helping them if they start contracting symptoms.

I am satisfied that the Trexler beds and the negative isolation rooms are safe both for health care workers and in preventing onward transmission. They use different systems—one of them is a tented system and the other is based on people wearing personal protective equipment—but I am satisfied that both of them are safe. I will continue to take advice on that. It is very important that ambulance staff know that someone is a potential Ebola case, so that they wear the PP equipment.

As we will not be able to identify everyone who comes from the affected countries, it is important that the 111 service knows to ask people exhibiting the symptoms of Ebola whether they have travelled to those affected areas. The right hon. Gentleman asked what those symptoms are. They are essentially flu-like symptoms, but they are not dissimilar to the symptoms someone might exhibit if they had, for example, malaria. That is why it is important to ask for people’s travel history and whether they have had or may have had contact with people who have had Ebola, in order to identify the risk level.

We would like to continue using ZMapp for people in the UK who contract the disease, but that is subject to international availability. It might not be possible to get it for everyone, because there is such high international demand, but we will certainly try.

In terms of the development of a vaccine, we are doing everything we can to work with GSK to bring forward the date when a vaccine is available. Indeed, we are considering potentially giving indemnities if the full clinical trials have not been conducted.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): May I welcome the Secretary of State’s statement and pay tribute to all the staff who are giving him professional detailed scientific advice? I join him in paying tribute to all the NHS personnel, our forces personnel and diplomatic staff putting their own lives at risk in west Africa.

[Dr Sarah Wollaston]

I am particularly pleased to hear that those individuals returning to the UK or coming to the UK from west Africa will be able to access support in a timely manner and in a manner that does not put other individuals at risk in crowded health care settings. Will the Secretary of State say more about the testing arrangements, which I hear are going to be at Porton Down? Does he have any plans to make further testing centres available so that testing can happen more rapidly?

Mr Hunt: I thank my hon. Friend for her comments and her support for the statement. I want to pay particular tribute to the chief medical officer and Dr Paul Cosford at Public Health England, who have done an enormous amount to make sure we develop the right policies, which are both proportionate and enable us to prepare for the future. The Government are hugely grateful for their contribution.

We are satisfied that the testing arrangements at the PHE facility at Porton Down are adequate to the level of risk, but one of the reasons why I wanted to announce to the House the current estimate of the number of Ebola cases we are dealing with in the UK was to make the point that we will continually keep those arrangements under review should the situation change. We need to recognise in a fast-moving situation such as this that it might well change, and I will keep the House updated, but in such situations the resilience of all those very important parts of the process will be checked.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): In May the Government announced the closure of the health control unit at Heathrow airport in my constituency. It contained the staff who undertook the monitoring, screening and treatment of passengers who were sick. I believe many of those staff have now been made redundant, so can the Secretary of State tell me what the staffing arrangements will now be at Heathrow airport? Also, will a training programme be developed for airport staff themselves, including cabin crew and others?

Mr Hunt: The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. In terms of the staffing arrangements, a total of about 200 people will be employed in the screening process, working at both Heathrow and Gatwick airports in the hours when they are open, and potentially at other airports if we expand the screening. It is a comprehensive facility.

The hon. Gentleman's most important point is that we must make sure that people who might come into contact with people who might have Ebola—airport staff and people working on aeroplanes, and people working at receptions at GPs' surgeries, at A and E departments and at hospitals—have basic information about how the virus spreads, so that we can avoid any situations of panic. The virus is transmitted through exchange of bodily fluids. It is not an airborne virus, so it is not transmitted as easily as something like swine flu. The advice is that those doing physical examinations of patients need to wear the protective equipment, but that that is not necessary when having a conversation with a patient, for example. That advice will always be kept under review, but the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that we need to make sure everyone knows that advice.

Sir Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): The work that the British Government have done in Sierra Leone and Liberia to build health systems has been extremely important, but those systems were clearly inadequately developed to cope with this kind of problem. I welcome the joined-up thinking across government, but will the Secretary of State give me an assurance that the legacy of this situation will be not only that we have contained Ebola but that we have built health systems in those countries that are capable of dealing with future outbreaks? The long-term legacy must be stronger health systems, as well as the protection of British citizens, which is of course important.

Mr Hunt: I remember working with the right hon. Gentleman on the International Development Select Committee many years ago, when we had many conversations about strengthening the resilience of local health care systems. He is absolutely right to say that that must be our long-term goal, and I will ask the Secretary of State for International Development to write to him to explain how our efforts in Sierra Leone will help to strengthen its local health care system in the long run. The simple point I would make is that this illustrates the dual purpose of our aid budget more powerfully than any example I can remember. First, our aid budget gives humanitarian assistance to some of the poorest countries in the world and, secondly, it protects the population at home in the UK. Those two aims go hand in hand.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement and I appreciate having been given an advance copy of it. He mentioned the devolved regions. First, will he tell us which Minister in Northern Ireland will take personal responsibility for this matter? Secondly, he will know that the main point of entry for potential victims of this terrible disease is the Republic of Ireland. What special measures are being put in place to stop people using those points of entry to travel from the Republic to Northern Ireland when there are no apparent protective measures in place?

Mr Hunt: The Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison), has been in touch with Jim Wells in the Northern Ireland Assembly and she will take up that issue. The broader point that the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) makes is that there are many points of entry into the UK, and it is important for us to recognise that our screening and monitoring process will not catch absolutely everyone who comes from the affected regions. That is why we need to have other plans in place, such as the 111 service, and to have encouragement at every border entry point for people to self-present so that we can protect them better, should they develop symptoms.

Mr Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement to the House, and I am also grateful to the shadow Secretary of State for what he said. All Members share the Secretary of State's admiration for the staff of the NHS and Public Health England who are assisting in the front-line treatment and care of those in west Africa. In that context, he is right to try to tackle the virus in west Africa, but this is

not just about the availability of much better treatment facilities; it is also about working in the community in short order to try to stem the continuing transmission of the disease. Work has clearly been done on that; will he tell us how we might scale it up?

Mr Hunt: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. I discussed this with United States Secretary Burwell today. The US is piloting a programme in Liberia, and we are doing the same thing in Sierra Leone. We are both providing the same response, which is to tackle the disease at source. We know that, if we can get 70% of the people who develop Ebola symptoms into treatment and care, we will contain the disease. At the moment, the disease is replicating at a rate of 1.7, which means that every 10 people infected are going on to infect another 17 people. That is why the virus is spreading so fast, and we can halt it only if we get people into treatment very rapidly. Community treatment centres are therefore an important part of the Department for International Development's strategy to help to contain the virus, and that is why we are supporting the development of 700 beds in Sierra Leone.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): May I beg the Secretary of State to work across Europe and all the countries that can help? I have a daughter who has just returned from west Africa and she has reported to me and the family that the situation is critical—it is desperate. There is a lack of any kind of facility to control this disease. Parents are dying, leaving children with nobody to care for them. The situation is so grave, so will he redouble his efforts to persuade Europe, the World Health Organisation, the UN—all of us—to do something more significant and to do it now?

Mr Hunt: The hon. Gentleman speaks movingly and well about the incredible gravity of the situation, and he rightly says that we need full international support on it. In such a situation there are a number of things we are much better tackling as part of an international effort; we are very proud of our 659 NHS volunteers, but volunteers from the whole of Europe could go out and play a part. They need reassurance that they will be safe if they end up contracting the virus, because the truth is that there is no 100% guarantee of safety, even for people who follow the correct procedures—that is why these people are so brave. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right in what he says, and I reassure him that that is exactly the conversation I have been having with international colleagues: we do need a co-ordinated effort.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): The military have superb experience of dealing with contaminated areas. Are contingency plans in place to bring the military services into line to help, should that be required?

Mr Hunt: We are doing that already: we have made a commitment of 750 military personnel, who will be going to the affected region to help; we have military engineers helping to build the 92-bed facility in Kerry Town; and Royal Fleet Auxiliary Argus is on the way to Sierra Leone. We are tapping into that expertise, and it has a vital role to play.

Michael Connarty (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (Lab): Following on from the question put by my colleague from Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for North

Antrim (Ian Paisley), clearly the nearest hospital to Scotland with provision is in Newcastle. Who is the responsible person with whom the Secretary of State has been working in Scotland? What arrangements are taking priority in Scottish towns, because someone who has 21 days to travel in the UK might not wish to stay in England alone?

Mr Hunt: The hon. Gentleman is right in what he says. This morning, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary spoke to Alex Neil, the Scottish health Minister, and on Wednesday we will have a Cobra meeting with the devolved Administrations to test how resilient the structures are between the constituent parts of the UK. That is a very important part of our effort.

Martin Horwood (Cheltenham) (LD): Perhaps I should declare a non-pecuniary interest, Mr Speaker, as my wife works for Public Health England. I join the Secretary of State in applauding all of her colleagues and the others who are putting themselves in harm's way in the front-line battle against Ebola. Given his predecessor's reorganisation of the NHS and of public health, does the Secretary of State need to check whether there are now sufficient local directors of public health in post and whether they have sufficient resources, qualified staff and seniority within local authorities to take a local lead, should that be necessary, in the fight against Ebola?

Mr Hunt: We are absolutely checking that, and it is all in hand.

Fiona O'Donnell (East Lothian) (Lab): I do not know whether the Secretary of State has any plans to speak to the hon. Member for Clacton (Douglas Carswell), but if he does will he ask him why he now supports a party that would decimate the UK's aid budget? Does the Secretary of State, like me, feel a great sense of pride in being part of a family of nations whose aid budget is saving lives in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and, in turn, keeping people in the UK safe?

Mr Hunt: The hon. Lady speaks extremely wisely and there is cross-party agreement on that matter. That shows why it is so wrong to make an artificial division between helping people abroad and helping people at home. I think we have a moral responsibility to help people in the poorest countries abroad in any case, but in my time in this House there has been no better example than this one of how doing so is in the interests of people in the UK, too. It helps to make us more secure, and we can be incredibly proud of the work we are doing as a result.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): The Secretary of State has spoken about multiple points of entry, and major connection points are via Schiphol, Charles de Gaulle, Madrid and Frankfurt. Has he spoken to his opposite numbers in those countries to see whether they are following the best practice that is being rolled out in the United Kingdom? Will he ensure that those who are manning the points of entry in the UK have the ability to deal with children, because if a parent is detected with symptoms, their children will have to be properly looked after?

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I am sure that those arrangements are already in place, but I will ensure that they are. Yes, we are in touch with colleagues in other countries. It is important to say that there are only a very few direct flights to Europe from the affected region, and indeed there are none to the UK. At the moment, it is possible to be fairly confident that we will reach the vast majority of people who come from those affected areas. But part of what I am trying to convey in this afternoon's statement is that the risk level could change—for example, there could be a breakdown in public order in the affected countries—which is why we need to be prepared for a much more porous situation, with people coming from many different points of entry.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): Is the Secretary of State talking to our universities, as a number of them must have overseas students from west Africa returning for their studies in October? Is he focusing on them in particular, and what provisions are we making to cater for them?

Mr Hunt: The hon. Lady makes a very important point. Clearly, it is important that anyone who comes from those countries, whether a student or a visitor, is treated with the same screening and monitoring process. Screening and monitoring people simply on the basis of their passport would not work. There will be people who have indefinite leave to remain in the UK but who have a Sierra Leonean passport, and it would not be appropriate to put them through that process. It is most important that we have a system in place in which we can check and find out who has been to the Ebola-affected areas in the past three weeks, so that we can give them help if they need it.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): My right hon. Friend has given details of plans for extra Ebola-bed capacity in regional centres such as Sheffield. Will he confirm that those regional centres will be used alongside the Royal Free hospital in London, or will they be used only when capacity there has been reached?

Mr Hunt: Essentially, the plan is to start with the Royal Free, which has capacity to go from two beds to four. Then we have six beds available in Newcastle and Liverpool and two beds available in Sheffield. Following that we can further expand capacity at the Royal Free.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State ensure that British citizens fleeing Ebola-affected countries are not left destitute and homeless? My constituents, Mr and Mrs Mahmood, have been working in Sierra Leone for the past four years. When they returned, they were told that they were not eligible for income-based jobseeker's allowance or housing benefit. Will the Secretary of State speak to his counterparts at the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that no British citizen is left in such a state when they have to flee a country that is affected by Ebola?

Mr Hunt: If the hon. Lady lets me know the details of the individuals concerned, I will happily take up the case.

John Hemming (Birmingham, Yardley) (LD): A systemic lacuna in the Government's proposals relates to the lack of monitoring of lower-risk travellers. Will the Secretary of State consider having daily contacts with such travellers on the basis that identifying erroneous risk assessments at the first stage is the key to bringing things under control in the interests of the travellers as well?

Mr Hunt: The judgment on how effective we are at identifying higher-risk passengers must be made by the scientists and the doctors involved. Their view is that we are currently going further than we need to given the current risk level, but that it is prudent to do what we are doing because that risk level might increase. I will always listen to their advice.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement on Ebola. Given that one of the busiest air routes within these islands is that between London and Dublin—the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) has already referred to the role of the Republic of Ireland—will he outline what discussions have taken place between him and his officials and the Minister for Health and his officials in the Republic of Ireland?

Mr Hunt: The hon. Lady makes an important point. The Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison), has been in contact with the Northern Ireland Health Minister, and we will pursue discussions with the Republic of Ireland. Although the hon. Lady's concern is legitimate and it is right that she has asked the question, it is important to say that the current assessment is that the risk level to the UK is low. I would imagine that the risk level in Ireland is similarly low, but that is ultimately a matter for the Irish authorities. At the moment, we are following a precautionary process just in case the risk level increases. We will of course involve colleagues in the Irish Republic in our assessment of those risks.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): I am pleased that my right hon. Friend is focusing on the protection of health care workers in the vital work he is taking forward. Given that lessons are still being learned from cases in Texas and Madrid, what mechanisms are in place to update procedures when any new findings are brought into the public domain?

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that what happened in Dallas is of great concern. We need to listen to our colleagues in the Centre for Disease Control in the US as they try to understand exactly what happened. If they decide that we need to change the protocols for protecting health care workers, we will of course take that advice extremely seriously. At the moment, their scientific assessment is that there was a breach in protocol, not that the protocols were wrong. Until we identify what those breaches were, we cannot be 100% sure. We are working very closely with them and we have a good and close working relationship. We will update our advice to UK health care workers accordingly.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for the answers he has given so far, but my right hon. Friend the Member for

Leigh (Andy Burnham) asked whether he was satisfied that all relevant NHS staff, including all GPs, know how to identify Ebola, know the precautions to take with patients presenting, and know the protocols for handling Ebola. I did not get a sense from the Secretary of State's reply of how complete that knowledge is. He has talked a lot about receptionists, and that is important as they are in the front line of risk, but hospital cleaning staff and cleaning staff in GP practices are also at risk if such patients present.

Mr Hunt: The hon. Lady makes an important point, but I reiterate the point I made earlier to another hon. Member. The risk level to the UK general population remains low, so the measures we are taking are precautionary because of a possible increase in that risk level. As part of that, we are sending advice to everyone we think might be in contact with anyone who says that they have recently travelled to the Ebola-affected areas and who displays those symptoms. That is why alerts have gone out to hospitals, GP surgeries and ambulance services to ensure that they know the signs to look for and are equipped with that important advice.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): To cross a typical western international border illegally, one needs a passport and passports are meant to have stamps in them. What steps are we taking with the seven most affected west African countries to ensure that they stamp the passports of people who go into and leave those countries so that we can readily identify the stamps in their passports should they come to the UK? What extra resources are Border Force putting into checking the stamps in people's passports when they come to the United Kingdom?

Mr Hunt: I will get back to my hon. Friend with the exact details of what is happening with passport stamps, but I reassure him that we are working very closely with Border Force officials and we have a high degree of confidence that we will be able to identify the vast majority of people who travel from the most directly affected countries within the recent incubation period of the virus. It is important to remember that that incubation period is 21 days, so we are looking at the previous three weeks. We have a high degree of confidence, but I will get my hon. Friend information on whether passport stamps could be an additional source of security.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I join others in congratulating the Secretary of State on initiating screening, as he did on Thursday. That is the right approach, as is targeting it at certain ports. As he knows, viruses do not wait for direct flights and it is extremely important that there is a synergy between our screening processes and those of Sierra Leone and other west African countries. Did we supply the screening equipment and, if we did not, is he satisfied that it is fit for purpose? The same goes for the screening in other hubs throughout Europe.

Mr Hunt: We have absolutely checked the screening equipment that is being used in those three countries, and in Sierra Leone, which is our more direct responsibility, that is being done by Public Health England officials. The reports that we are getting back say that people are checked not just once, but several times. It is really important to say that the main purpose of the screening

that we are introducing—I call it screening and monitoring, rather than screening—is to identify passengers who may be at higher risk. We are not particularly expecting to identify people showing symptoms because they should have been prevented from leaving the country in the first place, but we want to keep tabs on them while they are in the UK, in their own interests, and that is the purpose of the process.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. Given the large number of languages in use in that part of west Africa and the consequent practical difficulties in producing notices and posters that travellers can actually read for the purposes of self-presenting, may I ask my right hon. Friend in what circumstances would he reconsider the decision not to introduce the screening and monitoring of passengers arriving at Manchester airport?

Mr Hunt: We have not yet made a decision on Birmingham and Manchester, and we will continue to review the risk advice from the chief medical officer and PHE on whether such action would be appropriate. It is important to say that the measures we take must be proportionate, but they must also look forward to potential changes in the risk, so that we can react very quickly were that risk to increase dramatically, and that is exactly what we are doing at other UK airports.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and for the support given to health services in west Africa, but does he not agree that this terrible time shows the massive health inequalities that exist all around the world and that, although there will be a big international effort to deal with Ebola, it calls into question the effectiveness of the millennium goals on preventive health measures, not just in west Africa, but in a much wider sense? Do we not need to redouble our efforts to reduce health inequalities around the world for the protection of everyone?

Mr Hunt: The hon. Gentleman is right, although the millennium development goals have been successful in making a start on the process of reducing health inequalities. We can see that in other areas, such as the provision of antiretroviral drugs to HIV-positive patients in Africa, and that has been completely transformed in the past decade. But he is right: while some countries have highly underdeveloped health care systems, the risk of such public health emergencies is much higher and therefore the risk to the UK is higher.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I should like to echo the tributes paid to our NHS volunteers and to all health workers. Today of all days, it is important to recognise the sacrifices that they make. The Secretary of State has indicated that Newcastle's Royal Victoria infirmary in my constituency is next in line after the Royal Free to receive Ebola victims. Will he say a little more about what measures are or will be in place for public awareness, training, equipment, staffing and basic hygiene procedures to enable that to happen?

Mr Hunt: I am happy to let the hon. Lady have full details of what is being planned at the RVI, which is an excellent hospital. It was one of the hospitals that was part of the exercise that we did on Saturday to test

[Mr Jeremy Hunt]

preparedness. In that exercise, we modelled what would happen if someone became sick and vomited in the Metro centre and was then transferred to the RVI. We modelled the decisions about whether they would be kept there or transferred to the Royal Free, and so on. I am very satisfied with the measures in place at that hospital, but I will happily send her the details.

Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): I am one of a group of parliamentarians who returned from a visit to west Africa on Friday. We were quite surprised to be asked no questions about where we had travelled, and to be offered no screening at either the EU or UK border; I came back to Newcastle from Brussels. Will the Secretary of State reassure us that all regional airports will offer screening and advice to people who might be affected? Will he redouble his efforts, in partnership with other agencies, to stop the spread of this disease, which is devastating parts of west Africa?

Mr Hunt: We are absolutely redoubling our efforts, and we are looking at what screening procedures are needed at regional airports. The screening and monitoring procedures that I outlined are starting at Heathrow terminal 1 tomorrow; they will be rolled out progressively across Heathrow, Gatwick and Eurostar terminals over the next two weeks. We are satisfied that that will reach the vast majority of people travelling from the affected countries. Any decision to expand those arrangements to other regional airports will be taken on the basis of the scientific advice that we receive about risk.

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Liverpool university's Institute of Infection and Global Health, and the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, have done a great deal of work to address the problem of the transmission of Ebola. Does the Secretary of State's work involve their recommendations, and do his proposals for combating Ebola, particularly as regards international travel, address the issues that those institutions raise?

Mr Hunt: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to say that we have fantastic research on the spread of infectious diseases at a number of institutions in this country, including in Liverpool, and we are not only using that research in the battle that we are leading in Sierra Leone, but making it available to partner countries leading the battle in other parts of west Africa. The advice that I get from my experts, from Public Health England and from the chief medical officer takes full account of the research done in places such as Liverpool.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): In his statement, the Secretary of State said that the screening measures would reach 89% of passengers from the three affected countries; it is therefore hoped that one in 10 will self-identify. Will he tell the House the numbers that the estimate is based on, not just the percentage, so that we have an idea of how many people will be involved in these screening measures?

Mr Hunt: For the month that we looked at, September, we are talking about around 1,000 people arriving from the directly affected countries, which is about 0.03% of

all Heathrow travellers for that month. It is important to say that the vast majority of those will be low-risk passengers, but those are the people with whom, initially, we would want to have a conversation, so that we could understand whether they had been in contact with Ebola patients or had been in the areas particularly affected by Ebola, and so that we could decide whether we needed to put in place tracking procedures to allow us to contact them quickly, should they develop symptoms.

Heidi Alexander (Lewisham East) (Lab): The Secretary of State may be aware that this weekend Lewisham hospital dealt with a suspected Ebola case. Thankfully, tests have shown that the individual is free from the virus, but may I press the Secretary of State further on the advice given to staff on the NHS front line? When was the guidance to NHS hospital and general practitioner receptionists sent out, and what steps have been taken to ensure that the guidance has been read and understood, and will be acted on?

Mr Hunt: First, on what happened in Lewisham hospital, the moment the individual was identified as a potential Ebola case, he was put into isolation. We learned, from what happened there, the importance of making sure that the guidance is widely understood. Making sure that everyone on the NHS front line knows what happens is an ongoing process. It is important to say, as I did in my statement, that the chief medical officer is satisfied that the arrangements in place right now are correct for the level of risk. The additional processes that I talked about are to make sure that we are ready for an increase in that risk.

Mr Iain McKenzie (Inverclyde) (Lab): Did I hear correctly that the Secretary of State said that 21 days is quite a lengthy time for the incubation of this particular disease? Will he commit to putting a further screening in place towards the end of that 21 days so that he can be assured that those entering the country are free of Ebola?

Mr Hunt: I am not sure that I entirely understood the hon. Gentleman's question, but the incubation period is 21 days, so if we identify through the screening and monitoring process someone who is higher risk, we will want to stay in touch with them for that period of 21 days on a daily basis to make sure that we are monitoring their temperature and that we get help to them as quickly as possible if they need it.

Mr Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow) (Lab): I welcome the introduction of screening at various London locations, but what about Newcastle, which runs numerous flights every day to the airports that act as hubs for these west African countries, and obviously there is passage that way?

Mr Hunt: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We have numerous ports of entry to the UK. We are one of the most international countries in the world, and London is one of the most international cities in the world, so the actions that we take must be proportionate to the risk. The risk is currently low, so the advice is that having no screening procedures at those airports is proportionate to the risk now, but we are taking this precautionary approach, starting with the Heathrow,

Gatwick and Eurostar terminals, because we want to prepare for a possible increase in that level. Were that to happen we would of course look at whether that screening process should be expanded to regional airports.

Andy Sawford (Corby) (Lab/Co-op): In a recent film of medical workers treating people in west Africa with Ebola, a young doctor said that the one benefit of her protective mask was that people could not see her cry. Even as the media focus inevitably moves on, we know that this will go on for months and months ahead, so will the Secretary of State give us all an absolute assurance that we will continue, even though we cannot see her cry, to hear her voice and do whatever we can to help people in west Africa?

Mr Hunt: If that is the last question today, it is a fitting one on which to end. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: this is an appalling human tragedy. There have been more than 4,000 deaths so far, in countries that are already, in many ways, the unluckiest countries in the world in terms of the levels of poverty that they already have to cope with daily. We can be incredibly proud of the 659 NHS volunteers, and the military, diplomatic and development staff who are stepping up to the plate, and we should always remember our humanitarian responsibility never to forget those countries' plight.

Scotland within the UK

4.52 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr Alistair Carmichael): With permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement to the House about the position of Scotland within the United Kingdom.

As hon. Members will know, on 18 September the people of Scotland voted in a referendum on independence. I am pleased to report to the House that, by a margin of 10.6%, or by 55.3% to 44.7%, the people of Scotland voted to remain part of the United Kingdom.

The referendum was underpinned by the Edinburgh agreement, signed between the United Kingdom Government and the Scottish Government in October 2012. That agreement ensured that the referendum would have a clear legal base, that it would be conducted in a way that commanded the confidence of both Parliaments, Governments and people, and, most importantly, that it would deliver a fair, legal and decisive expression of the views of people in Scotland—a result that everyone would respect.

More than 2 million people made a positive choice for Scotland to remain part of the United Kingdom. The franchise for the referendum included, for the first time ever in this country, 16 and 17-year-olds. At a time when our elections have suffered from declining participation, the turnout across Scotland was nearly 85%—something that I am sure all across the House would welcome. Politics works best when people take an active interest in supporting the things that matter to them most. It also adds emphasis to the democratic result.

The decision of the people of Scotland was clear: they voted to continue to be part of this family of nations; they voted to continue to work alongside people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; and they voted for all of us to remain together as a United Kingdom. It is important that everyone now accepts that result. We should all move on from being part of the 55% or the 45% to working for 100% of the people of Scotland.

That is what we are doing. The vow made by the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition during the referendum campaign is already being put into practice. The Smith commission, chaired by Lord Smith of Kelvin, was up and running on 19 September. He will convene cross-party talks to reach agreement on the proposals for further devolution to Scotland. His terms of reference make it clear that the recommendations will deliver more financial, welfare and taxation powers, strengthening the Scottish Parliament within the United Kingdom. But that process is not just about the parties; the referendum opened up civic engagement in Scotland across sectors, communities and organisations, and Lord Smith has made it clear that he wants to hear from all those groups to ensure that the recommendations he produces are informed by views from right across Scottish society.

By St Andrew's day, Lord Smith will publish "Heads of Agreement". The Government are committed to turning those recommendations into draft clauses by Burns night 2015. The timetable is demanding, but that is because the demand is there in Scotland to see change delivered, and it is a demand we shall meet. On Friday 10 October, all five main Scottish parties submitted their proposals to the commission. In the case of the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties, the

[Mr Alistair Carmichael]

proposals reflect the positions published by the parties prior to the referendum campaign. The Scottish National party and the Green party agreed to join the cross-party talks after the referendum, and they too submitted proposals on Friday—a development that we welcome.

Today I can confirm that the Government are meeting the first step in the further devolution process by publishing a Command Paper. The Command Paper we are presenting today provides a clear, factual summary of the proposals for further devolution in Scotland published by each of the three pro-UK parties, as we committed to do during the referendum campaign. Those plans encompass a broad, complex and often interlinked range of topics, from taxation to borrowing and from welfare to regulation. To inform and assist consideration of each of those proposals, the Command Paper also sets out factual information about the current situation in the key policy areas, as well as presenting some background information about devolution in Scotland to date. The publication is wholly without prejudice to the work of the Smith commission, which will look at proposals from all the parties and others and seek to establish the ground for consensus. This will be the first time in the development of Scotland's constitutional future that all its main parties are participating in a process to consider further devolution. It is a truly historic moment, and one that I very much welcome.

With all five main Scottish parties working together in collaboration, I am confident that we will reach an agreement that will provide the enhanced powers to the people of Scotland and accountability for the Scottish Parliament while retaining the strength and benefits of being part of the United Kingdom. That was the message heard loud and clear during the referendum campaign, and it is one that this Government, and all Scotland's political parties, are committed to supporting.

4.58 pm

Margaret Curran (Glasgow East) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement.

Only three weeks ago, in unprecedented numbers, the people of Scotland voted to remain part of the United Kingdom. It was an historic decision, and the result was emphatically clear: the Scottish people voted for pooling and sharing resources across the United Kingdom; they voted to continue with devolution; and they voted for a stronger Scottish Parliament. I wish today to pay particular tribute to my right hon. Friends the Members for Edinburgh South West (Mr Darling) and for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown), who put the case with so much passion throughout the campaign.

Following the referendum, we can say with confidence that devolution is the settled will of the Scottish people and that we shall have a stronger Scottish Parliament. A vital part of the campaign was the commitment made by the Leader of the Opposition, the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister to have a strengthened and empowered Scottish Parliament. Led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath, we guaranteed a clear and definitive timetable for further powers, and I am pleased that the Secretary of State has published the Command Paper ahead of time today. Can the Secretary of State confirm that a motion now appears on the Order Paper detailing that timetable?

The process now ongoing under the leadership of Lord Smith of Kelvin will guarantee that more powers will come to the Scottish Parliament. The Labour party will enter the talks this week in a spirit of partnership and co-operation with the other parties. We will apply a simple test to reaching a conclusion: what outcome respects the result of the referendum and will make the people of Scotland better off? The people of Scotland have voted for pooling, sharing of resources and greater prosperity, and that should guide the commission's discussions.

The referendum attracted the highest level of participation of any national poll ever held in Scotland. It is important that, as we develop this next stage of devolution, we reflect that. The Secretary of State has mentioned how voluntary organisations can participate. Will he lay out how individual members of the public can contribute to that process too and tell the House how Lord Smith intends to engage with people across every area of Scotland?

We debated the agreement for the referendum two years ago, as the Secretary of State said. At that time, I said that we would spend the campaign vigorously defending devolution from those who would seek to bring it to an end. Over these last two years, that is exactly what the Labour party has done. Not only does this campaign conclude with the devolution settlement secured; that settlement will be strengthened. We will continue to argue that the best future for Scottish people comes from pooling and sharing resources inside the United Kingdom and from a powerhouse Parliament that can again change the lives of people across Scotland. That is what the people of Scotland want, and it is what the Labour party will fight for.

Mr Carmichael: I thank the hon. Lady for the very constructive tone of her response. Working with people across parties has been an interesting experience, as it always is in Scotland, and it is clear that the process of cross-party working will have to continue if the will of the Scottish people expressed on 18 September is to be honoured. That will become all the more challenging, although I still believe it will be more effective as a result, for having members of the Scottish National party and Scottish Green party on board. A high price will be paid by any political party that does not enter the Smith commission and the process that follows in good faith.

I echo the hon. Lady's comments about her right hon. Friends the Members for Edinburgh South West (Mr Darling) and for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown). All Members from Scotland, and a number from beyond it, played their role in giving leadership across the referendum campaign, but her two right hon. Friends indeed played a particularly important and significant role.

The motion on the Order Paper honouring the timetable has indeed been tabled. On the approach of the Labour party and the Government, I should remind the House that under the Scotland Act 2012 any proposal should have cross-party support, should be based on evidence and should not be to the detriment of other parts of the UK. It is the Government's view, as expressed in the Command Paper today, that that should also be the guiding principle in relation to the current process.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): Does the Secretary of State accept that throughout the House many believe that further devolution to Scotland can occur only if there is a rebalancing of the entire constitutional settlement, with English votes on English issues? Does he agree that those who say that that would create two classes of MP are being disingenuous? The House has had an imbalance since devolution; many Members have been able to vote on issues such as health and education in England without having to answer to a single voter for those decisions.

Mr Carmichael: I have said many times that the completion of the job of devolution in Scotland and the process we are now undertaking would unlock the door to further constitutional change across the whole of the United Kingdom, and I believe that to be the case. Let me be clear, however, that the timetable we have set out here will be honoured. If other parts of the United Kingdom are able to take advantage and to move along in our slipstream, so to speak, that will be to their advantage, but we will not delay the implementation of the proposals in Scotland for other parts of the UK.

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow Central) (Lab): Scotland has decided and spoken, and it is now the accepted sovereign will of the Scottish people to work in partnership with the rest of the United Kingdom and support it through devolution. One of the lessons from the referendum campaign, though, is that although our country may not be broken, people believe that our political, social and economic model is broken and does not work for ordinary people. That is why I urge the Secretary of State and, indeed, the entire Government not to fall into the trap of thinking that we can just talk about which politician has what power in what building; more important is what politicians choose to do with the powers they have to make a genuine difference to people's lives. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the process being talked about is separate from the process being mentioned by others—that of English votes for English laws?

Mr Carmichael: On the hon. Gentleman's latter point, I think I have already made that clear. I very much hope that once we have done this piece of work, we will in Scotland at last be able to move on to using the powers of the Parliament rather than just talking about them.

Sir Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD) *rose*—

Sir Menzies Campbell (North East Fife) (LD) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Ah! Two distinguished Liberal Democrat knights in heated competition—what a delicious choice! I call Sir Menzies Campbell.

Sir Menzies Campbell: Does my right hon. Friend understand the general welcome there has been in Scotland for the fact that change in Scotland should not be held up to enable England to catch up? Having agreed that position, is it not right for the Government, and indeed for him today, to say that, although not in lockstep, there will undoubtedly be progress on constitutional change for the other nations that form the United Kingdom? Particularly with regard to any possible change in the role of Scottish MPs, does he agree that however

superficially attractive it might appear, changes to the Standing Orders would be inappropriate, and that such a change to the role of Scottish MPs should undoubtedly be enshrined in primary legislation?

Mr Carmichael: My right hon. and learned Friend is entirely correct about that. This should be something that does more than just affect just the Standing Orders of this House. Indeed, even if it were to be done in that very narrow way, he would, I suspect, be one of the first to remind me that the House guards very jealously, through your office, Mr Speaker, its right to determine its Standing Orders for itself. It has never normally been the practice for Government to lead on these matters.

Mr William Bain (Glasgow North East) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State agree that the Smith commission process will require compromise and good faith from all political parties in Scotland? Does he also agree that in the agreement that comes we must see the sharing of resources across the United Kingdom? Is not that in keeping with the spirit of the way in which the Scottish people voted on 18 September?

Mr Carmichael: I think Lord Smith has already made it clear that he is not going to deliver independence by the back door. Whatever proposals he comes up with on St Andrew's night in relation to further devolution, they will be in the context of there continuing to be a United Kingdom, and the constitutional integrity of the United Kingdom will be respected.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we ought to learn some lessons from this near-death experience of the United Kingdom and the fact that we did not intend the winning margin to be as narrow as 10%? Does he also agree that if we are to avoid another referendum, Westminster politics and Westminster politicians must raise the tone of debate with our Scottish counterparts in order to ensure that we develop more of a relationship of mutual respect, with less opportunity for the nationalists to make mischief?

Mr Carmichael: There are indeed many lessons to be learned from this, and their full extent will probably not be apparent for some time to come. This statement is an important part of the process, because it is very important that the Government, with the official Opposition as well, are able to demonstrate to the people of Scotland that we are making good the commitment that we made in the course of the referendum campaign. Politicians doing what they say they will do in that way is probably the most important thing we can do to restore faith in politics.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): The Secretary of State is, of course, right: the referendum was an incredible, transformational event that gripped and energised our whole nation. I am sure he will want to join me in congratulating the Scottish people on the way in which they went about that business. He is also right to say that Scotland is moving on. According to one opinion poll, two thirds of the Scottish people want devolution maximum—everything devolved, other than foreign affairs and defence. Three quarters have said that they want all taxation devolved to Scotland. This is

[Pete Wishart]

the thing, isn't it? There might be a Command Paper, but the people in charge of this process are the Scottish people themselves and we will be judged by their good judgment on what they want for their future.

Mr Carmichael: May I say again that I welcome the participation of the hon. Gentleman's party in the Smith process? I very much hope—in fact, I believe—that that is being done in good faith. However, perhaps the hon. Gentleman should take heed of the 60.19% of the people in his own area who voted to remain part of the United Kingdom. If he tries to subvert the Smith process by getting independence through the back door, as others have said, he will pay a heavy price.

Sir Malcolm Rifkind (Kensington) (Con): Should we not all be grateful to the Scottish National party for having called the referendum? Has it not in fact provided an opportunity for the Scottish people in the 21st century to show that they have come to the same conclusion as their ancestors in 1707 that the best interests of all the peoples of this island are to have a British citizenship in a United Kingdom?

Mr Carmichael: There are, indeed, occasions when we should be grateful to the Scottish National party; they are few and far between, but this may, in the way the right hon. and learned Gentleman describes it, be one of them. It was not, of course, the Scottish National party that called the referendum; it was an agreement between Her Majesty's Government here and the Scottish Government in Edinburgh—the Edinburgh agreement—that gave the basis for it to happen. It would be helpful for the SNP leadership to now make it clear that we have met the terms of the Edinburgh agreement, that the decision was fair, legal and decisive, and that, accordingly, we will not revisit the process.

Gregg McClymont (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (Lab): As a Labour nominee to the Smith commission, may I welcome the Secretary of State's constructive comments? In that spirit of constructive dialogue, as we approach the debate about further devolution will he consider bringing forward the public information campaign on the raft of tax powers that are to be transferred to the Scottish Parliament by 2016?

Mr Carmichael: I wish the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues well on the Smith commission; he has a job of work to do, but he is very well qualified to do it. I will give consideration to his question about our public information campaign on the powers already coming from the 2012 Act.

Sir Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): The Secretary of State is to be commended for introducing the Command Paper in such a timely fashion. Has any thought been given to the lessons learned from this campaign, particularly whether a simple majority of 50% plus one is sufficient for a matter of such far-reaching constitutional implications?

Mr Carmichael: I have thought of little else in the past few weeks. I know that when referendum processes are undertaken in other parts of the world a debate

often takes places on the point raised by the right hon. Gentleman. My view continues to be that 50% plus one should be the threshold for any referendum in a democracy.

Mr John Denham (Southampton, Itchen) (Lab): It is clear that Scotland will now get what Scotland wants, and so England must get what England wants. The Secretary of State has outlined a process through which the debate about Scotland's future reached every corner of Scottish society. Does he agree that, in determining our future, England must have that same opportunity and that to push changes through a narrow Cabinet Committee on an artificially short time scale would be absolutely unacceptable?

Mr Carmichael: In relation to the work of the Cabinet Committee, there is not of course a time scale, except that we are looking towards the next general election in May 2015. I would say to the right hon. Gentleman that we are perhaps more familiar with the process in Scotland than in the rest of the United Kingdom. We have been round this course at least twice: first with the constitutional convention, and then with the Calman commission in 2008. On each occasion, we brought together political parties and the voices of business, trade unions, churches, local authorities and others to build consensus, and then we implemented it. That is the way that people are best guaranteed to get the constitutional change they want.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): The Secretary of State knows that, with the advent of devolution under the previous Labour Government, the number of seats for Scotland in this House was reduced from 72 to 59. With further devolution, will he support a reduction in the number of seats for Scotland in this House?

Mr Carmichael: No.

Tom Greatrex (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): Further to that question, I note that the Secretary of State has made it clear that implications for other parts of the United Kingdom will follow from this process, and some of those points are set out in the Command Paper. Will he clarify that? On page 43 of the Command Paper, it states that the Liberal Democrat commission's view is that

"the present level of Scottish representation at Westminster should be retained until a federal structure for the UK has been delivered".

Does that remain his position and that of his Front-Bench colleagues?

Mr Carmichael: That remains the position of my party.

Sir Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): May I first welcome my right hon. Friend's Command Paper? As somebody who led our party in the constitutional convention, I welcome the fact that the Scottish Parliament will now get proper tax-raising powers. Does he agree that anything more than 50% looks a lot like home rule and a shared partnership? To those who want devolution within England, may I say, "You have our support, but it is quite difficult to support something that is unclear"? We need a constitutional convention. I suggest that devolution has

in every case been accompanied by electoral reform and proportionality, and that should also be a condition in England.

Mr Carmichael: It is an important point that devolution has in every case been accompanied by electoral reform, and that institutions to which power is devolved are always elected proportionately. I cannot add a great deal to my answer to the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr Denham) on the need to build consensus in whichever way people in England choose. In Scotland, we have done it in a way that has worked for us twice, and will I believe now work for us a third time. It could work for people in England, but it is for them to make up their own minds about that.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement. I welcome more the resounding result of our Scottish kith and kin choosing to stay within the Union, and I welcome the way in which the debate was fought and won. The implications go well beyond the Scottish highlands and islands or the borders: where Scotland goes with devolution, Northern Ireland invariably follows. What engagement will the Smith commission and Lord Smith have with parties in Northern Ireland to ensure that the outcome reflects the needs of all the United Kingdom in all its diversity, especially the needs of Northern Ireland?

Mr Carmichael: Lord Smith has been charged with building a consensus in relation to further powers for the Scottish Parliament. I am sure that if the hon. Gentleman has a view informed by his experience of devolution in Northern Ireland, Lord Smith will certainly be interested to hear it. Given the remit that we have given Lord Smith, however, I do not expect him to say anything in relation to changes for Northern Ireland.

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend assure me that the business community on both sides of the border will be fully consulted on the further devolution of powers over personal taxation, because they shoulder much of the administrative burden? Much as further devolution might be desirable, it must not increase the regulatory burden on wealth and job creators on both sides of the border.

Mr Carmichael: Indeed, the voice of business is very important in this process, as it was throughout the referendum campaign. I know from my discussions with the CBI, the chambers of commerce and others that they are working on their proposals. I urge all collective organisations, individual businesses and individual citizens who have something to say to come forward and say it—this is their time.

Graeme Morrice (Livingston) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the decisive no vote was not a vote for the status quo, but a vote for continued change, and that we in this House must deliver and be seen to deliver on our commitments to further Scottish devolution quickly, inclusively and decisively, without tying them to any decentralisation plans for south of the border?

Mr Carmichael: I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman that assurance, which I have already given on two or three occasions this afternoon. There are few things

that would be worse for the constitutional integrity of the United Kingdom than our not delivering on the promises that we made or not meeting the timetable. It is because I care so much about keeping the United Kingdom together that I am determined that we will meet the timetable that we have laid out.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Today's Command Paper does not contain a section dedicated to the supervening question of the position of European law in relation to Scotland. That is a reserved matter under the Scotland Act 1998. Will the Secretary of State give an absolute and categorical assurance that, having saved the Union of the United Kingdom, under no circumstances will we surrender the Scottish functions to the European Union?

Mr Carmichael: I would be more than happy for the hon. Gentleman to engage directly with Lord Smith. Indeed, I will make every effort to explain to Lord Smith what he might expect.

Mr Brian H. Donohoe (Central Ayrshire) (Lab): In his statement, the Secretary of State said:

“It is important that everyone now accepts this result”.

The \$64,000 question is how long it will be before the SNP demands another referendum.

Mr Carmichael: Demands for a further referendum would have an exceptionally damaging effect on Scottish businesses, Scottish jobs and the Scottish economy. We know that because we can see what happened in Quebec in Canada when the separatists did not accept the outcome and came back a second time. We know what happened to the financial services sector in Montreal. I do not want that to happen in Scotland. Unfortunately, I cannot dictate what the Scottish National party will do, but I say to it that if it does not make it clear that it accepts this result and if it does not engage in the Smith commission in good faith, it will suffer.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): As my right hon. Friend congratulates the people of Scotland on the 85% turnout in the referendum, I hope that he will reflect on the 85% of people in the United Kingdom who did not get a vote on the Union: namely, the people of England. He has no mandate from me or my constituents to devolve further powers to Scotland, while expecting my constituents to bankroll it and failing to address the issue of English votes for English laws.

Mr Carmichael: I fear that my hon. Friend does not quite reflect the intricacies of the settlement in the United Kingdom. I invite him to reflect on that at some leisure. I understand completely the concerns that he expresses about the position of England within the United Kingdom. Of course that discussion needs to take place. We have had such a discussion for decades in Scotland and I wish the people of England well in having it, but I cannot emphasise too strongly that that discussion cannot and will not hold up the delivery of the powers to the Scottish Parliament.

Cathy Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab/Co-op): A key principle during the referendum debate was the delivery of fairness in Scotland. I was pleased to

[Cathy Jamieson]

hear the Secretary of State confirm that the principle of pooling and sharing resources across the United Kingdom will be fundamental. Will he say more about whether Lord Smith will have access to various resources within the Treasury and the Government so that he can produce further analysis of the various proposals that have been put forward by the different political parties, with the principle of the pooling and sharing of resources in mind?

Mr Carmichael: The secretariat for Lord Smith's commission is already supported by civil servants from the Scotland Office, the Cabinet Office and the Treasury. I met Lord Smith on the Monday following the referendum and I told him then—I am happy to repeat this commitment publicly—that any resources that he felt he needed would be given, such is the importance that we attach to the work with which he has been tasked.

Sir James Paice (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the holes in the current devolution settlement, as some of us pointed out at the time, is that effectively the Scottish people have representation without taxation? We must ensure that the Scottish Government have not only the power but the obligation to raise some of their taxes, thus increasing their accountability and enhancing democracy.

Mr Carmichael: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The completion of the job of devolution requires the Scottish Parliament to be given control of at least half its budget—preferably more in my view, although we will see what Lord Smith comes forward with on that in the fullness of time. It is important for the rebalancing of the political debate in Scotland that we have a Parliament that debates not only how to spend money, but how to raise it.

Katy Clark (North Ayrshire and Arran) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State agree that the high level of participation among ordinary members of the public in the referendum debate was incredibly important, and a stark contrast to the debate leading up to the Scotland Act 2012, which of course delivered substantial further powers to the Scottish Parliament on the taxation and indeed borrowing that come to it? Does he agree that we must listen to the message of that debate, which was that whether people voted yes or no, they wanted change and we have failed to deliver on social justice? Will he hold a public education campaign and ensure that the Government talk not only about the powers that need to be delivered, but about how those powers can be used by the Scottish Parliament to deliver social justice?

Mr Carmichael: Having a short process such as the one we have outlined allows early delivery of those powers, and that will allow us to get on to talking about how we use those powers, not just where they are. I share the hon. Lady's commitment to progress and social justice, and one thing that is clear from 18 September is that people in Scotland, and elsewhere, understand that these are often complex and subtle problems that we cannot solve just by drawing a line on the map.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that part of this settlement needs to be a public spending agreement that is fair to all four nations of the UK? On that basis, will he be reviewing the Barnett formula to ensure that it continues to reflect relative need and will do so in the future?

Mr Carmichael: Part of the vow made by the three party leaders was that there would be no change to the Barnett formula, and that remains Government policy.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): With the Wales Bill about to proceed to the other place, what improvements will the UK Government bring to the Bill to reflect the changing constitutional landscape following events in Scotland?

Mr Carmichael: I am afraid that the answer to that question will have to be delivered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mike Crockart (Edinburgh West) (LD): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement, and may I echo his call for all of Scotland, whether part of the 45%, 55%, or indeed 65% of my constituents in Edinburgh West who voted no, to now set aside our differences and party affiliations and ensure that the will of the Scottish people is delivered?

Mr Carmichael: I echo that sentiment, and having campaigned on a number of occasions with my hon. Friend in his constituency during the referendum campaign, I was not in any way surprised that his constituents voted by such a handsome margin; it was almost as good as the decision in Orkney—[*Interruption.*] Shetland also voted no very heavily. The best way to capitalise on that magnificent result is for us in this House to demonstrate good faith in relation to the vow.

Jim McGovern (Dundee West) (Lab): I am mindful of the previous hon. Member's contribution. At the risk of sounding partisan, we see the separatists' turnout here today. Are they really the party that stands up for Scotland? They cannot even turn up for Scotland.

Mr Carmichael: I am sure there are good reasons why hon. Members are here or not, and they can explain that for themselves.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): The Secretary of State is absolutely right that the vow must be made good on, but the devolution of considerable additional powers to Scotland has a particular impact on the north of England and we need a long-term solution to our constitution. One thing that could very quickly enhance the voice of the north is to deliver English votes for English laws. Can the Secretary of State confirm that there is absolutely nothing to prevent that happening in tandem with the new powers for Scotland?

Mr Carmichael: To make any change of that sort, it will be necessary for the parties to build consensus and to deliver it through this House. That is something that goes beyond my responsibility.

Mrs Anne McGuire (Stirling) (Lab): Given the enthusiasm of the Scottish electorate during the referendum campaign, how will the Secretary of State maintain the enthusiasm, engagement and transparency of the process, so that on 30 November it does not look as though we have delivered a fix, instead of something that has support among the Scottish people?

Mr Carmichael: I will be more than happy to play my role in the process that the right hon. Lady outlines. There is a duty and an opportunity for all of us, across all the parties, to play a role. The electorate has rebooted politics in Scotland. It is for us now to respond to the initiative that has been taken by the people.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I am told that on all sorts of measures Kettering is the most average borough in England. I would contend that Kettering people are the most fair-minded people in England. I am sure that my constituents would be very happy for Scotland to have lots more powers so that it can decide things for itself. However, what the fair-minded people of Kettering cannot accept—I would like the Secretary of State to try to explain it to them—is the Scottish people receiving premiums for public services, over and above what the average English taxpayer gets in England, unrelated to relative deprivation.

Mr Carmichael: The flow of money between the different parts of the United Kingdom comes and goes at different times over the years. What we have—Scotland has just said that it wishes to continue to be part of this—is a situation in which we all share and pool risks and resources. That is what the people of Scotland have voted for. I hope the hon. Gentleman will sign up to that too.

Sheila Gilmore (Edinburgh East) (Lab): In relation to greater devolution, one proposal that my party made was for the devolution of housing benefit. I appreciate that to some extent that cuts across one of the current Government's pet projects, universal credit, but will the Secretary of State assure me that his colleagues on the Government Front Bench will be as flexible as possible and willing to see changes that will really help people in Scotland. Incidentally, this proposal might get his Government off one of their uncomfortable hooks—a policy that is not even going to work.

Mr Carmichael: Time will tell exactly what the change to universal credit achieves. On the devolution of housing benefit and other matters, we will wait and see what Lord Smith comes forward with. It is not appropriate at this stage for me, as a Minister, to second-guess what he might come up with, but the Government will respond in good faith when we see his heads of agreement.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): The Secretary of State will be aware that very late in the campaign all three party leaders promised significant extra powers to the people of Scotland. What calculations were done on the costs of implementing any additional powers? I heard the Secretary of State say that all resources would be given in terms of making up the deal, but when will the House see any figures associated with what will happen in the name of giving extra powers to Scotland?

Mr Carmichael: May I gently correct my hon. Friend on one point? The proposals of the three parties that support the continuation of the United Kingdom were published, in some cases, 18 months ahead of the independence referendum, and all certainly were published well before the summer. What was made clear in the latter stages of the referendum campaign was the timetable that would be followed. That was the essence of the new commitment that was made. On the figures that will be available, I am afraid that my hon. Friend will, like the rest of us, have to wait until Lord Smith comes forward with his heads of agreement on 30 November, because we cannot put figures on something that we do not yet know the details of.

Sandra Osborne (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Lab): These powers are, of course, extremely important, but may I join colleagues on the Opposition Benches in emphasising the need for further devolution to deliver on social justice and equality? That is what the Scottish people voted for, and it is what they want to hear. We are very proud of our young people and the way they conducted themselves and engaged with the campaign, but does the Secretary of State agree that it is illogical to give them a vote for just one election?

Mr Carmichael: I certainly join the hon. Lady in congratulating 16 and 17-year-olds on the enthusiasm and vigour that they brought to the campaign, which was one of the most heartening aspects of the whole process. Although this goes beyond the next general election, I think it would be difficult for any future Government to resist such a change across the whole of the United Kingdom, and, having seen its effect in Scotland, I do not see why anybody would want to.

Michael Connarty (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (Lab): I commend the Secretary of State for being able to take the heat out of a situation better than almost anyone else in politics. He has taken some heat himself during the campaign. Will he assure me that the people who do not shout the loudest—people who do not gang up on others—will be heard by the Smith commission? I am talking about the quiet people—the 10,000 contacts I had from constituents who said they wanted this to be solved, whether they voted yes or no, and who wanted their group, whether it was a non-governmental organisation or a charity, to be heard by whoever designs the future of Scotland within the Union.

Mr Carmichael: The hon. Gentleman commends me on taking the heat out of the situation. I wonder if that is perhaps an oblique way of saying I am boring if that is what is necessary. I have certainly been accused of an awful lot worse than that during my 13 years as a Member of this House.

In terms of engaging the quiet majority who spoke, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: it should not just be the squeaky wheel that gets the grease. Anybody who has a view on how Scotland can be better governed should be able to express that view and expect it to be given the respect it will undoubtedly deserve.

Gemma Doyle (West Dunbartonshire) (Lab/Co-op): The people of Scotland have made a positive choice to stay in the UK. There is clearly support for the further devolution proposed by the three parties, and that must

[Gemma Doyle]

now happen and that process must move forward. I understand that there need to be discussions about devolution to other parts of the UK, but will the Secretary of State urge calm among his colleagues? It will be ludicrous if the result of this vote is that we start to rip apart this Parliament because of their ill-thought-out and rushed proposals.

Mr Carmichael: I cannot restate too often the importance of building the broadest possible consensus. It has taken us decades to do that in Scotland, and the Smith commission is just the latest iteration. I believe that parties in England, Wales and Northern Ireland now have to enter into that process with the same good faith we are showing in Scotland. There is no alternative to building that sort of consensus. Reflecting on some of the efforts of this Government, I see no other way of achieving constitutional reform than by building that consensus.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): I wish the Secretary of State well in completing the process of devolution to Scotland, but it cannot be denied that that will leave unfinished business in the form of devolution in England to our great cities outside London such as Birmingham. In his capacity as a Cabinet member of the United Kingdom Government, is he talking to his colleagues—particularly the Minister responsible for cities—about how the greater devolution of power to cities in England can take place in tandem with the work that he is doing in Scotland?

Mr Carmichael: I reiterate that I hesitate to use terms such as “in tandem” because they might suggest a link that could cause delay for one process or the other. It is apparent to me that there is an increased appetite for discussing constitutional change, especially in England. I see that among my own family living in England. I think that it is entirely healthy, and I will encourage it in any way I can. The hon. Lady mentioned devolution to cities. I believe that this Government’s record on city deals and on giving opportunities and resources to cities represents one of our biggest successes. It has probably brought more significant change to the way in which England is governed than many people realise.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): I strongly support more powers for the Scottish Parliament, but as the Secretary of State has said, there is a growing appetite for more devolution throughout the whole of the United Kingdom, perhaps in different forms. Will he therefore support the sensible suggestion that the way forward might well be to have a constitutional convention?

Mr Carmichael: I have already made it clear that I am something of an enthusiast for that process, having been through it north of the border. I have always thought that there were applicable lessons for the rest of the United Kingdom, but I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that I do not see us resolving that issue this side of the general election.

Mr Iain McKenzie (Inverclyde) (Lab): I do not think that it is lost on the Secretary of State, or on any of the hon. Members in this House who took part in the referendum campaign, that there are now deep divisions among the Scottish people. Does he agree that, if those divisions are to be healed to allow people to come together, a good starting point would be for the leadership of the Scottish National party to acknowledge that the question of Scottish independence is now dead for decades?

Mr Carmichael: I have already made it clear that I expect the leadership of the Scottish National party—in whatever shape or form it eventually emerges—to give that commitment to the Scottish people. That was what the party signed up to in the Edinburgh agreement and that was what it was saying in the week before the referendum. I see no reason why it should not stick to that position.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I am absolutely certain that the events in Scotland will lead to further devolution in Wales and in England, but what analysis has the Secretary of State made of the proposals on English votes for English laws? Would it not be bizarre if Scottish MPs were barred from voting but Scottish peers were allowed to vote on exactly the same legislation? Such peers could include the ninth Earl of Arran, the 14th Earl of Stair, the 16th Earl of Lindsay and, for that matter, Lord Smith.

Mr Carmichael: Lord Smith is not an hereditary peer. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr Laws) has already said, where we have devolved, we have devolved to a legislature, be it a Parliament or an Assembly, that is elected proportionally. That has been an important part of the way in which we have gone about the process of devolution, and I think that the people of England should be entitled to that as well. The essential difficulty that the hon. Gentleman touches on is that it is—[*Interruption.*] He knows my views on an unelected House of Lords. It is very difficult to devolve within Parliament but not the Executive, and that is something that those who want changes of this sort will have to address and explain.

Backbench Business

Palestine and Israel

Mr Speaker: A manuscript amendment standing in the name of the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) and others has been tabled this morning—copies are available in the Vote Office—and I have selected it. In a moment, I shall call Mr Grahame M. Morris to move the motion. It might be for the convenience of the House for Members to be told that no fewer than 52 right hon. and hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye, in consequence of which I am sorry to have to say that there will need to be a five-minute limit on Back-Bench contributions. I understand that at some point, probably around the middle of the debate, the Minister and the shadow Minister wish to contribute. They are not, of course, so constrained, but I am sure that they will want sensitively to tailor their speeches, taking account of the level of interest of their Back-Bench colleagues. Similarly, the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) is not subject to the five-minute limit, but I know that he will aspire to retain or to gain the warm regard of his colleagues and will therefore not seek to detain the House beyond 15 minutes, and preferably not beyond 10.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman must.

Crispin Blunt: It is pertinent to the issue of amendments. An amendment standing in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb) has been tabled, and I have been given two accounts as to whether it has been withdrawn or not selected. I would be grateful if you could illuminate the House, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I am very happy to illuminate the House. That amendment has not been selected; the amendment selected is that in the name of the right hon. Member for Blackburn. I am grateful to the hon. Member for raising the point.

5.46 pm

Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House believes that the Government should recognise the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel.

I wish to place on record my thanks to the Backbench Business Committee for allocating time in the main Chamber for what is obviously, given the number of Members from all parts of the House who have indicated support, a very popular and timely debate. May I say at the outset that I am happy to support the amendment standing in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) and various other Members? It has always been my position that recognition of Palestinian statehood should form the basis of any future peace negotiations, and the amendment clarifies that.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Grahame M. Morris: I will, but I suspect I will have to be careful about giving way, given the time.

Ian Paisley: As the hon. Gentleman knows, his party played a phenomenally important role in the peace process in Northern Ireland, one of the world's most successful peace processes. Why not learn from that experience and, instead of setting the conclusion at the beginning of the debate, wait for the debate and the negotiation to take place in order to reach the conclusion?

Grahame M. Morris: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention but—if he will bear with me—I hope to be able to destroy that argument comprehensively.

I am firmly of the opinion that the day will come when the two-state solution, which I believe is supported by all parties on both sides of the House, will collapse and Israel will face a South African-style struggle for equal voting rights. As soon as that happens, the state of Israel is finished. Hon. Members might think that that is controversial, but they are not really my words but those of the then Israeli Prime Minister in 2007.

The two-state solution has been Britain's stated policy aim for decades, but in politics talk often comes cheap. I have participated in numerous debates in Westminster Hall and in the main Chamber where I have heard speeches delivered by Back Benchers from both sides of the House and from Ministers at the Dispatch Box stating our commitment to a two-state solution—

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): May I say that many people support the two-state solution? Will he also confirm that more than 300 Israeli figures signed a letter on Sunday urging this Parliament to vote in favour of the motion, and they included former Ministers, ex-diplomats and activists in Israel?

Grahame M. Morris: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for her intervention. As a friend of Palestine, I earnestly believe that recognition of the state of Palestine is the only way forward, and that it should be the choice of all true friends of Israel. All parties should come together on that basis. Given our commitment to a two-state solution and the fact that an overwhelming majority of 134 nations voted in favour of Palestinian statehood, I was hugely disappointed by our decision to abstain on the issue at the UN General Assembly. We should regret that decision.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): There were no boundaries when the state of Israel was created, so there should be no prerequisite for the recognition of a Palestinian state.

Grahame M. Morris: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I should like to make some progress, so that all Members who have expressed a wish to speak have the opportunity to make their own specific points.

The decision that was taken at the UN General Assembly placed Britain not only at odds with the international consensus, but on the wrong side of history. Although this is a cross-party debate—I want to pay tribute to all colleagues from all parts of the House who have supported the motion—I have to say that, as a Labour MP, I was proud when my party opposed the Government's decision and said that the British Government should be willing

[*Grahame M. Morris*]

to support the recognition of Palestinian statehood. I am proud, too, that Labour is supporting today's call to recognise Palestine.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green) *rose*—

Grahame M. Morris: I will give way just one more time.

Caroline Lucas: The hon. Gentleman is very kind to give way, and I congratulate him on securing this debate. Does he agree that this is an unprecedented moment? Sweden has already moved to recognise Palestine. If we do not grasp this moment, we will lose a real opportunity to push this matter forward and to move closer to peace.

Grahame M. Morris: I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady. As the originator of the Balfour declaration and holder of the mandate for Palestine, Britain has a unique historical connection and, arguably, a moral responsibility to the people of both Israel and Palestine. In 1920, we undertook a sacred trust—a commitment to guide Palestinians to statehood and independence. That was nearly a century ago, and the Palestinian people are still to have their national rights recognised. This sacred trust has been neglected for far too long. As the hon. Lady has just said, we have an historic opportunity to atone for that neglect, and take this small but symbolically important step.

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Grahame M. Morris: I would rather not. I am sure that my hon. Friend will have an opportunity to speak later. I wish to make some progress.

The former Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and the current Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), who is not in his place, told the House that the two-state solution might become impossible if a settlement were not reached within a year. That was in 2012—two years ago. I am pleased to see that the Minister is listening attentively, as I expect him to stand at the Dispatch Box and tell us that we support a two-state solution and that we encourage all parties to return to negotiations. I advise him to keep hold of his speech, because he will soon have another opportunity to use it given the failure of so many similar initiatives.

It is now more than 20 years since the Oslo accords, and we are further away from peace than ever before. An entire generation of young Palestinians—the Oslo generation—has grown up to witness a worsening situation on the ground. We have seen a significant expansion of illegal Israeli settlements, heightened security threats to both sides, punitive restrictions on Palestinian movement, economic decline, a humanitarian crisis in Gaza of catastrophic proportions and the construction of an illegal annexation wall through Palestinian land.

It is clear that both Israel-Palestine relations and our foreign policy are at an impasse, which must be broken. We hear a great deal of talk about the two-state solution. Today, through validating both states, Members will have the opportunity to translate all that principled talk into action, but we should be under no illusions—today

might be a symbolically important step, but it will not change the facts on the ground. The continuous blockade of the Gaza strip will not relent and the day-to-day reality of life under occupation will not change for the ordinary Palestinians. Opponents of the motion will use the well-worn argument that statehood should come through negotiations and not unilateral action.

Let us make no mistake about this: to make our recognition of Palestine dependent on Israel's agreement would be to grant Israel a veto over Palestinian self-determination.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Grahame M. Morris: Let me finish this point, and then I will give way for the last time. We have had a huge debate on giving up sovereignty to the EU. British people may or may not disagree with that argument, but they and their representatives here in this House would feel that it was completely wrong in practice and in principle if another sovereign state, be it Israel or any other country, determined our foreign policy.

Mr Djanogly: Israel's peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan involved bilateral negotiations and agreement on both sides. Why does the hon. Gentleman think that it would work now unilaterally?

Grahame M. Morris: The evidence of history is why. Twenty years of negotiations have failed, so we need to move things on. I firmly believe that we can all rally around this effort, and that that would achieve the desired results.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con) *rose*—

Grahame M. Morris: No, I am afraid I will not give way.

Recognition is not an Israeli bargaining chip; it is a Palestinian right. It is one that has to form the basis of any serious negotiations. Indeed, the lack of equity between Israel and the Palestinians is a structural failure that has undermined the possibility of a political settlement for decades. As it stands, Israel has little motivation or encouragement—perhaps little incentive is a better way of putting it—to enter into meaningful negotiations. The majority of Israeli Government politicians flat-out reject the notion of a Palestinian state. There are currently no negotiations and, as Secretary of State John Kerry admitted, it was Israeli intransigence that caused the collapse of the latest round of talks.

Israel has been unwilling to offer a viable Palestinian state through negotiations. If the acceleration of the illegal settlement enterprise had not already proved that, in July Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu once again ruled out ever accepting a sovereign Palestinian state in the west bank.

Andrew Percy: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Grahame M. Morris: No, I will not give way.

Let me be clear: to make recognition dependent on negotiations, as some Members advocate, is to reject the two-state solution. Some argue that by recognising Palestine,

we would undermine negotiations or somehow incite violence, but it is the systematic denial of rights that incites violence and emboldens those who reject politics. The knowledge that Britain, once again, is refusing to recognise the rights of the Palestinian people will serve only to validate those who reject diplomacy and to demonstrate the futility of the efforts of moderates on both sides.

Rejectionists in both Israel and Palestine—those who oppose any type of political settlement—will be delighted to learn that the British Parliament has refused what the vast majority of states have already accepted. Members should bear that in mind before they cast their vote. Those Palestinians who have pursued the path of diplomacy and non-violence for more than 20 years have achieved very little. We need to send them a message and give them encouragement that it is the path of peace and co-operation, and not the resorting to force of arms, that will actually lead to a lasting and just peace. It will also send a message to Israel that the British Parliament believes that its illegal settlement enterprise, which has pushed the possibility of a two-state settlement to the brink of collapse, has no validity whatsoever and that the international community is resolute in its opposition to the systematic colonisation of Palestinian land.

The right to statehood has already been accepted by the Government, who have said that they reserve “the right to recognise a Palestinian state bilaterally at the moment of our choosing and when it can best help bring about peace”.

If they do not do so urgently, I contend, and many informed commentators would agree with me, that any hope of a two-state solution, the only viable solution, will disappear altogether. Instead, Israel will continue its crusade towards the morally repugnant and politically untenable one-state solution that, in truth, could be maintained only through even greater brutality and effectively through apartheid rule—a fate so bleak that any true friend of Israel would oppose it.

In conclusion, during the assault on Gaza the leaders of all the main political parties told Members in this House that the life of a Palestinian child is worth just as much as the life of an Israeli child. Today, we can show that we regard both peoples as equal in dignity and rights not just in death but in life. I urge Members to support the motion and to recognise the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel.

6.1 pm

Sir Malcolm Rifkind (Kensington) (Con): I listened with great care to the sensitive speech that we have just heard from the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris), and I compliment him on his balanced remarks. I find this a very difficult issue to address, and I do not think the answer to the question that the House is having to consider is absolutely on one side or the other.

It fell to me when I was Foreign Secretary to commit the United Kingdom Government for the first time to a two-state solution with a Palestinian state. I have never wavered in that view and I believe that the earlier that state comes about the better, both for the Palestinians and for the middle east as a whole. I also share the frustration of the hon. Gentleman and that of many other hon. Members about the impasse, which has causes on both sides of the dispute. I believe that the Israelis are totally unjustified in their settlement policy. But I must also

say that the way in which the Israelis, having withdrawn from Gaza, have been subject to an ongoing attack by Hamas from within Gaza has clearly had a massive influence on Israeli public opinion. That has made it more difficult to make the progress we would like.

For me, the most important question is what practical benefit agreeing this motion would have. It might make us feel good and it might make us act in a similar way to a number of other countries around the world, but recognising a state should happen only when the territory in question has the basic requirements for a state. Through no fault of the Palestinians, that is not true at the moment.

It seems to me that the motion is premature. I say so for the following reason. We do not have a Palestinian Government; there are actually two Governments. Palestine is split, not because of the Israelis but because of the conflict between Hamas and Fatah. Not only are the boundaries of the Palestinian state not known but there is no Palestinian Government with any control over foreign policy or defence policy or who have an army with which to protect the territory of that state. That is not a criticism; it is simply a factual description of what would normally be a precondition. The United Kingdom did not recognise the state of Israel until 1950. It was only after what the Israelis call their war of independence that the Israelis demonstrated that they had created a state not simply through a declaration but through having the fundamental requirements.

We know that there have been occasions elsewhere in the world when states have been declared without the means to carry out the function of a state. We have seen it in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, where the Russians recognise an independence that is bogus in reality. We saw it in South Africa, where Transkei and Bophuthatswana were declared independent states when, of course, they were never any such thing.

Mr Jack Straw (Blackburn) (Lab): On the issue of the boundaries of a state of Palestine, surely their basis—although not their detail—is very clear and is internationally agreed to be the 1967 boundaries?

Sir Malcolm Rifkind: I will not take issue with the right hon. Gentleman on that, but I think that the boundaries are perhaps the least of the problems that we are addressing. I am saying something that has applied to British policy for generations, as it has to the policies of other countries. We recognise a state when the territory in question has a Government, an army, military capability—[*Interruption.*] That might not be something of which hon. Gentlemen would approve—

Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Sir Malcolm Rifkind: I am sorry, but I do not have time.

Hon. Members might not approve of that policy, but it has been pursued for many years.

Mr Andrew Love (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Sir Malcolm Rifkind: No, I am sorry. I am afraid I cannot in the time available.

[Sir Malcolm Rifkind]

We are told that 135 members of the United Nations—many of which have relatively little connection with the middle east, although some have a great connection—have recognised Palestine as a state. That has had no effect. It has received 24 hours of publicity but has had no marginal, massive or significant impact on the course of history. There is a great risk that today we will make ourselves feel important and that our own frustration will lead us to vote for a motion that will not have the desired effect and will perhaps make the problems that need to be addressed in reaching a two-state solution more difficult to deal with.

I will not detain the House any further, but will simply say that symbolism sometimes has a purpose and sometimes has a role, but one does not recognise a state that does not yet have the fundamental ingredients that a state requires if it is to carry out its international functions. At the very least, I would respectfully suggest that the motion is premature.

6.6 pm

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): There is so much to say about the tragedy with which Israelis and Palestinians have lived for so long. Over the years, I have spoken about the things I have seen for myself, whether that has been settlements growing in violation of international law and successive resolutions; the barrier that snakes in and out of the west bank, cutting Palestinian communities off from each other and farmers from the land; or Palestinian children being brought in leg irons into Israeli military courts, accused of throwing stones, and being subject to laws that vary depending on whether one is Palestinian or Israeli. I have sat with Palestinian families in East Jerusalem who have had their homes destroyed and who are no longer allowed to live in the city of their birth. I have seen for myself the devastation of homes, schools and hospitals in Gaza. I have met fishermen who are fired on if all they do is try to fish. Yes, I have been to Sderot as well and know that Israelis have spoken about their real fear about rocket attacks from Gaza. I also know the fear that Palestinians in Gaza feel daily because of the constant buzz of drones overhead, 24 hours a day, that could bring death at any moment.

I have not merely read about such things; I have seen them for myself. They are why a negotiated settlement is so important. Principles are important too, however, in reaching that negotiated settlement. First, we should act according to international law and insist that the parties involved do so as well. Secondly, we should treat Palestinians and Israelis as equals. We have a choice today: will we do that, or will we just talk about it?

For Israelis, the right of recognition and to self-determination are not the subject of negotiation but something they have demanded as a right and that they were given as a right more than 65 years ago.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and compliment him on all his work. Is he aware that despite what was said by the right hon. and learned Member for Kensington (Sir Malcolm Rifkind) and despite the fact that Israel is listed under the borders put down in 1948, it has never

delineated its own borders? Our recognition of Palestine would help to assert Palestinian rights at this important time.

Richard Burden: Yes, that is absolutely right. The international position is clear: it is delineated by the green line. The final borders will be negotiated in final status negotiations. That is understood, and that is the same for Israel and for Palestine. But let us also remember that it is more than 20 years since the Palestine Liberation Organisation, acting on behalf of the Palestinian people as a whole, recognised the state of Israel. Yet, despite that, when Israel talks about itself, it still says that it wants constant reaffirmation of that recognition. How many times have I heard Israeli Ministers—indeed, some hon. Members—ask, “How can you talk with people who do not recognise your right to exist?” So for them and Israel, recognition is not about negotiation; it is about something fundamental. Well, if that is the case for Israelis, Palestinians have no fewer rights than that. Recognition for Palestinians cannot be a matter of privilege; it, too, must be a matter of right. That is the problem with the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb), because saying that recognition can only happen with the outcome of negotiations very much gives Israel the right of veto not only over a Palestinian state but over the UK Parliament’s ability to make our own decision to recognise that Palestinian state.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Richard Burden: No. I am afraid that I have given way once. Time prevents me from doing so any more.

In the House, we make our own decisions, and we act on them bilaterally. We do so as members of the European Union and as members of the United Nations. The choice before us is clear: do we want to achieve a two-state solution in practice, with Palestinians and Israelis treated as equals, or are we content to repeat a theoretical mantra about two states where the reality is slipping away before our eyes, either because Benjamin Netanyahu, as he said to *The Times of Israel* this summer, has said that he will never countenance a Palestinian state that is sovereign in the way that he expects sovereignty for Israel, or because another generation of Palestinians has grown up being told that they must reject the path of violence when the only reality that they see ahead of them is occupation in the west bank and a blockade in Gaza.

I received an e-mail today from a Palestinian living in East Jerusalem. He described some of his life under occupation in East Jerusalem and he asked me to say this tonight: “I want to see light at the end of the tunnel, but I really want to see light at the end of the tunnel; I don’t want to see a train coming at me from the other end.” That is the challenge before us today. Are we prepared to give him that light at the end of the tunnel and to assert that a negotiated solution must be based on equality: two states for two peoples, with equal rights and each with equal stature in the international community? If we are going to do that, it is not just something to talk about; it is something to get on with. People will vote tonight for different reasons, but if we want to achieve a Palestinian state in practice, vote for the motion tonight.

6.12 pm

Sir Richard Ottaway (Croydon South) (Con): If the rest of the debate follows the tone of the three speeches that we have heard so far, it will be a memorable debate. The next few minutes will be personally rather painful for me. It was inevitable right since the time of the holocaust that Israel clearly had to be a state in its own right, and Attlee accepted the inevitable and relinquished the British mandate. In November 1947, the United Nations supported the partition resolution. What was on the table then was a settlement that the Arabs would die for today. In May 1948, Israel became an independent state and came under attack from all sides within hours. In truth, it has been fighting for its existence ever since.

I was a friend of Israel long before I became a Tory. My wife's family were instrumental in the creation of the Jewish state. Indeed, some of them were with Weizmann at the Paris conference. The holocaust had a deep impact on me as a young man growing up in the aftermath of the second world war, particularly when I paid a visit as a schoolboy to Belsen.

Sir Bob Russell (Colchester) (LD): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Richard Ottaway: I will not give way if the hon. Gentleman does not mind.

In the six-day war, I became personally involved. There was a major attempt to destroy Israel, and I found myself as a midshipman in the Royal Navy based on board a minesweeper in Aden, sent by Harold Wilson to sweep the straits of Tiran of mines after the Suez canal had been blocked. In the aftermath of that war, which, clearly, the Israelis won, the Arab states refused peace, recognition or negotiation.

Six years later, in the Yom Kippur war in 1973, the same situation happened again. It was an emphatic defeat after a surprise attack. Since then, based on the boundaries that were framed after the Yom Kippur war, we have had three thwarted peace agreements, each one better than the last, and we have had two tragedies: the assassination of Rabin and the stroke suffered by Ariel Sharon.

Throughout all this, I have stood by Israel through thick and thin, through the good years and the bad. I have sat down with Ministers and senior Israeli politicians and urged peaceful negotiations and a proportionate response to prevarication, and I thought that they were listening. But I realise now, in truth, looking back over the past 20 years, that Israel has been slowly drifting away from world public opinion. The annexation of the 950 acres of the west bank just a few months ago has outraged me more than anything else in my political life, mainly because it makes me look a fool, and that is something that I resent.

Turning to the substantive motion, to be a friend of Israel is not to be an enemy of Palestine. I want them to find a way through, and I am delighted by yesterday's reconstruction package for Gaza, but with a country that is fractured with internal rivalries, that shows such naked hostility to its neighbour, that attacks Israel by firing thousands of rockets indiscriminately, that risks the lives of its citizens through its strategic placing of weapons and that uses the little building material that it is allowed to bring in to build tunnels, rather than

homes, I am not yet convinced that it is fit to be a state and should be recognised only when there is a peace agreement. Under normal circumstances, I would oppose the motion tonight; but such is my anger over Israel's behaviour in recent months that I will not oppose the motion. I have to say to the Government of Israel that if they are losing people like me, they will be losing a lot of people.

6.16 pm

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): I wish to draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

The tragic clash between Jewish and Palestinian nationalism can only be resolved with the creation of a Palestinian state with agreed and secure borders, with international backing and support, alongside the state of Israel, and the only way to bring that about in a lasting and peaceful way, to the benefit of both peoples, is through direct negotiations, where agreements are made, assurances are given and where there is full security and long-term peace. That needs agreement on borders, and some agreement has been made, but the differences are relatively small in length but critical in nature. It needs agreement on how to share Jerusalem, on refugee issues, agreement on security and agreement that setting up a Palestinian state would be the end of claims and the end of conflict, not a staging post for an attack on Israel's existence.

We should remember that the peace treaty that was signed with Egypt in 1979 has stood the test of time, despite drastic changes in regime and Governments. In contrast, Israel's unilateral withdrawal of settlers and soldiers from Gaza in 2005 has not resulted in peace. It has led to the terrorist organisation, Hamas, violently overthrowing Fatah, launching its barrage of rockets and now directing the terror tunnels at the civilians of Israel. We saw the results in the horrendous events of last summer.

Two years ago, the Palestinian Authority were given some status in the United Nations in an attempt to look for a diplomatic UN route to try to resolve what appeared to be intractable problems. What has happened since then, and what use has been made of that diplomacy? The most recent effort to find a negotiated peace was that undertaken by John Kerry. The truth is that it was President Abbas who did not give an answer to the framework agreement that John Kerry put forward as a basis for further negotiations. Israel agreed to it, quite rightly, though it did not want to; it had to be pushed and pressurised to do so. President Abbas has still not given any answer; instead, he returned to the United Nations.

On 26 September, President Abbas addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations. That was the sort of approach that the proposed resolution envisages: no direct negotiations, and dealing with this by resolution, and through United Nations debates. He spoke about "genocide" by Israelis, and about Palestinian "martyrs". Is that the language used about the suicide bombings directed at the young people and civilians of Israel at a time when peace negotiations, following Oslo, were very much under way? He spoke about "forced withdrawals". That is not the language of peace.

[Mrs Louise Ellman]

It should be remembered that while peace negotiations were under way following the Oslo negotiations, in one month alone—March 2002—80 Israeli civilians were killed and 600 injured in targeted suicide bombings on the streets of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Ashkelon, in a concerted attempt to undermine and destroy that peace process. No wonder there is concern among the people of Israel; they know that during those peace negotiations—it was right to stick to them and to keep going with them—terror groups sent by, among others, Yasser Arafat, were targeting, killing and maiming Israeli civilians. The Israeli withdrawal from Gaza—a correct, unilateral withdrawal—was followed by rockets, the terror tunnels, and more and more death.

This is not an easy issue; if it was easy to resolve, it would have been resolved by now. Both Jews and Palestinians deserve to have their states, and to live in peace and security, side by side. Direct negotiations are the way—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order.

6.22 pm

Sir Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) (Con): The House is enormously grateful to the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) for securing this debate. I hope that amendment (b), in the name of the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw), to which I put my name, will maximise support tonight for the recognition of Palestine as a state. I find it astonishing that, having been a Member of this House for 22 years, I cannot think of a previous occasion on which we have debated this issue on either a substantive motion, or a motion such as today's, yet this is the most vexed and emotive issue in the entire region, if not the world.

Let us be clear from the start, to allay the fears of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman), who speaks passionately on this subject: I think that all of us in this House, to a man and a woman, recognise the state of Israel and its right to exist. Our belief in that should not in any way be impugned. Let us also be clear that that same right has not been granted to Palestine; in my view, it is high time that it was. It is the other half of the commitment that our predecessors in this House made as part of the British mandate in the region.

I cannot think of any other populous area of the world that is subject to so many resolutions but is not allowed to call itself a state. After the civil war, albeit two years after 1948, we recognised the state of Israel. It was still not the tidiest of Administrations. Its borders were not clear; they still are not. It had no agreed capital—it wanted Jerusalem; at the moment, it has Tel Aviv—and no effective Government, so I do not quite agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kensington (Sir Malcolm Rifkind) in his assessment of what it takes to justify granting statehood to, and recognise, a country.

Grahame M. Morris: The right hon. and learned Member for Kensington (Sir Malcolm Rifkind) said that Palestine did not have international recognition; the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have both said that Palestinian statehood should be recognised.

Sir Alan Duncan: I agree.

Mrs Gillan *rose*—

Sir Alan Duncan: Given the very short time left to me, I will race ahead, if my right hon. Friend will allow me.

We have accepted as a principle in Government that eventually there should be recognition of a Palestinian state, so this is ultimately a matter of timing and circumstance. The House will have been deeply moved by the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Sir Richard Ottaway). So many of us go on a personal journey on this issue, as I have done over the past 20 years. Recognition of statehood is not a reward for anything; it is a right. The notion that it would put an end to negotiations, or somehow pre-empt or destroy them, is patently absurd; Palestine would still be occupied, and negotiations would need to continue, both to end that occupation and to agree land swaps and borders. Refusing Palestinian recognition is tantamount to giving Israel the right of veto.

When I was a Minister of State at the Department for International Development, we supported the Palestinian Authority; over so many years, it was there, a responsible organisation. It is not their fault that they are occupied, and so often have their revenues withheld by the Israelis; if they were not withheld, Palestine would not need a penny of British aid. Recognising Palestine is not about recognising a Government. It is states that are recognised, not Governments. We are talking about recognition of the right to exist as a state. This is not about endorsing a state that has to be in perfect working order. It is the principle of recognition that the House should agree to today.

Mrs Gillan: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Alan Duncan: I will run out of time, so no; forgive me.

Some in this House clearly think that to support Israel, they must oppose or delay such recognition, but that is not the case. By opposing Palestinian recognition, they are undermining the interests of both Israel and Palestine. It is only through recognition that we can give Palestinians the dignity and hope that they need to engage in further negotiations and to live in a country that they can properly call their own. Let us remember a fundamental principle, on which I will make a more detailed speech tomorrow morning: settlements are illegal, and the endorsement of the Israelis' right to reject recognition is tantamount to the endorsement of illegal settlement activity.

A lot of people feel intimidated when it comes to standing up for this issue. It is time we did stand up for it, because almost the majority of Palestinians are not yet in their 20s. They will grow up stateless. If we do not give them hope, dignity and belief in themselves, it will be a recipe for permanent conflict, none of which is in Israel's interests. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside, who speaks on every occasion on this subject, only ever catalogues the violence on one side, and this is a tit-for-tat argument. Today, the House should do its historic duty.

6.28 pm

Mr Jack Straw (Blackburn) (Lab): I beg to move amendment (b), at the end of the Question to add, 'as a contribution to securing a negotiated two state solution.'

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) on bringing this debate to the House. I also pay tribute to the extraordinary and very moving speech by the right hon. Member for Croydon South (Sir Richard Ottaway), which, as I think we all appreciated, was a very difficult speech to make.

As the House will note, the amendment has wide, cross-party support. Its purpose is very simple. It is based on the belief that the recognition of the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel will add to the pressure for a negotiated two-state solution, and may help to bring that prospect a little closer to fruition.

The “Road Map to a Permanent Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict” was promulgated at the end of April 2003 under the auspices of the Quartet—the UN, EU, US and Russia. Though, palpably, much of the progress presaged by the road map has been confounded by events, crucially, by the road map, the Government of Israel were signed up to there being a separate and independent state of Palestine. One part of the road map anticipated that Quartet members, which include the UK, could

“promote international recognition of a Palestinian state, including possible UN membership”

as a transitional measure, well before any final status agreement. The Government of Israel disagree. They claim that recognition of Palestine as a state should be at the conclusion of any successful peace negotiations. But such an approach would give the Government of Israel a veto, even over whether such a state should exist.

Sir Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (LD): I understand what the right hon. Gentleman is trying to achieve by his amendment, but how does he think the passing of the motion would encourage either Hamas or the Israelis to change their approach to negotiation, which has been so unfruitful so far?

Mr Straw: It is the Palestinian Authority that is part of the negotiations, not Hamas. I believe that the fact of the Israeli’s intemperate reaction to the very prospect of the House passing this resolution is proof that it will make a difference. The only thing that the Israeli Government understand, under the present demeanour of Benjamin Netanyahu, is pressure. What the House will be doing this evening will be to add to the pressure on the Government of Israel. That is why they are so worried about this resolution passing. Were it just a gesture, as the right hon. and learned Member for Kensington (Sir Malcolm Rifkind) implied, they would not be bothered at all. They are very worried indeed because they know that it will have an effect.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his contribution, but does he not agree that this is a Back-Bench motion? This has no effect on Government policy, and it is just futile.

Mr Straw: We represent the electorate of the United Kingdom. I can tell the hon. Gentleman, having spent 13 years sitting on the Treasury Bench, that resolutions passed in the House, whether they emanate from Back Benches or Front Benches, make a difference, and this resolution will, if it is passed, make a difference.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Straw: I have had my ration, if the hon. Gentleman will excuse me.

A moment’s thought will allow us to appreciate just how ill-founded the Government of Israel’s assertion is. Israel has been occupying Palestinian land for nearly 50 years. It fails to meet its clear international legal obligations as an occupying power. In the last 20 years, as we have heard, it has compounded that failure by a deliberate decision to annex Palestinian land and to build Israeli settlements on that land. There are now 600,000 such Israeli settlers in East Jerusalem and the west bank. The Israelis are seeking to strangle East Jerusalem by expropriating land all around it, and two months ago, they announced the illegal annexation of a further nearly 1,000 acres of land near Bethlehem. The Israeli Government will go on doing this as long as they pay no price for their obduracy. Their illegal occupation of land is condemned by this Government in strong terms, but no action follows. The Israelis sell produce from these illegal settlements in Palestine as if they were made or grown in Israel, but no action follows.

Israel itself was established and recognised by unilateral act. The Palestinians had no say whatever over the recognition of the state of Israel, still less a veto. I support the state of Israel. I would have supported it at the end of the 1940s. But it cannot lie in the mouth of the Israeli Government, of all Governments, to say that they should have a veto over a state of Palestine, when for absolutely certain, the Palestinians had no say whatever over the establishment of the state of Israel.

Today’s debate will, I hope, send a strong signal that the British Parliament stands full square behind the two-state solution set out in the road map. The current impasse can be broken, in my view, only by actions, not simply by words, and the recognition of Palestine by the international community would further, not hinder, these aims.

Three years ago on 9 November 2011, the right hon. Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), then Foreign Secretary, told the House:

“The United Kingdom judges that the Palestinian Authority largely fulfils criteria for UN membership, including statehood”.

He added that we, the United Kingdom,

“reserve the right to recognise a Palestinian state bilaterally at a moment of our choosing and when it can best help to bring about peace.”—[*Official Report*, 9 November 2011; Vol. 535, c. 290.]

That moment is now. I urge hon. Members on both sides to support the amendment.

6.35 pm

Mr James Clappison (Hertsmere) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw), but I am afraid to say that, having listened carefully to his speech and the speech of the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris), I am not as convinced as I would like to be that this motion would contribute towards a peaceful solution of the conflict, or that the recognition of Palestine by the House in a Back-Bench motion would somehow unlock a process whereby the two sides negotiated freely together to arrive at a peaceful solution.

The hon. Gentleman said that he would destroy the argument of the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) that taking this step would pre-empt and pre-determine the result of the negotiations. I am afraid to

[Mr James Clappison]

say that having listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman's speech—he did not take all interventions on this point—that argument was still well in existence at the end of his contribution and had not been destroyed at all, and it remains there for us to face. I say that as a committed supporter of a two-state solution, which will involve difficult, if not painful, compromises on both sides. It is also something that will take a long time—

Andrew Bridgen: Does my hon. Friend agree that, given that the political system of the world's superpower and our great ally the United States is very susceptible to well-funded powerful lobbying groups and the power of the Jewish lobby in America, it falls to this country and to this House to be the good but critical friend that Israel needs, and this motion tonight just might lift that logjam on this very troubled area?

Mr Clappison: There are powerful lobbies on all sides, and I am sure that my hon. Friend would agree with me in paying tribute to the work that Secretary of State Kerry did in trying to bring both sides to the negotiating table; he really does deserve our staunch support. But I am sure that my hon. Friend would also agree that a peaceful solution will be achieved only by negotiations by the parties themselves over all the outstanding issues, without the issues being determined in advance. The question for the outside world is whether what it does makes a just two-state solution more or less likely. I believe that international recognition of a Palestinian state in the terms of the motion would make a two-state solution less likely rather than more likely. I heard what the right hon. Member for Blackburn said about this. I am afraid that I do not see Israel, having faced the challenges that it has faced over years, caving in to this Back-Bench motion tonight. It might be a gesture on the part of the House, but it would take the process no further. The right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Easington can choose to look at this in terms of a veto, but it will require both sides, including the state of Israel, a democracy, which is susceptible to public opinion, to agree to a solution. That is the only way in which a just solution can be achieved.

Grahame M. Morris *rose*—

Mr Clappison: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman if he can answer the point, which I think was going to be made to him, as to whether he will accept that although Israel has not done everything always that it possibly could to bring about a solution, there have been repeated occasions in history, in the 1930s and the 1940s, and more recently, when it has been Israel that has agreed to a solution of all the outstanding issues, and it has not found the hand coming from the other side. That is historical fact.

Grahame M. Morris: What is the hon. Gentleman's solution, given that the former Foreign Secretary has said that the two-state solution is no longer tenable? Given the facts on the ground, as the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) and numerous other Members have indicated, with the settlement expansion plan—600,000 settlers—if we are not going to push ahead with the two-state solution because of the practicalities, what is the hon. Gentleman's alternative? Is it a one-state solution?

Mr Clappison: The state of Israel has been prepared to agree to a two-state solution in the past, and I hope that it will do so in future, but that will require both sides to negotiate. I do not accept the pessimism inherent in the hon. Gentleman's approach, because it is now clear that the motion is very pessimistic. I would like to see a hopeful motion that looked forward to a peaceful solution that gave Palestine its state, based on a fair division of territory, and all the accoutrements of statehood while at the same time allowing the state of Israel to enjoy sovereignty and security.

Sir Edward Garnier (Harborough) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Clappison: I am afraid that I cannot, because I would run out of time.

I believe that the Palestinian Authority have acted in good faith and are a worthy partner in negotiations. They have expressed their commitment to a two-state solution. Although he does not actually have a state, I believe that President Abbas has displayed statesmanlike qualities, not least during the recent Gazan conflict, but I believe that he and his Authority are making a mistake in going down the unilateral road.

There is a problem, which the hon. Member for Easington did not recognise, in the form of Hamas. Hamas is a different matter. Although the Palestinian Authority has acted in good faith, and although President Abbas has been statesmanlike in many ways, I am afraid that the Palestinian Authority took a backward step when they entered into a unity deal with Hamas in April this year. It would have been fine if Hamas had shown any inkling that it was moving towards a peaceful solution, but it has not. It has had many opportunities to commit to the requirements of the international community and say that it will go down the road of peace, but from its inception, and according to the tenets of its founding charter, it has set its face against any sort of peaceful co-existence with the state of Israel and turned its hand to a campaign of unremitting terror and violence. No Government would stand by and allow such a campaign to be directed against its population without taking proportionate measures in self-defence.

We must not overlook the fact—it is often overlooked—that Hamas has caused Gaza, a rather sad place to say the least, to be locked into a deeply depressing cycle of violence, intending to inflict casualties on Israel and reckless as to the consequences for the civilian population in Gaza. It is against that background that we must approach these issues.

I very much hope that in future Hamas will show some willingness to become part of a peaceful solution and to engage in normal democratic politics and peaceful and legal means, but it has not done that so far. The pressure should be on Hamas to desist its campaign of violence and enter into negotiations genuinely, together with the Palestinian Authority, with the state of Israel.

This is a terrible conflict. We must all look forward to the day when both sides get down to the business of making the compromises that will be needed to bring it to an end. Israel certainly has to make compromises as well, but in the meantime we should all take steps that will make those compromises more, rather than less, likely. My fear is that the motion—a unilateral recognition

of the Palestinian state—by encouraging one party to walk away from negotiations, would put off that day. We should be doing everything we can to induce both sides to negotiate, because only that way, as our Government have recognised, will we see a peaceful solution to this problem.

6.43 pm

Sir Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): There are 6 million Israeli Jews. There are 1,600,000 Palestinians in Israel, 2,700,000 on the west bank and 1,800,000 in Gaza. The Palestinians now outnumber the Israeli Jews, and that is without taking into account the 5 million Palestinians in refugee camps and in the diaspora. The big difference, of course, is that the Israelis have a secure state and the Palestinians live under oppression day after day.

The right hon. and learned Member for Kensington (Sir Malcolm Rifkind) wove a fantasy that the Jews were reunited when the state of Israel was created and that the Palestinians were split, and we have just heard again about the wickedness of Hamas—I do not condone what Hamas does, and I realise that it is a useful tool for those who wish to portray the Palestinians as divided and unreliable. His fantasy was that all was harmonious when Israel was created, but the Israelis were divided into three warring factions at that time: the Haganah, representing the official Jewish agency; the terrorist organisation Irgun Zvai Leumi; and the terrorist Stern gang. Israel nearly broke out into civil war immediately after it was founded because Irgun insisted on having its own army in an independent state. So the idea that Israel was somehow born in a moment of paradise and that all that surrounds the Palestinians is stress and damage is a fantasy.

Where are we now? The situation was not ideal for Israel then, and it is not ideal for the Palestinians now, but divided Israel survived and survives even though it is still divided. Look at the amazing divisions in the Israeli Government, with the extraordinary extremism of the Yisrael Beiteinu party, which makes the UK Independence party look like cosy internationalists, yet it is part of the Government.

The Israelis are harming the Palestinians day after day. Last week the US State Department denounced a settlement expansion of 2,600 that the Israelis are planning. Last week the new president of the New Israel Fund, Talia Sasson—Jewish and pro-Israel—denounced the expansion of settlements again in the west bank. The Israelis, with the checkpoints, the illegal wall and the settlements, are making a coherent Palestinian state impossible.

That is why it is essential to pass this motion, because it would be a game changer. The recognition of Palestine by the British House of Commons would affect the international situation. This House can create an historic new situation. I call on right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House to give the Palestinians their rights and show the Israelis that they cannot suppress another people all the time. It is not Jewish for the Israelis to do that. They are harming the image of Judaism, and terrible outbreaks of anti-Semitism are taking place. I want to see an end to anti-Semitism, and I want to see a Palestinian state.

6.48 pm

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) on securing the debate. I think that I am right in saying that the last time a debate of this type took place was in 1985, which was a long time ago, and that is not to the House's credit. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Sir Richard Ottaway) on a formidably powerful speech. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan), who also made a formidable speech.

I am convinced that recognising Palestine is both morally right and in our national interests. It is morally right because the Palestinians are entitled to a state, just as Israelis are rightly entitled to their homeland. This House should need no reminding of the terms of the Balfour declaration, which rightly endorsed

“the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people”

but went on to state that

“nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine”.

Ninety-seven years later, the terms of the Balfour declaration are clearly not upheld with respect to the Palestinians, and in Britain that should weigh very heavily upon us indeed. It is in our national interest to recognise Palestine as part of a drive to achieve lasting peace. We face so many dire emergencies in the middle east today; we cannot afford to add to them the continuing failure of the middle east peace process and the inevitable death of the two-state solution. This step by Britain and other nations is needed to galvanise talks that are paralysed and indicate that the status quo is not only untenable, but wholly unacceptable.

It is said that bilateral recognition would harm the prospects for negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians, but the sad truth is that that effort has failed. Negotiations have completely broken down and there is not the remotest sign of a possible breakthrough. The cataclysm in Syria, the emergence of Islamic State and the 3 million Syrian refugees bringing neighbouring countries to their knees have made the situation in the middle east—already a cauldron—even more dangerous.

Moreover, as others have said, 135 of 193 UN member states have already recognised Palestine in recent years. Unless it is anyone's serious contention that those member states are responsible for the failure of the negotiations, the act of recognition itself clearly does not wreck the prospects for peace. What does impede peace is a dismal lack of political will to make the necessary concessions and a tendency in Israel to believe that it will always be sheltered by the United States from having to take those difficult steps. Recognition by the United Kingdom would be a strong signal that the patience of the world is not without limit.

Secondly, it is said that recognition would be an empty gesture that would not change the facts on the ground. That is true, but it is not a reason not to recognise Palestine, which would be purely a political decision by the United Kingdom as a sovereign Parliament. It would be a powerful gesture to Palestinians that they will obtain their state in the future after 47 years of cruel and unjust occupation and it would strengthen the hand of President Abbas against Hamas.

[*Sir Nicholas Soames*]

Indeed, recognising Palestinians would be only a small and logical evolution of the current position of the United Kingdom. It has been the Government's view since 2011 that the Palestinian Authority have developed successfully the capacity to run a democratic and peaceful state founded on the rule of law and living in peace and security with Israel. To paraphrase a familiar expression, if it looks like a state and fulfils the criteria for a state, surely it should be recognised as a state. What entitles the United Kingdom to withhold a recognition that is the birthright—the long overdue birthright—of each and every Palestinian child? It would be shameful not to take the step of recognition now, when it would make a real difference.

The United Kingdom was a midwife at the birth of Israel and is a permanent member of the UN Security Council. That means an aspiration to take a lead in world affairs. We should take that lead now on this vital issue through a decisive vote of the British House of Commons.

6.53 pm

Mike Wood (Batley and Spen) (Lab): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) on securing this debate; he has done all in the House a great service.

I cannot think why any supporter of Israel should oppose the recognition of a Palestinian state. We know the history of Israel from its beginnings in 1948, as outlined by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman). We know about the six-day war in 1967 and about Israel's present situation. In 2013, Mr Kerry warned that there were only two years to resolve this flashpoint and that time was running out. He was surely talking to the Israelis as much as to the Palestinians. The two-state solution is disappearing rapidly before our very eyes.

We have to grapple with the issue of what will happen if there are not two states. What does the one-state solution look like? We are told that the majority of the present Israeli Administration no longer accept a two-state solution. Mr Netanyahu has suddenly become a rather centrist pragmatist, holding together a coalition, many of whom are to the right of him, in wanting a one-state solution. Do they accept the genocide and ethnic cleansing that go along with that?

The situation is far worse than that in apartheid South Africa, which has been mentioned. It has been regularly referred to as a parallel to what is going on in Palestine, but the situation in Palestine is much worse than apartheid. The white junta in South Africa accepted that somewhere in the country—preferably not near them—there would be land for black people. It was the worst possible land and a long way from the ruling white group, but none the less the junta accepted that there would be a place for the blacks. A one-state solution in Israel does not accept such a thing. There is no place in Israel and Palestine for the Palestinians. We have to face squarely what that means and so do the Israelis. That is even more reason why we should not give the Israelis a veto over Palestinian statehood.

We will be voting tonight for the recognition of a Palestinian state. That is not just about recognising the inalienable right of Palestinians to freedom and self-determination but about Israel's need to be saved from

itself. What Israel is looking at in a one-state solution is a continuation, year after year, of war and violence such as we have seen building in the past 20 years. The Israelis have just finished a third incursion into Gaza in 10 years. Are we suggesting that every two years another 1,500 people should be killed and another 100,000 people rendered homeless as a continuation of the process of driving everybody who is not Jewish out of what is considered to be greater Israel?

Mrs Ellman: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mike Wood: I would prefer not to, if my hon. Friend does not mind.

The occupation and exile have to end. There is never any peace without justice. Statehood for Palestine would strengthen—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I call David Ward.

6.58 pm

Mr David Ward (Bradford East) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) on securing the debate, which is so important.

As a young man, I backpacked around Israel and had a wonderful time. I stayed at various hostels—in Ein-Gedi, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Eilat. I swam in the dead sea and went to Masada. I loved the place and its people and I wanted to return. I went back and spent time working with Mashav in the Arabic desert and living with an Israeli family. We had many discussions as we sat on our upturned vegetable boxes, drinking tea and taking a break from picking peppers and tomatoes. The farmer, the head of the family, told me over and over again about his personal experiences—his military service and how proud he had been to do what he felt was his duty in representing his country in the military. From where we were sitting, we could almost touch the Jordanian mountains a few miles away. He also told me about the real existential threat involved in being surrounded by what he regarded as hostile Arab states. I have never forgotten that or sought to trivialise it in any way, or to minimise the sense of insecurity that Israelis must feel.

That sense of insecurity—felt by many Jews, I suppose, throughout the centuries—has occurred as they suffered persecution throughout eastern and western Europe, and beyond. That persecution, as we all know, included an attempt at annihilation. Quite apart from the Zionist agenda, the need for a place to be safe somewhere was so important because of the failure to find safety from persecution in many other places. All that is perfectly understandable, but what I do not understand is why the Palestinians should have had to pay such a terrible price for the creation of the state of Israel, where it was believed that security could be created, or why the Israelis believed that the brutal expulsion and continued suppression of the Palestinians would ever lead to the sense of security that they seek.

I remember a meeting not too long ago in one of the big Committee rooms in the House of Commons at which there were lots of members of the Palestinian community. I said that the Israelis were winning; I was in despair at the lack of progress. I said that they will not negotiate and asked why should they when the immense support

of the US and the inaction of the international community at large meant that they were gaining, day in and day out, and could ignore international law, continue to act with impunity, and, of course, increase their holding of Palestinian land. But a Palestinian rebuked me, saying that they were not winning because “We have not forgotten and we never will forget.” How can the Israelis believe that they can ever have security, because the Palestinians will never forget?

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): My wife, who is a delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross, met many Palestinians in south Lebanon who still have keys round their neck on a string from the house that they were ejected from in the late 1940s. They will not forget.

Mr Ward: Indeed—how could they?

I support the motion for many reasons, but I will state three. First, for the Palestinians to turn away from the men of violence, they need hope, and this motion represents a degree of hope for them. Much is made of the failure of Hamas to recognise Israel, and we know about that, but let us imagine the sense of despair that ordinary Palestinians must feel at the failure of the international community to recognise their right to exist. My tweet on the firing of rockets out of Gaza and the previous comments by Baroness Tonge were never, of course, condoning terrorist acts by Palestinians; they were simply our recognition of the despair and sense of hopelessness that leads to terrorism.

Secondly, Israel is in breach of the contract set out in the Balfour declaration stating that

“nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine”.

In the light of the Nakba and everything since, that seems like a sick joke. The failure of the international community to recognise the state of Palestine has helped Israel to ignore this commitment.

Thirdly, on a personal note, this Sunday at Eden Camp in north Yorkshire there will be a gathering of the Palestine veterans. They will parade at 1 o'clock, but many of them will not be able to walk very far, if at all—they are all over the age of 80. They went to that land in 1945 as a peacekeeping force, but lost over 700 members of the armed forces and 200 police. I believe that we owe it to them for tonight's motion to succeed. Many were not conscripts; many were veterans of Arnhem, Normandy and Bergen-Belsen. Many felt, and still feel, betrayed by Israel and question the sacrifice that so many of their colleagues made. If this vote on recognising the right of Palestinians is won, they will very much welcome it, but it has been so long in coming.

7.4 pm

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow Central) (Lab): I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak in this historic debate on the recognition of statehood for Palestine: one small part in righting a profound and lasting wrong. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) on securing the debate and, in so doing, again demonstrating his commitment to justice and to the region. This issue has widespread public support in the UK and across the world. That has been shown by the hundreds of thousands of people who took to the streets over the summer to protest against the continued

bloodshed in the region, and by the flooding of Members' in-boxes by constituents asking us to support this important motion.

As we have heard, this debate follows on from the failure of the UK Government to support Palestinian statehood at the UN. In 2011 and in 2012, Labour Members urged the Government to support the Palestinians' bid for recognition at the UN. Let us be clear: this was a missed opportunity and a shameful moment for the United Kingdom and our claim to be leaders on the international stage for justice and democracy. The selective way in which the British Government apply their force and resource is, sadly, self-evident. I am therefore pleased that this motion has strong cross-party support and that it does not split on party lines, or even between those who class themselves as pro-Palestinian or pro-Israeli. Rather, it is a motion that is pro-justice and pro-peace.

Palestinian statehood is in the interests of the people of Palestine and the people of Israel, because with statehood come rights and responsibilities. The rights are the ability to govern freely, both politically and in the judiciary; the powers and the infrastructure that, we hope, will deliver for the people; and economic freedom, with the ability of the country to grow its own economy and create prosperity. Palestine has the resources and the skills to be a self-sustaining, functioning country. In 2010, the UN found that the overall cost of the occupation to the Palestinian economy was estimated at nearly \$7 billion, or a staggering 85% of GDP. As I said, there are not only rights but responsibilities. Statehood obliges the Palestinian Government to respect, protect and fulfil human rights for their people. It requires Palestinian forces to abide by international rules on armed conflict, and it requires the Palestinian people to accept and learn to co-exist with all their neighbours. The recognition of a state is not an endorsement of any political party or any group within Gaza or the west bank—far from it.

There are moments when the eyes of the world are on this place, and I believe that this is one of those moments. What message will we send to the international community? There will be those living in Palestine who keep hearing that word, “peace”, while at the same time seeing a continued occupation, an ongoing blockade, further expansion of illegal settlements, and the never-ending cycle of violence and bloodshed, causing fear on both sides of the conflict.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Did my hon. Friend see the film on Saturday on BBC 2, “The Gatekeepers”, which showed the people who were at the most senior level of the Israeli security service, now retired, urging for the sake of Israel itself a willingness on the part of the Israeli Government to negotiate with all, including Hamas? It is a great pity that the Israeli Government refuse to accept such common sense.

Anas Sarwar: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. The key point is that there is widespread support within Israel for this motion on the statehood of Palestine. People who are friends of Israel, who are Israelis, and who class themselves as part of the struggle to find a peaceful resolution for the people of Israel recognise that the motion is not only in the interests of Palestine but fundamentally in the interests of Israel too.

[Anas Sarwar]

To go back to the issue of previous false dawns in Palestine, the people there have been hearing warm words for decades, but I am sorry to say that words are no longer enough. Our best chance of seeing a rejection of violence and militant forces is by rekindling hope so that people can stop hearing the word peace and start living its true meaning.

This motion is an opportunity to start addressing decades of failure, which are a shame on the entire international community. It has been said that supporting the motion somehow undermines peace and the two-state solution, but it actually does the opposite. This motion does not disregard the two-state solution; it endorses it. This motion does not undermine the peace process—there is no peace and there is no process—but it shows that we are serious about finding a lasting solution. This motion does not damage Britain's role or undermine its standing in the international community; it actually goes a long way to restoring its standing in the international community. This motion is not a failure of leadership; it is a demonstration of it. That is why I will passionately and proudly walk through the Aye Lobby tonight.

7.10 pm

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): I had not anticipated being called to speak, so I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The proposal for this House to recognise Palestinian statehood is not only premature, but misguided. An affirmative vote tonight would be nothing more than a propaganda victory for those who wish to bypass the mediation of the peace process in favour of international institutions such as the United Nations where the Palestinian Authority enjoy an automatic majority.

Three years ago President Abbas made it explicit that the attempt unilaterally to assert statehood through the UN was to ensure that it

“would pave the way for the internationalisation of the conflict as a legal matter, not only a political one. It would also pave the way for us”—

the Palestinian Authority—

“to pursue claims against Israel at the United Nations, human rights treaty bodies and the international Court of Justice.”

The Palestinian Authority are seeking to create opportunities for new diplomatic and legal fronts on the conflict with Israel that enable a distraction, an alternative and an escape route from the bilateral principle entailed in the Oslo accords and subsequent diplomatic frameworks.

Jeremy Corbyn *rose*—

Grahame M. Morris *rose*—

Dr Offord: I will not give way at the moment.

The proposers of this motion are aiding those efforts and turning their backs on the peace process. That is not a proposal that I can accept.

The middle east peace process is underpinned by several key documents—this has not been addressed tonight—that prohibit the unilateral diplomatic action this motion would allow and which the same documents deem to undermine the prospect of a negotiated settlement.

In 1993 the Palestine Liberation Organisation committed itself to a declaration that

“all outstanding issues relating to the permanent status will be resolved through negotiations.”

This was followed two years later by the Oslo II agreement, where the PLO said it would not take any step that would change the status of the Palestinian territories pending the outcome of the permanent status negotiations.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con) *rose*—

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con) *rose*—

Dr Offord: I will not give way at the moment.

That principle has a binding validity on all parties and has been subsequently reaffirmed as the only acceptable basis for a resolution.

Crispin Blunt *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. The hon. Gentleman is not giving way.

Dr Offord: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

That is also an agreement to which our Government of the United Kingdom, as part of the European Union and the Quartet, are a signatory. Therefore, this motion asks the UK Government to break their commitment to the peace process. That is not a proposal that I can accept.

A negotiated two-state agreement would also resolve others issues, including borders, security arrangements and recognition by all of Israel's right to exist, but this motion would allow recognition of a Palestinian state that would not even recognise or even accept Israel's 1967 borders. The former Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw), has called for the 1967 borders. If we had acceded to such requests in the past, the Golan heights would be in the hands of Syria or, in fact, ISIL nowadays, meaning that Israel would not be able to continue to exist, which I cannot accept.

Similarly, the concept that the 1948 armistice lines should become a border with a terror state is another irresponsible policy and something in which the Parliament of any liberal democracy should not be involved in any way. The battle that Britain and our allies are a part of is to stop the spread of fundamentalist Islamist control over the Levant—of which Israel is a part—and not to speed it along.

Mr Straw: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Is he aware that when I intervened on the right hon. and learned Member for Kensington (Sir Malcolm Rifkind) I was careful with my language and spoke about any borders being based on 1967, not resolutions? That is no different from that which is contained in the final page of the road map, which was endorsed by the Government of Israel, among others.

Dr Offord: I am grateful for that clarification.

Recognition of Palestine appears attractive as it is considered to be the first step towards the internalisation and perceived legitimisation that could allow diplomatic and legal challenges to Israel through organisations that are perceived to be sympathetic to Palestinian grievances.

The recognition of Palestine would produce significant setbacks for the existing peace process and is bound to elicit a retrenchment in the position of Israel when it has previously agreed statements that have produced land swaps for peace.

Most infamously, that occurred in 2005 when Israel undertook the unilateral move to withdraw from Gaza. Members all know what has happened since: more than 11,000 rockets have been fired from the Gaza strip into Israel by terrorists. Some 5 million Israelis are currently living under threat of rocket attacks, and more than 500,000 Israelis have less than 60 seconds to find shelter after a rocket is launched. That means that people in the biggest cities of Israel, including Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Haifa, are all at risk.

On the other hand, negotiated peace deals, such as the Egypt and Israel peace treaty in 1979 and the Israel and Jordan peace treaty in 1994, are examples of land being relinquished in return for stable peace negotiations. The same did not occur at the Camp David negotiations in 2000. The proposal to establish an independent Palestinian state in virtually all of the west bank and Gaza, along with a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem, was rejected because of the alternative condition that the Palestinian Authority declare an end to the conflict as part of the final agreement.

Consequently, the proposal for the recognition of Palestinian statehood without the fundamental aspects of final-status negotiations, coupled with a reciprocal agreement that relinquishes further claims over lands, property, settlements, the right to return and access to Jerusalem, is premature.

Sir Edward Leigh: My hon. Friend said that he had not intended to speak and he seems to be making up for that by reading, at great speed, from an Israeli Government handout. Could we at least establish these ground rules: those of us who support the motion are still firm friends of Israel and defend its right to security, but we also believe in justice for the Palestinian people?

Dr Offord: I am grateful for another helpful intervention, but I assure my hon. Friend that this is certainly not an Israeli Government press release. [*Interruption.*] I can hear another hon. Member chuntering away, but never mind.

It is vital that any peace is achieved through negotiation and mutual agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, not through unilateral moves or pre-emptive recognition. Formal progress in peace deals has only ever been achieved through bilateral talks, which remain the way forward for the peace process. No credible peace-building initiative has ever emerged from the UN General Assembly. Both the UK Government and the Conservative party have been clear that bilateral negotiations are the only path to a stable peace. I had understood that that was the Labour party's policy, but its Members seem to have been whipped to vote for this motion because their leader cannot make up his own mind on Israel.

Members of Parliament should vote against any unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood while making it clear that they support the creation of a Palestinian state through direct bilateral negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. It is of great concern that the amendment tabled by the right hon. Member

for Blackburn has been selected, because I felt that the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb) was more than adequate.

The diplomatic process, realities on the ground, international law and not least the UN system itself are likely to suffer serious negative consequences if Members accede to the Palestinian attempt to remove the search for a two-state solution from the established bilateral framework. It is vital that we send a clear message that such an approach, which the Palestinian leadership has pursued since 2010, is a dead end. At best it is a costly distraction and we should vote against this motion tonight.

7.18 pm

Mr Andrew Love (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): In the short time available to me I want to give my support to the motion for two main reasons. First, three years ago at the United Nations, the then Foreign Secretary said that Palestine met the conditions and was ready for statehood. How long do they have to wait? Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, against the backdrop of recurring violence, regular incursions into Gaza and settlement-building activity, we urgently need to find new ways forward, and I believe that recognition can and should be a part of that new process.

The Palestinians have waited a very long time for this debate, but the developing international consensus is that Palestine is ready for recognition. One hundred and thirty four countries have now recognised it diplomatically, including some members of the European Union, and the new Swedish Government made Sweden the 135th at the beginning of October. UN observer status was granted in 2011 by 138 votes to nine. There were 41 abstentions, including by the United Kingdom, but France, Italy and Spain all voted yes. Contrary to what the right hon. and learned Member for Kensington (Sir Malcolm Rifkind) said, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the European Union have all separately reported that the institutions in Palestine are appropriate for the formation of a state.

The then Foreign Secretary elaborated the Government policy, saying that the decision on recognition should be "at a moment of our choosing and when it can best help to bring about peace".—[*Official Report*, 9 November 2011; Vol. 535, c. 290.]

There are many reasons why the timing is now right. Recognition would give a very clear signal about the illegality of occupation. We have talked incessantly about settlement building. There are 550,000 settlers in Palestinian territory, and recent announcements suggest that that figure will increase rapidly, so now is the time.

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): If we believe in internationalism and self-determination, is it not wholly unacceptable, unjust and illogical not to allow the Palestinians to have a state?

Mr Love: I shall come on to that, but the short answer is yes.

On settlements, we must take action now to ensure that the building activity that so undermines the whole peace process is brought to an end. I believe that recognition will be a symbolic gesture towards that.

[Mr Love]

Recognition addresses real fears about the fact that the window of opportunity for a two-state solution is narrowing rapidly. Many now openly question whether it has any current validity, but recognising Palestine—a second state—would help to ensure such a solution. Recognition would help to highlight the root causes of the conflict and address the cycle of violence that has ravaged Gaza three times in recent years. It would strengthen rather than, as has been suggested in the House, weaken the voices of moderation and compromise on, I hope, not only the Palestinian side but on both sides. It will help to avoid the dangers of adopting a one-state solution, which would be a disastrous conclusion to the negotiating process. Declaring that Palestine is the second state would undermine a one-state solution.

People have suggested that even if recognition were accepted, the Palestinian Authority would engage in some form of unilateralism. The reality is that the PLO is in no doubt—it has stated this publicly—that the occupation can end only through a negotiated settlement. We need to reaffirm that this evening.

The motion has the great merit of acknowledging that statehood is solely a bilateral issue for the United Kingdom and Palestine. Recognition should not be part of a negotiated settlement. Israel would never have accepted that some other country had a veto over its statehood, and we should not accept such a veto in the case of Palestine.

What would be the consequences of rejecting the motion? It would send a signal that we do not think it is a priority to recognise the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people, particularly their right to self-determination. We would underplay the need for a viable sovereign Palestinian state, which our Foreign Secretary has said is in place. We would accept an extension of the Israeli military occupation, which is now in its 48th year, and enshrine it further into the future.

We should vote in favour of recognition because it will strengthen the belief of the Palestinians in diplomacy and democratic debate, which will go a long way to improving the climate for the discussions—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order.

7.25 pm

Sir Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): It is a great pleasure, as always, to follow the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr Love), and the many right hon. and hon. Members who have already made excellent speeches.

As the last Minister out of the washing machine on this topic, it is appropriate for me, on behalf of Members from across the House, to pay tribute to the many excellent people at the Foreign Office, both in the Box and in our two excellent missions in the embassy in Tel Aviv and the consulate in East Jerusalem—ably led by Matthew Gould, Sir Vincent Fean and Alastair McPhail—who have done so much, along with their staff from the Foreign Office, the Department for International Development and those employed locally, to represent our interests and to help the people of the region. All of us genuinely owe them a great deal.

Over the past year, my time was dominated by the Kerry peace plan. That process initially excited much optimism, but I am afraid that it was ultimately doomed, like many of its predecessors. When I was thinking about what I could usefully say today, my eyes were drawn to a line in Jonathan Powell's new book—it was reviewed at the weekend—which states:

“A deal depends on personal chemistry and uncommon leadership”.

Having studied this area in detail over the past year, I regret to say that both of those factors were absent during the most recent round of negotiations.

What did we learn from those negotiations about the middle east peace process and the connected issue of recognising the state of Palestine? First, I genuinely believe that there will be no deal unless the international community not only remains engaged in the process, but drives it. The US is the only power in the world that can force the necessary concessions from the Israeli Government and meet their security concerns. The Kerry peace plan remains an excellent basis for restarting negotiations.

The reconstruction of a Palestinian state will require the sort of Gulf money that has been evident, and welcome, in Cairo over the weekend, so keeping the wider Arab world involved is key. Egypt also has a key role to play, and the UK needs a more consistent policy on Egypt. We have unique bilateral relationship with it: we are the largest bilateral investor in the country, and about 1 million British tourists travel there each year. Resolution of the Gaza issue depends as much on the Egyptians as the Israelis. We should deal positively with Cairo for the greater good of the region.

Secondly, having secured proactive international buy-in, we need to freeze the situation on the ground and buy some time for the negotiations. At the moment, every hurdle and obstacle on the way is met with terrorist violence and announcements about more settlements. If there is much more building, particularly on area C, a two-state solution will fast become undeliverable, and we will be left with the one-state option that is in no one's interests.

Sir Alan Duncan: Was my right hon. Friend's experience that Mahmoud Abbas was a genuine partner for peace?

Sir Hugh Robertson: It absolutely was. By the same token, I believe that many people on the Israeli side are genuine partners for peace. I am afraid, however, that the ability to make the crucial decisions and the really tough compromises necessary to deliver a peace process was in the end absent, as they have been in the past.

Thirdly, the international community needs to look at an appropriate and calibrated programme of incentives and disincentives at key points in a peace process, and recognition of a Palestinian state is one key component. It will be extraordinarily difficult, but the process must be done in such a way that it is in neither side's interest to derail it.

Finally, I fear that we need in practice to look again at our own policy. Having sat on the Front Bench only a few months ago, I know that the Minister is bound to say that the British policy is to support a two-state solution—that is good—based on the 1967 boundaries, with agreed land swaps. However, as I did when I stood looking at a settlement in East Jerusalem, we have to

recognise that the international community lacks the will to bulldoze £1 million houses built illegally in settlements. We will have to form a new border, probably based on the wall, and then deal with the settlements beyond it if we are to make any progress.

I firmly believe that the principle of a Palestinian state is right and fair. I am delighted to be a signatory to the former Foreign Secretary's amendment to that effect. However, I feel that declaring it unilaterally at this time could well be the catalyst for a further period of instability. The international community needs to re-engage on this issue as never before, led by the USA with the Arab world and Egypt alongside it. It must lay out a road map, including incentives and disincentives, to a final agreement in which the recognition of a Palestinian state is a key milestone. There is no doubt that that will be extraordinarily difficult, as many of our predecessors have found, but the alternative is unacceptably grim. This House can play a part in that process tonight.

7.30 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): This is the first opportunity that I have had to speak in a debate in this House since 12 September, when my father passed away. It gives me the opportunity to say thank you to the many Members who contacted me and expressed their condolences. It was much appreciated. It is apt that I am speaking in a debate that touches on the issue of peace processes and peace processing. It provides an opportunity to look at some of the lessons that the House should have learned when dealing with a divided nation and a divided land.

Israel and Palestine are often described as the promised land. This mother of Parliaments has an opportunity to ensure that it does not become a broken promised land. This Parliament can play a part in ensuring that the promises are honoured and cemented. What we see happening in that part of the world is cruel and unfair in many people's eyes. It deserves our attention. It deserves to be healed.

However, this House, which is often described as the mother of Parliaments, must not become the arrogant Parliament. It must not assume that it has the right to tell people how to sort out their peace processes, when it knows that there is a better way. It has proved in its own backyard in Northern Ireland that there are better steps and better ways.

In my brief comments I want to draw attention to two lessons that have to be learned. I raised one of them at the beginning of the debate in my intervention on the mover of this important motion, the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris), in which I spoke of our experience as a Parliament and as a nation. His party and this Parliament played an important role in ensuring that the conclusion of the negotiations was not set in stone in advance of the negotiations or during the negotiations. The participants in the process must be allowed to find their own conclusions. I was told that that argument would be devastated and set aside. It is unfortunate that that argument has not been addressed. It cannot be addressed because this House knows that it is right. This House knows that the participants have to find their way; they cannot be told, lectured or dictated to on what is the best way.

This motion, which is well meaning, well intentioned and supported by friends and colleagues on all sides of the argument, would therefore do the wrong thing at the wrong time, because it would be saying, "Here is the conclusion that the House will reach." That is wrong. As we have heard from other Members, more than 130 other Parliaments and processes have said that that is the conclusion that they will reach, but it has not made a bit of difference. We must therefore step back and realise that there is a better way.

The other lesson that I want to draw from our experience of being involved in a peace process is that we must not pour fuel on already burning flames. To recognise the state of Palestine at this time, when significant and strong elements in the Palestinian negotiating process do not even recognise Israel and would not allow that state to exist, would be to make an already difficult situation worse. Although no one here claims to have the answers to the process, we must, as a rule, tread carefully.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) said that people want to see light at the end of the tunnel. I agree with that. However, we do not want to see flames in the tunnel, because all we would get is more smoke.

7.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): It is an honour to participate in this debate, which reflects the House at its best. I have travelled the middle east for 30 years. I have written about it and served there as an officer. I am now the Minister for the region. I am humbled by the depth of knowledge on both sides of the House and by the spirit in which the debate has taken place.

I join other Members in congratulating the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) on securing this debate and I welcome the contributions of hon. Members from all parts of the House. I am sorry that important statements have curtailed the length of the debate. Before responding to the specific points that have been raised, I will briefly set out the Government's position on the middle east peace process and the recognition of a Palestinian state.

I will start by addressing the terrible situation in Gaza, which I visited last week. I was profoundly shocked and saddened at the suffering of ordinary Gazans. More than 100,000 people have been made homeless by the conflict, and 450,000 people—about a third of the population—have no access to water. Yesterday, I attended the Gaza reconstruction conference in Cairo with the Minister of State, Department for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Mr Swayne). It was clear that the international community stands ready to support the rebuilding of Gaza. I am pleased to say that the UK pledged £20 million to kick-start the recovery and help the Gazan people back on their feet. The UK has been one of the largest donors to Gaza this summer. We have provided more than £17 million in emergency assistance, which has helped to provide food, clean water, shelter and medical assistance to those in the greatest need.

Let me be clear: we do not want to see a return to the status quo. This is the third time in six years that conflict has broken out in Gaza and reconstruction has

[Mr Tobias Ellwood]

been needed. To illustrate the problem, in 2000, more than 15,000 trucks of exports left Gaza. In 2013, the figure had dwindled to only 200 trucks. The UN estimates that it could take 18 years to rebuild Gaza without major change. It says that Gaza could become unliveable by 2020. If the underlying causes are not addressed, it risks becoming an incubator for extremism in the region. At the same time, Israel has faced an unacceptable barrage of rockets from Hamas and other militant groups. That is unsustainable. We all know that if the problems are left to fester, conflict could break out at any time. Bold political steps are therefore necessary to stop the cycle of violence once and for all.

We welcome the agreement between Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the UN to assist in the reconstruction. That must now be implemented. More needs to be done as a priority and we urge the parties to make serious and substantive progress in the talks in Cairo to ensure that the ceasefire is durable. It must address Israel's security concerns and ensure that the movement and access restrictions are lifted. There must also be a clear economic plan. Gaza has huge economic potential and significant natural resources that need to be realised. There must be urgent repairs and upgrades to the public utilities, including water, sewerage infrastructure and power.

The parties must work together to open the border crossings to goods and people to allow greater connectivity between Gaza and the west bank. I fully support the announcement by Baroness Ashton yesterday, in which she said that the EU is analysing the feasibility of a maritime link that could open Gaza to Europe. I discussed that issue with my Palestinian and Israeli counterparts when I was in the region last week.

It is crucial that the Palestinian Authority return to Gaza to provide services and security. In that regard last week's Palestinian Cabinet meeting, which took place in Gaza for the first time, was a positive sign. The Palestinians must also take steps to address Israel's legitimate security concerns. The world has shown that it is willing to put the necessary money on the table, and the parties must now demonstrate that they are ready to take the political steps necessary to prevent conflict in Gaza. However, even a more durable ceasefire is no substitute for peace, and there must be urgent progress towards a two-state solution that meets the aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians.

Jeremy Corbyn: I thank the Minister for what he has said so far. During his discussions, was there at any point a serious debate about the problem of the lives faced by many Palestinian refugees in camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and other places? They too must surely be part of a long-term peace equation. They have spent more than 60 years in those camps, and it cannot go on for ever like that.

Mr Ellwood: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I had a number of bilaterals in Cairo, and I met the Lebanese Foreign Minister and we spoke about that issue. The hon. Gentleman might be aware that we are pouring in significant DFID and Ministry of Defence funds to support Lebanon in that regard. In Cairo yesterday Secretary Kerry again reaffirmed that the United States

is fully committed to bringing the parties back to negotiations, and the UK will continue to take a leading role in working closely with international partners to support US efforts. A just and lasting peace will require leadership from all sides. For Israelis and Palestinians that must mean a commitment to returning to dialogue, and to avoiding all actions that undermine prospects for peace.

Let us be clear: Israel lives in a tough neighbourhood and faces multiple security challenges. The British Government are staunch supporters of Israel's right to defence. Israel is a friend and we are proud to be pursuing a strong, bilateral relationship, from trade to our commitment to growth in high-tech start-ups. However, Israel's settlement building makes it hard for its friends to make the case that Israel is committed to peace.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): Will the Minister enlighten the House about what he perceives would be the consequences should the motion be passed tonight? Would the consequences be helpful at this time, would they be neutral, or would they be negative? That would be helpful in guiding us to make the right decision in a controversial and important debate and vote.

Mr Ellwood: I ask the hon. Lady to be patient so that I can complete my speech and get to that point. We have made our position clear: Britain defends the right to choose our moment, which is appropriate for the peace process, when we make that bilateral decision.

Returning to Israeli settlement building, last week I visited the E1 area of the west bank and met members of the Bedouin community living there who face relocation by the Israeli authorities. They told me that they had no wish to leave, and expressed their fears of being forcibly transferred to make way for the construction of Israeli settlements. Such a move would seriously threaten the possibility of a contiguous Palestinian state, and according to the UN would be contrary to international humanitarian law. Israel's recent decision to advance settlement plan units in Givat Hamatos will also have serious implications for the possibility of Jerusalem being part of a Palestinian state. As the Foreign Secretary said on 3 October, Israel needs to change course on that now. The Palestinian Authority must also show leadership, recommitting themselves to dialogue with Israel, and making progress on governance and security for Palestinians in Gaza as well as the west bank.

Mr Straw: The words that the Minister and his ministerial colleagues, including the Prime Minister, have used against further Israeli settlement building have been very robust. What action do the British Government intend to take if those words are ignored?

Mr Ellwood: We are in a critical position, and at the discussions in Cairo it was clear that there is a huge effort to recognise where we are in trying to sort out a two-state solution. That has been recognised, and there is now a huge international effort to bring all parties to the table, which is where such issues need to be discussed. Having said that, we have made clear our concern about the developments, which must be considered when the parties come together to consider a two-state solution.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Ellwood: I will make a little progress and then I will give way. Our commitment to that vision is why the UK is a leading donor to the Palestinian Authority and such a strong supporter of their state-building efforts. We are providing almost £350 million between 2011 and 2015 to build Palestinian institutions, deliver essential services and relieve the humanitarian situation. We commend the leadership of President Abbas and Prime Minister Hamdallah, whom I met last week, and their commitment to security co-operation and institutional reform. Despite that commitment, however, and the support of donors such as the UK, the aspirations of the Palestinian people cannot be fully realised until there is an end to the occupation—a point that the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) just made—and we believe that that will come only through negotiations. That is why, following the Cairo conference, the urgency was recognised, and the UK hopes that a serious process can urgently resume. It is time to readdress these issues, and only an end to the occupation will ensure that Palestinian statehood becomes a reality on the ground. The UK will bilaterally recognise a Palestinian state when we judge that that can best help bring about peace.

Sir Edward Garnier: I have no doubt that all my hon. Friend is saying is entirely true, but surely it is a matter of judgment. We all want to see negotiations, and no doubt there is some magic right time for those to go well. Would a vote tonight by the House for the motion, as amended, provide a catalyst, even a nudge, for both parties to come together and to do so more quickly?

Mr Ellwood: I believe the nudge we saw was in the announcements made in the Cairo conference and the recognition of the huge amount of money that is now pouring in. I was very moved by a speech given by Ban Ki-moon at the UN General Assembly when he said, “Is this what we do? Is this who we are? We reconstruct; it’s damaged. We reconstruct; it’s damaged. Is this the cycle that we now endure?” What was clear in Cairo is that that is unacceptable. There needs to be commitment to rebuilding, and the parties need to come back to the table to discuss and work towards that two-state solution. That is what is on the agenda at the moment, and that is what we are focusing on.

Mr Winnick: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Ellwood: I will give way a little later, but first I want to make progress and address some of the specific points raised by hon. Members. I apologise because limited time means that I cannot address every contribution, but I will write to hon. Members if I am not able to cover their views.

The hon. Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris), who moved the motion, placed in context Britain’s historical role in the region. Let me clarify, however, that the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have not said that they recommend statehood, but that the essential institutions are there. One of the most powerful speeches made today was by my right hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Sir Richard Ottaway). It takes some courage to speak in the manner he did, and the House is all the wiser for his contribution.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kensington (Sir Malcolm Rifkind) spoke about what practical benefit voting for the motion will have. After all, we can play this card only once—once it is done, we cannot repeat it, so the timing of the motion is critical. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman) spoke about the important role of John Kerry, and the House should pay tribute to the hard work and dedication he has pursued in trying to bring parties to the table. We went a long way back in April, and it is important that we pick up where we were at that point. The same point was made by the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Mike Wood).

My right hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan) described this as the most vexed and sensitive issue. That is true, and I play tribute to his work as DFID Minister in considering how oil and gas reserves in the Gazan territory can be harnessed. I found it ironic that all the countries at the Cairo conference were contributing substantial funds, yet on Gaza territory and off the shore of Gaza there is mineral wealth that could be harnessed. That is one of the things that must be placed on the agenda and it will be brought up with my Israeli counterparts.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr Clappison) was the first to speak of the role of Hamas and the challenge of governance in Gaza. That is the elephant in the room, which needs to be addressed. The hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr Love) asked how long we will have to wait for a solution. My right hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Sir Hugh Robertson) rightly paid tribute to the hard work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and of those who work in posts around the world. They do us a grand service and the whole House pays tribute to their work. The hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) paid a moving tribute to his father. I think the whole House joins him in that.

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, there are many Members who are keen to speak in this debate and—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. That is not a point of order. [*Interruption.*] It is not a point of order. The House is well aware that many Members wish to speak. The Minister and the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman are well aware. I notice that the Minister is keeping his remarks much shorter than Ministers normally do and I am sure he will conclude soon. We will not waste time on more points of order that are not points of order.

Mr Ellwood: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have taken a number of interventions and I thought that that was right. I will now move on to my conclusion, which I am sure the hon. Gentleman will appreciate.

Duncan Hames (Chippenham) (LD): Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ellwood: I will not give way. I do not think it would be appropriate for me to do so.

The challenges are clear. We must act urgently to help the people of Gaza to get back on their feet and begin the hard work of reconstruction. To put an end to the

[Mr Ellwood]

destructive status quo there must be swift progress towards a durable ceasefire that addresses Israel's security concerns and lifts the restrictions on Gaza. Even a durable ceasefire can only be a temporary measure. The international community must redouble its efforts to support a comprehensive peace agreement that delivers an independent Palestine alongside a safe and secure Israel. The UK will be with other parties every step of the way. We will continue to push for progress towards peace and lead the way in supporting Palestinian state building and measures to address Israel's security concerns. The UK will recognise a Palestinian state at a time most helpful to the peace process, because a negotiated end to the occupation is the most effective way for Palestinian aspirations of statehood to be met on the ground.

I recognise the strength of feeling on this issue among many people in Britain. I am glad that this debate has given me the opportunity to set out the Government's position. Once again, I thank the hon. Member for Easington for securing the debate, and I thank other hon. Members for their contributions.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Before I call the shadow Minister, I should tell the House that, as we have just discussed, there are a great many people waiting to speak, so I have to reduce the time limit for Back-Bench speeches to four minutes.

7.53 pm

Ian Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) on securing this historically significant debate. I will seek to limit my remarks and I hope that Members will forgive me if I do not refer to them by name. I do, however, want to refer by name to the right hon. Members for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan) and for Faversham and Mid Kent (Sir Hugh Robertson). They made significant interventions and I thank them for doing so.

To clarify the Labour party's position, the motion will be supported by the Labour party because it reflects our long-standing support for the principle of recognition of Palestinian statehood. Labour will also support the manuscript amendment, because it makes clear our support for recognition of Palestinian statehood as a contribution to securing a negotiated two-state solution. Labour is clear that it is, of course, a matter for any Government to recognise another state at any point of their choosing. It is a matter for this Government, just as the former Foreign Secretary the right hon. Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague) made clear as long ago as 2011. The Minister has just said that there now needs to be urgent progress towards peace. There now needs to be, to use his word, a catalyst. I urge the Minister and the Government to listen to the tenor and seriousness of this debate, and to judge their own policy on the views being expressed tonight.

The timing and the mechanism to decide whether to recognise Palestinian statehood is a matter for this Government. It will be decided by Labour in government if the decision has not been made by this Government before Labour comes to power. We have made it very clear that we will always work with partners multilaterally to advance the two-state solution agenda. We fully

support two states living side by side in peace, recognised by all their neighbours. We are clear that Palestinian statehood is not a gift to be given, but a right to be recognised. That is why—the hon. Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) should heed this—since 2011, when the Leader of the Opposition made Labour policy clear, Labour has supported Palestinian recognition at the United Nations. The weeks of bloodshed witnessed in Gaza this summer, and the breakdown of meaningful negotiations in April this year, are a painful and stark reminder of how distant and difficult the prospect of a peaceful resolution to this conflict remains.

I was in Israel and in Palestine at the end of July and the beginning of August, and heard directly from Israelis and Palestinians about their view of the position on the ground. One conversation with an Israeli general stayed with me. He said that the conflict would end sooner or later, and that how many die would depend on how quickly resolution was reached. That was true for Gaza then and it is true for the wider middle east conflict now. Urgent steps need to be taken to stop people dying.

The steps that need to be taken to resolve the conflict are political steps. That is why it was right for the Leader of the Opposition, in 2011, to instruct my right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary to write to the Foreign Secretary to ask the UK Government to support the Palestinian bid for recognition at the United Nations. That is why it was right for Labour, in 2012, to call on the UK Government to vote in favour of Palestine's bid for enhanced observer status at the United Nations General Assembly, a vote on which this Government abstained.

I have never understood how, in the context of a conflict in which so many have died, it can be wrong to use political steps and the United Nations to make progress. Indeed, this principle has been widely supported, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) said earlier when referring to the road map in 2002-03, where

“creating an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders and attributes of sovereignty, based on the new constitution, as a way station to a permanent status settlement”

was endorsed by President Bush and Prime Minister Sharon. The road map set out that Palestinian statehood was part of the solution. Since then, much progress has been made. We heard from the hon. Member for Hertsmer (Mr Clappison) that President Abbas is a true partner for peace and that much progress has been made in the west bank during that period. It is therefore crucial, at this time when help is needed, that President Abbas receives support for the political path he has chosen. We need to support President Abbas to follow the path of peace and not the path the terrorists of Hamas inflict on the people of Israel, something I have seen with my own eyes in Ashkelon and in Sderot.

We should, as we stand today, support peaceful, political steps. This is why the Labour party will maintain its support for a two-state solution to the middle east conflict by supporting this motion. Labour is clear that this conflict will be resolved only through negotiations. However, after decades of diplomatic failure, there are those on all sides who today question whether we can actually achieve peace. This is why Labour believes that, amid the despair today, we need to take a dramatic step. The Government have rightly stated that the goal of all diplomatic efforts must be a two-state solution brought

about by negotiations, but no negotiations are taking place. How can the Government's current position on Palestinian recognition help bring about resumed negotiations?

The Labour party supported Palestinian recognition at the UN and we support the principle of recognition today, because we believe it will strengthen the moderate voices among the Palestinians who want to pursue the path of politics, not the path of violence. Labour urges the Government to listen to the House of Commons—listen to the voices on the Conservative Benches, the Liberal Democrat Benches, the Labour Benches, all the Benches—and give Palestinians what they have as a right: statehood. This is not an alternative to negotiations; it is a bridge for beginning them.

8 pm

Mr Mike Hancock (Portsmouth South) (Ind): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate and I join other Members in congratulating the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) on introducing this motion. Like other Members, I was very disappointed at the Minister's response, because he did not say anything about what might be wrong with the motion; he did not say anything that would harm the interests of Israel; and he did not actually say anything that would benefit the people of Palestine. This motion and the amendment offer that light at the end of the tunnel.

When we speak to Palestinians—whether President Abbas here in Parliament or Palestinians on the street in the west bank or elsewhere in Palestine—we see and hear first hand how the voice from the UK Parliament is very important to them. The message that we send out tonight is a message of hope for them: that we in this Parliament recognise the right of their struggle and their right of self-determination. Those who would oppose this motion, or who speak as if it would harm Israel, have not put forward a single sustainable argument; not one iota of what has been put forward by them would stand close examination.

We have an opportunity to say to the people of Gaza, who have had their homes systematically bombed and destroyed and where, in Gaza alone, something like £5 billion-worth of infrastructure damage has been done, that that has to be put right.

Mrs Ellman: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the reason for that dreadful bombing is Hamas's launching of rockets on Israeli civilians and the building of terror tunnels?

Mr Hancock: I do not believe for one minute that the Israelis' attitude and the sort of punishment they dished out was in any way the right thing for them to do; it was not in their best interests and it certainly was not in the best interests of the people of Palestine. "The Gatekeepers", a "Newsnight" special, has been mentioned. In it, five of the past six heads of the top security agency in Israel say that successive Prime Ministers had not wanted to solve the problem with Palestine, and five out of the six say that that was a mistake and that Israel had to change its policy. These were the people who were leading the defence of Israel, but they recognise—obviously far too late, because they did not do this when they were in office—that something has to give in Israel.

Let us return to the initial point of this debate. If we give this motion our blessing, there is not a single thing that will harm Israel, but it will send a powerful message which is crying out to be heard for the people of Palestine, whether they are in the refugee camps—where four generations have now lived—or in Gaza, the west bank, Lebanon, or wherever. The people of Palestine have waited 65 years to get the justice they deserved. We did not listen then: when we could have given a two-state solution in '48, we chose not to do it. People made that biggest mistake.

Dr Julian Lewis: I am sorry to correct the hon. Gentleman on an historical point, but my understanding is that the UN did vote for a two-state solution and five Arab armies then invaded Israeli territory, so it is not quite as he suggests, I think.

Mr Hancock: The hon. Gentleman will recollect that those five Arab states were seeking more of a reassurance that their borders would also be safeguarded, so it was a two-edged sword, I am afraid. We therefore have to be very careful when we talk about that situation.

I want to end by saying, please—for goodness' sake—let us all send out a positive message to the people of Palestine and give them the hope and the light at the end of the tunnel that they deserve to see coming their way.

8.5 pm

Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab): I am very glad that my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris), secured this debate in Backbench Business Committee time, and I rise to speak in support of his motion and the manuscript amendment of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw).

This has been one of the most fascinating debates that I have had the privilege to witness in this House since becoming a Member. For me, the motion is very simple. There is no ambiguity: all sides want a two-state solution that works and is sustainable. That can only be reached by negotiation—by people talking to each other. There is no other way to reach it. However, Israel was given statehood in 1950 with no preconditions, and I believe Palestine should be given the same.

For negotiations to work, it is helpful to have as level a playing field as possible and to have as much equality as possible between the sides, but that simply is not the case at present. As has already been said, after the Balfour declaration—which was not carried through entirely—we as a country have a bit of a moral obligation to give our support.

This year's conflict in Gaza shows how unequal the two sides are. There were some 1,462 civilians killed on the Palestinian side and seven on the Israeli side. All of those are a personal disaster for the victims' families and are regrettable, but we can see from the numbers the scale of the imbalance in this situation.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Julie Elliott: No, I am going to carry on.

[Julie Elliott]

Given the imbalance, Palestinian statehood would not harm Israel in any way, but it would give some support to the Palestinian people.

For me, the issue is very straightforward and very simple and I am going to keep my comments brief and end on a personal story. I have a friend who came to Sunderland—my city—in the early '80s to study at what was then the polytechnic and is now the university. He was born in Gaza and on his travel documents his nationality is given as “Palestinian”, but his brother, who was born in precisely the same place seven or eight years later, had “stateless” on his travel documents. No child should have that on their travel documents; it is wrong, it is immoral and it should stop. That is why, on a personal level, I will support the amendment and the motion. It is the right and the moral thing to do.

8.8 pm

Mr Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): I will not discuss the rights and wrongs of the Palestinian and Israeli causes, about which hon. Members have spoken with such passion and eloquence, because I want to focus on the narrow issue of recognition: when it is appropriate and what its consequences are.

Some countries grant recognition as a mark of approval of a regime and withhold it as a mark of disapproval. Others grant recognition only on condition of receiving reciprocal favours from the country concerned. Neither approach has traditionally been that of the British Government. We have always granted recognition to a regime, however abhorrent, once it has established effective control of the state apparatus on the bulk of its territory. Likewise, we withhold or withdraw recognition from any regime, however congenial, if it lacks, or loses, control over the bulk of the state apparatus in its territory. Thus, whereas the United States refused to recognise the communist regime in China for many years and continued to recognise Taiwan as the legitimate Government, Britain speedily recognised the People's Republic of China once its power was clearly established. I believe that we should stick to that pragmatic approach, subject to qualifications. We should recognise the Palestinian state, not as a mark of approval of its policies or disapproval of Israeli policies, but simply as a recognition of the reality, just as we would do anywhere else in the world.

There are two possible objections to our doing this. The first is that this is a question of recognising a state as well as a regime. Normally, we recognise a state as any duly constituted territory established as a state with a long history or more recently by agreement with the previous authorities exercising sovereignty in that territory. We did not recognise Katanga or Biafra even though the breakaway regime had established control, but Palestine is not a breakaway regime. It was recognised as a separate entity by the inheritor of the previous sovereign authority, the League of Nations and then the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I am interested that the right hon. Gentleman is drawing a conclusion in favour of recognition. Does he think it significant that he and the right hon. Members for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames), for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan) and for Croydon South

(Sir Richard Ottaway)—distinguished senior Conservative Back Benchers and former Ministers—have arrived at the conclusion that recognition is the way forward? Is not this a significant step?

Mr Lilley: I am sure that it is extremely significant, as is any contribution that I make. [Laughter.]

The second objection is the one that has been raised by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kensington (Sir Malcolm Rifkind)—namely, that the Palestinian state is not in de facto control of its territory because of Israeli occupation. However, Britain has never accepted that military occupation extinguishes a country's statehood. We did not do so during the second world war, when we continued to recognise the occupied countries in western Europe. For that reason, we should go ahead with recognition.

What effect would recognition have? Here, I fear that I must disappoint Members on both sides of the debate: it would have very little impact indeed. The proponents and opponents of recognition exaggerate the impact that it would have. Already, 134 countries have recognised Palestine and it has had no discernible effect on either advancing or hindering the peace process. Sadly, we in this House cling to the delusion that the world hangs on our every word, but it is absurd to imagine that the people who are prepared to fire rockets at civilian areas from Palestine, or the people in Israel who are prepared to incur international odium by the brutal way in which they respond, will be moved one way or the other by what we in this House say today. It is time we as a Parliament grew up and recognised that we have very little control over what happens there. Ultimately, it will be the people on both sides who will recognise the need to reach an accommodation. In that important programme the other night, we saw six former heads of Shin Bet—Israel's state security apparatus—acknowledging the need to reach such an accommodation.

In line with our traditional policy, we should recognise the Palestinian state as a reality. We would not be granting it anything; we would simply be recognising a fact. We should make it clear that, in doing so, we were not expressing support for its policies or repudiating the right of Israel to exist. We must also accept that change will come about only as a result of those on the ground in Israel and Palestine realising that they need—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Dawn Primarolo): Order.

8.13 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) on securing this important debate.

My father served with the Army in Palestine from 1945 to 1948 during the currency of the British mandate. He did not say much about it, but he did tell me that, at the end of his tour of duty, he had a chit for leave to spend a last night in Jerusalem. However, his comrade pleaded with him to let him have the chit as he wanted to see a girl in town. He had fallen in love with her and did not know when he might see her again, so he was desperate. My dad let him have his chit, but sadly the vehicle that took the soldiers into town that night was attacked by terrorists and the seat that the love-struck soldier sat in bore the brunt of the attack and he was killed outright. That could have been my dad's seat.

There were other terrorist attacks—on trains and, famously, on the King David hotel. Among the terrorists were Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir, both of whom went on to hold the highest office in the newly formed state of Israel. The point I am making is that committed individuals and groups who pursue self-determination might at one time be deemed to be terrorists but then perceived as freedom fighters and, ultimately, statesmen. We need look no further than the journey made by the great Nelson Mandela, as well as taking a glance across the water to the island of Ireland.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): My dad served in what was then Palestine in the late 1930s, before the outbreak of the second world war. In contrast to the other 134 countries that have recognised Palestine, our recognition would be quite different because we were the protectorate. We were the power that held the mandate of protection over the area of Palestine that subsequently became Israel and Palestine.

Andy McDonald: I thank my hon. Friend for making that powerful point. We have strong historical links to Palestine and we bear certain responsibilities as a result. I believe that the world will look at this Chamber to see what the British Parliament says about these important issues.

As the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) said, the Balfour declaration of November 1917 made it abundantly clear that, while this country would use its best endeavours to establish a national home for the Jewish people, nothing would be done that might prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine. A national home for the Jewish people was of course created, but it cannot, on any reasonable interpretation, be said that the interests of the non-Jewish people have not been prejudiced. Palestinian people are prisoners in their own land.

It has been said on innumerable occasions that a Palestinian state is not a gift but a right, and I agree wholeheartedly with that sentiment. When such a right exists, it is unacceptable that that right should be denied or that conditions should apply. I note that some people say that the state of Palestine should be recognised only on the conclusion of successful peace negotiations between the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority. If that view were to hold sway, the injustice would simply continue for ever more. It would be to put the cart before the horse and, worse still, exacerbate the situation. Can we really say with any sincerity that Binyamin Netanyahu will put his name to preconditions leading to the creation of the Palestinian state that would ever be acceptable to the Palestinian people?

We are all agreed that the actions of Hamas in launching missile attacks were abhorrent, but what hope are we offering to the Palestinian people? Let us imagine some coastal area of our own land being blockaded and starved, with bulldozers rolling in and destroying the properties and farms of innocent people. What would we expect those people to do? Simply lie down and accept such brutality? No; any people in those circumstances would fight with whatever they could lay their hands on to protect themselves and fight back. That is a basic human instinct, and you can bet your bottom dollar that the British would do that.

Yes, the death of an Israeli soldier or civilian is a tragedy every time it happens, but dropping bombs on innocent people in Gaza, killing thousands and annexing more and more land is not the answer; nor is it in any way justified. Do we really think that any of those actions will bring about peace? One day a Palestinian state will exist and with it there will be the hope of peace and prosperity for its people. Every day that the establishment of the Palestinian state is postponed merely guarantees the continuation of the conflict, with more innocent people losing their lives. We owe it to all those who have lost their lives on both sides, and those whose lives are constantly at risk, to bring this tragedy to an end by recognising the Palestinian state without further delay.

8.19 pm

Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) on securing the debate. I rise to support the motion to recognise the state of Palestine. I also support the amendment tabled in the name of the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw), to which I am a signatory.

I am a member of the Britain-Palestine all-party parliamentary group, and I have taken an active interest in the troubles in that part of the world since my election. Today, a number of Palestinian children were in schools across my constituency. This was facilitated by the Pendle for Palestine Twinning Group, and I was pleased to play a small role in helping facilitate that when the group encountered visa issues. I am sorry to miss their visit to Pendle, but I am sure they will understand why I am in Westminster today.

I last visited the west bank in May 2012, when I met the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, Breaking the Silence, Defence for Children International, the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights, the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, the Department for International Development, the British consul general, Sir Vincent Fean, and many others. I had not visited the region before, so the delegation gave me a much better insight into the region, the conflict and associated issues. We visited the Dheisheh refugee camp and al-Walaja, a village affected by both the separation barrier and demolition issues. It was also a privilege to meet the then Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority, Salam Fayyad, in Ramallah to discuss the future of the peace process, the hunger strikes and a range of other issues.

Although my visit to the region may have been brief, it left a lasting impression. Following my visit, I met Foreign Office Ministers to raise my concerns about the Israeli occupation and what was happening in this often misunderstood, misrepresented part of the world. The same year, 2012, I also publicly confirmed my support for Palestine's upgraded diplomatic status at the UN to that of non-member observer state, and I was pleased to see that approved by the UN General Assembly. Since then, I have attended lots of events and debates looking at different aspects of the conflict.

Why do I support today's motion and the amendment? It is simply because I believe we need to break the current impasse and underline our commitment to an equitable two-state solution. The recent conflict in Gaza was horrific and left Palestinians and Israelis, who reject violence, feeling that they had no hope. British aid

[Andrew Stephenson]

money and the generosity of the British public to help rebuild Gaza have been incredible, and they will help in the short-term—but what about the long-term? The ceasefire has suspended the killing but it has not resolved anything.

As several right hon. and hon. Members have said during this debate, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), speaking as Foreign Secretary in 2011, described the Government's policy as follows:

"We reserve the right to recognise a Palestinian state bilaterally at a moment of our choosing and when it can best help bring about peace."—[*Official Report*, 9 November 2011; Vol. 535, c. 290.]

I, and many others across this House, believe that time has come. We need to support the vast majority of Palestinians who believe in peaceful coexistence with Israel, and face down the violent minority by showing them that non-violence and a willingness to negotiate can help get them somewhere. As Sir Vincent Fean, our former consul general to the region, whom I met in Jerusalem and here in Westminster, put it this week,

"Israelis and Palestinians deserve to live in safety. Both deserve statehood. The status quo is unjust and thus indefensible."

I could not put it better myself, so I am pleased to support today's motion.

8.23 pm

Mr Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I congratulate all those who have made the case for the recognition of Palestine this evening, particularly my fellow officers in the Britain-Palestine all-party group and in Labour Friends of Palestine & the Middle East, including the mover of the motion, my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris), and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden), who has campaigned on this issue for decades rather than years. We have heard good speeches from Members on both sides of the House, particularly the right hon. Members for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan) and for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames).

This is not just a debate within this House: tens of thousands of people marched against the invasion of Gaza; we have seen mobilisations through the trade union movement and through the Palestine solidarity campaign; and we have heard that distinguished diplomats—Sir Vincent Fean, our most recent consul in Jerusalem has been mentioned—have written powerfully in this cause recently. Let us not forget the Jewish and Israeli groups, particularly the Israeli civil society groups such as Breaking the Silence, Peace Now and the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, which, under a great deal of pressure from their Government now, continue to campaign. But above all it is the British people who have taken up this cause, with more than 50,000 e-mails sent to MPs over the past two or three weeks.

I think that the British people have been on the same sort of the journey as the right hon. Member for Croydon South (Sir Richard Ottaway) described—it is certainly true of the Labour movement—from being very sympathetic to Israel as a country that was trying to achieve democracy and was embattled, to seeing it

now as a bully and a regional superpower. That is not something I say with any pleasure, but since the triumph of military Zionism and the Likud-run Governments we have seen a new barbarism in that country. We have seen it in the Lebanon invasion, in the attack on the Mavi Marmara and the flotilla, and, above all, in the three attacks on Gaza, Operation Protective Edge, Operation Cast Lead—

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the message sent from the British Parliament tonight will also be noted by the American Government and the American people, and that although our influence may not be strong directly on Israel, our relationship with America enables us to use its influence with Israel also to convey that sense of horror?

Mr Slaughter: I agree with my hon. Friend; I think this will be exactly as the vote in Syria was last year.

As I was saying, Operation Protective Edge, Operation Cast Lead and Operation Pillar of Defence have all been, despite how the names sound, attacks by a major military power on a civilian community. I have heard two views in opposition to the motion. The first is from people who have no intention of ever recognising the state of Palestine—unfortunately they include the leadership of Israel at the moment. This view used to come just from people such as Ariel Sharon, but now it comes from Naftali Bennett, the Minister with responsibility for the economy, Avigdor Lieberman, the Foreign Minister, and the Prime Minister himself, Binyamin Netanyahu. Bennett has said, "I will do everything in my power to make sure they never get a state." Those views are articulated publicly in Israel now because people are emboldened by their own actions and by the international community's failure to do anything about them.

Who can defend settlement building—the colonisation of another country? We are talking about 600,000 Israeli settlers planted on Palestinian soil. I disagree fundamentally with the right hon. and learned Member for Kensington (Sir Malcolm Rifkind), who said that Gaza was no longer under occupation. It is under occupation; the life is squeezed out of it daily from land, sea and air. Anybody who has visited the west bank and not come back thinking that it is an apartheid system has their eyes closed. The daily indignities suffered by the Palestinian people there would make many people rise in rebellion, and what we have there is a strong movement for peace, led by President Abbas.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): My hon. Friend and I went to Gaza together in 2009, in the immediate aftermath of Operation Cast Lead. Does he agree that, in addition to the staggering level of destruction wreaked on Gaza then, which has now tragically been repeated, one abiding story is the frustration and rage that the people feel about the peace process no longer being a realistic option and about how something needs to be done to break the logjam? I hope that we are starting to do that tonight.

Mr Slaughter: It is indeed, but who can doubt that the Palestinians think like that when they are subject to the arbitrary use of extreme violence against civilians, not just yearly, but often on a weekly basis.

The second voice I have heard against this motion comes from people who say they agree with it but place every obstacle in its way. I also heard that in the speech from the right hon. and learned Member for Kensington, when he talked about the Palestinians not yet being ready to have their own state. If that were true—I do not believe it is—it would be a direct result of Israeli policy. Just after Operation Cast Lead, I stood in Gaza in the ruins of the Palestinian Parliament, which was deliberately bombed. Every organ of civil society, of the economy and of democracy in that country had been systematically destroyed by the Israelis, and they have just done it again. Every concession given by the Palestinians is taken and then more concessions are demanded, and the remorseless colonisation continues. How long is this going to continue?

The motion is a positive step, but my constituents wish to see more. They would like us to stop supplying arms to the Israelis when those arms are being used for the occupation and to kill people in Gaza. They would like us to stop importing goods from illegal settlements—illegal under international law. They cannot understand why, if the settlements are illegal, the goods should not be illegal as well. The motion does not ask for any of that. It was supposed to be consensual motion that simply proposes giving the same rights to the Palestinians as we extend to the Israelis. This is about equity.

Finally, this country has a special duty here. It is easy to try to duck that duty. We are the authors of the Balfour declaration and we were the occupying power. Anybody who goes to the middle east knows—I am sure that the Minister would agree with me on this—that the views taken by the British Government and the British people run powerfully in the region. We should set an example. Yes, 135 countries have recognised Palestine and yes, we are behind the curve in this matter, but it is not too late for us to set an example to Europe and the rest of the world and show that we believe in equality and fairness in international statecraft as much as we believe in our own country. That is all that this motion is asking for tonight. It is not asking for special privilege or treatment. It is not a provocative act. It is simply saying: lay the basis for peace and equality in the middle east and resolve this issue and much else will follow.

8.29 pm

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): The issue of Palestinian statehood is one that goes beyond simply recognising one Government alongside another. When considering the recognition of a Government, one should ask who the Government are, who they represent and what the territory is.

Let us start by considering the authority that this motion seeks to see recognised. It is always ambiguous to talk about a Palestinian Government when the Palestinians do not form a unanimous body. This summer, we witnessed the terrible war between Israel and one of the manifestations of so-called Palestinian power, Hamas. The explicit aim of that terrorist organisation, as stated in its own manifesto, is to eradicate Israel from the map and to fight Jews—a racist goal if ever there was one. The only difference between Hamas and ISIS is one of degree.

Grahame M. Morris: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman's flow. May I refer him back to the motion, which is about recognising not the Government, but the

state? There is a substantial difference between the two. We recognise many Governments whom we do not tolerate. All we are recognising here is the need to confer statehood.

Robert Halfon: On those grounds, would the hon. Gentleman recognise ISIL? I think not.

When we look at the facts, it will be clear to this Parliament that recognising a Palestinian state in the status quo without a peace agreement would mean acknowledging a society that respects only the rule of force.

The first condition to the recognition of a Palestinian state needs to be that it is based on fully democratic and peaceful principles. As the Palestinian Authority is ready to co-operate with Hamas and to rule alongside it, we cannot be honest and democratic in recognising the Palestinian state.

I agree that there should be a Palestinian state. In fact, not many realise that there is already a Palestinian state called Jordan. It was created by the British in 1921 and was originally called Transjordan. After the 1948-49 war against the newly created state of Israel, the Jordanian monarch, Abdullah, even called himself the King of Jordan and Palestine, as his country controlled the west bank.

The vast majority of Arabs currently in Jordan are in fact Palestinians ruled by a monarch from the Hashemite minority. Before the 1967 six-day war when Israel defeated the Arab invasion and took control of the west bank and Gaza, which had been under the arm of Egypt, there had never been demands from Palestinians in the disputed territories for a second Palestinian state, as they were under Jordanian rule.

In today's motion to recognise a second Palestinian state, the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) overlooks the fact that the Palestinians in the west bank and the Palestinians in Gaza are ruled by entirely different entities—the more moderate Fatah and the terrorist organisation Hamas. If we are not careful, we could end up with three Palestinian states, or to be precise one state and two statelets: one controlled by the Hashemite Kingdom in Jordan, the eastern borders of which are now threatened by ISIS; one controlled by Fatah in the west bank; and one controlled by Hamas in Gaza.

Sir Edward Leigh: I do not understand my hon. Friend's point about Jordan. He is not suggesting that because hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled to Jordan, often in fear of their lives, and now live there that they have their state and therefore everything is okay?

Robert Halfon: Under the Balfour declaration, it was always envisaged that Israel would have a small part one side of the river and the Arabs would have the other part. There are many second and third generation Palestinians living there today.

We have heard a lot of criticism of the state of Israel today, but where is the same outrage about the massacre of thousands of Palestinians in the Syrian city of Yarmouk at the hands of Assad's regime? Last year, I voted for intervention because of Assad's chemical weapons and most hon. Members voted against it. What about the

[Robert Halfon]

ongoing exclusion of and discrimination against Palestinians in Lebanon, where women are not allowed to be married to a refugee for fear of integration?

The hon. Member for Sunderland Central (Julie Elliott) said that only a few Israelis were killed whereas more than 1,000 Palestinians were killed, but if the Israelis had not had an Iron Dome system, hundreds of thousands of Israelis would have been killed by the hundreds of missiles that Hamas fired into the state of Israel. Should we not condemn Hamas for firing the 11,000 rockets, using Palestinians, their own citizens, as human shields, and wasting millions of dollars of humanitarian aid to build tunnels from Gaza into Israel to send terrorists and suicide bombers across the border?

As I said, I support a Palestinian state and a free middle east, free from terror and free from Hamas, al-Qaeda and ISIS. An enlightened middle east that has real liberty—something I thought that my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) believed in—with the rule of law, genuine elections, property rights, religious tolerance, equality for women and the rejection of terrorism. I therefore support an enlightened Palestinian state after negotiation alongside a secure and democratic Israel, free from Hamas, free from Islamic Jihad and living in peaceful co-existence.

8.36 pm

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): This is an issue with which I have been involved since my teens. The fact that we are discussing it today feels historic and I am proud to have the opportunity to be in the Chamber. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) for securing the debate.

Before I begin, I send my thoughts to the families in Palestine and Israel that have been afflicted by the appalling conflict this summer in Gaza. It is, however, our duty to remember the vast number of Palestinian civilians who have died in the struggle not just this year but in the many years since the conflict began. They are people's mothers, sons, daughters and brothers and they continue to be treated with little regard for the value of human life. It is with those Palestinian civilians in mind that I rise today to speak in favour of the motion.

Now is the time to move forward from the horrors seen in Gaza to try to secure peace. The only way we can help to restore peace—a real, lasting peace—is by negotiating a two-state solution and by recognising in doing so the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. The arguments for doing so are compelling. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund both argue that Palestine is ready for statehood. Palestine has many of the attributes of a functioning state: a Government, people who identify as its population and the capacity to enter into relationships with other states. Some have argued today that Palestine is lacking as it does not have a defined territory, but recognition of a Palestinian state does not and should not hang on the final agreement of Palestinian borders.

The Government made the case for the recognition of a Palestinian state in 2012. The right hon. Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague) told the House:

“We want to see a Palestinian state and look forward to the day when its people can enjoy the same rights and dignity as those of any other nation.”

He went on to add that

“we support the right to a Palestinian state.”—[*Official Report*, 28 November 2012; Vol. 554, c. 228-231.]

If the Government have already recognised the right to a Palestinian state, the right of the Palestinian people to determine the parameters of that state logically follows. The Palestinian people have been arguing for self-determination for more than 50 years and that is a request that we cannot and should not ignore. More than 100 states have already recognised Palestine, joined by Sweden only two weeks ago. It is now our turn. It is our moral duty to treat Palestinians as the people they seek to be treated as. That should not be conditional on negotiations, the views of Israel or those of any other state. It should be conditional only on the views of the Palestinian people.

There are some parallels with the recent referendum in Scotland. On polling day, we did not ask the people of England, Wales or Northern Ireland whether they wish Scotland to stay. We accepted that it was the right of the Scottish people to decide. The same principle should be applied to Palestine. This is not an issue for the Israelis to decide, even if they want to. It is not an issue for negotiations. It is an issue for the Palestinian people and the Palestinian people alone. Israel should have no veto over the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. This is a right that is not contingent on the views of other states.

There is a practical issue here as well: the recognition of the state of Palestine would mirror our historic recognition of Israel. It has been 54 years since we recognised Israel. When we did so, we did not ask the permission of the Palestinians or, indeed, any of the surrounding states. The recognition of Palestine should have happened a long time ago. For over 60 years, Palestinians have not been granted the same recognition as other peoples, either in their rights or in having their voices heard on the international stage. It is time now that we formally recognise this recognition by acknowledging their right to self-determination and by supporting them to exist as a state. Only by doing so can we move forward to secure a lasting peace for the people of Palestine and of Israel.

8.40 pm

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): In the past, my problem with fully supporting Palestinian statehood has been the fact that Hamas—designated a terrorist organisation by the UK, as well as the United States, the European Union and other countries such as Australia—is so closely linked with the Government there. I remain concerned by the indiscriminate rocket attacks into Israel from Gaza, as well as the support given to other terrorist activities.

Article 57 of the Geneva convention, which I studied when I was the commander in Bosnia, is the key. It states that constant care must be taken to spare civilians from being hurt. It stresses that those who plan or decide on any attack must do everything feasible to verify that the objectives attacked are not close to civilians. It is absolutely clear that the military wing of Hamas, by its rocket attacks on Israeli territory and its association with west bank terrorism, such as the abduction and murder of three Israeli teenagers in August this year, pays scant attention to that fundamental humanitarian law.

I have criticised, too, Israeli military actions in south Lebanon, the west bank and Gaza for quite a few years—even before I was a Member. In my view, the Israeli defence force, whatever the reason or military requirement, has breached article 57 on occasion, too. After all, it is indisputable that large numbers of civilians have been killed as a result of IDF operations in Gaza this summer.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): I hope that my hon. Friend shares my view that one can condemn Hamas and the atrocities that it commits while still recognising that Palestine should have the right to be an independent state.

Bob Stewart: I entirely endorse what my hon. Friend says.

I have had to deal with terrorist organisations of one form or other, whether the Provisional IRA, the Irish National Liberation Army, Protestant extremist groups or even terrorist gangs in the Balkans. Too many soldiers under my command have been killed by fanatics for me not to be very serious about this problem. I loathe the way that terrorists act and their politics of guns, explosives and rockets.

Now if Hamas was to renounce violence and stop attacking innocent people in Israel, which in fairness, for a while, it did a few years ago, I would be much less vexed. Like so many of us in the Chamber, I have very mixed feelings about the motion. We all want to see a state called Palestine, but can I support a Government linked to terrorism? In theory, I should not, but in practice can I? After all, I can think of several well established states that support terrorism—away from their own territory, of course—which our Government already fully recognise and, indeed, support, despite this knowledge. So I wonder, why should we not support the Palestinians, too? Despite my aversion to the terrorism practised by elements of Hamas, I have decided that it is time that this Parliament should fully endorse the move to Palestinian statehood. I will be voting for the motion in the hope that it brings closer a peaceful settlement in the wonderful Levant.

8.44 pm

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart). Many of us will remember the great hope and expectation felt when the Oslo accords were finally signed in 1993 in Washington, but I wonder if many can recall what the accords were supposed to deliver: the withdrawal of Israeli forces from parts of Gaza and the west bank; the affirmation of a Palestinian right to self-government within those areas through, in the first instance, the Palestinian Authority; and an interim period during which permanent status negotiations would commence, supposedly no later than 1996. Thereafter, Israel was to hand over power in stages. Major issues such as Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees, Israeli settlements, security and borders were to be decided during the permanent status negotiations.

We must remember that the two groups also signed letters of mutual recognition. The Israeli Government recognised the Palestine Liberation Organisation as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people; the PLO recognised the right of the state of Israel to exist, and renounced terrorism, other violence, and the desire

for the destruction of the Israeli state. There were many other associated agreements. There was a joint Palestinian-Israeli Co-ordination and Co-operation Committee for security, and a similar continuing committee for economic progress. The parties even signed an environmental protection plan. There was a follow-up in 1995, Oslo II, to highlight the progress made since the Oslo accords were signed.

What of the last 20 years? There has been a separation wall or barrier, which encroaches deeply on the west bank; that is where 85% of the wall is located. The wall de facto annexes 46% of the west bank, effectively creating ghettos or military zones. The air, sea and land blockade of Gaza, which has effectively imprisoned more than 1.5 million Gazans, has been criticised by the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon. We have seen Operation Cast Lead and, more recently, Operation Protective Edge from the Israelis; no doubt the justification is the rocket attacks by Hamas, which should not have taken place. There were 4,000 deaths, mainly Palestinian, in those two actions alone, as well as spectacular loss of and damage to property, industry and agriculture. Of course, Israel continues to build settlements on the west bank. This is the history that our constituents will be familiar with, but perhaps we should briefly look back further.

In 1947, the UN Special Committee on Palestine said that there should be partition into a Jewish and an Arab state. In the same year, the UN agreed resolution 181, which took effect in May 1948. On 11 May 1949, Israel was recognised by the UN, and it was effectively recognised by the UK two days later, formal recognition coming the following year. If we are serious about a two-state solution, 65 years is too long to wait for recognition of Palestine. Even if only to provide parity of dignity—the basic dignity of having one's nation state recognised—we should recognise it. The time for excuses is over; we should recognise Palestine today.

8.48 pm

Andrew Griffiths (Burton) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this important debate. I have learned a great deal from listening to it. Time is short, and I do not want to take up too much of it, or repeat what others have said. It is remarkable that there has been a shift in tone, and in the concerns of the House, during the debate. That shift should worry the Government of Israel, because it is clearly losing the moral high ground when it comes to the people in Gaza and the Palestinian issue. I have become increasingly concerned about the way Israel is operating since seeing on my television screen pictures of the recent crisis. It is impossible not to feel the suffering and hopelessness of the people of Gaza. It is only right that we should have this debate and discuss the issue. I would not be a friend of Israel if I did not speak out when I saw it doing the wrong thing, heading in the wrong direction and causing the unnecessary deaths of too many Palestinians. It is for that reason that I take part in today's debate.

I recognise that Israel has a right to defend itself. I recognise that it is completely unacceptable for Hamas missiles to rain down in their thousands over Israel, and it is absolutely right that the British Government support Israel's right to defend itself. But it cannot be right that in response to the Hamas rockets, Israel can unilaterally

[Andrew Griffiths]

cause death and destruction in Palestine that is not proportionate to the threat. That is the important word here. The response must be proportionate.

According to the UN, during this summer's conflict, a total of 2,131 Palestinians were killed. Of those, at least 1,473 were civilians—young, innocent civilians, in many cases. On the Israel side, 66 Israeli defence force soldiers were killed, and five Israeli civilians. I do not believe that that response is proportionate. Israel has lost the moral high ground in the way it acted.

We should demand the same standards of Israel as we do of any democratic state. Just this weekend, we saw the Australian Super Hornet pilots pull away when they were hunting down ISIL fighters because they were concerned about the loss of life of innocent civilians. It is only right that a sophisticated, well-funded army, such as that of Israel—

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): Does my hon. Friend also agree that in an open, democratic society such as ours, with modern technology, the visibility of actions requires politicians to change our view too? People in societies around the world see such disproportionality, and they want their leaders to take action to make change.

Andrew Griffiths: That is exactly right, and that is why we have this debate today. It is impossible not to want to speak out and act when we see such suffering.

Some of the acts committed by Israel were clearly unacceptable. Why was it necessary to blow up Gaza's only power station, leaving already stretched hospitals to rely on generators? Why was it necessary to bomb hospitals and schools, when, as we saw, the threat of loss of life to Israeli civilians was small in comparison? By adding to the suffering of the Gazan people, the Israeli Government have lost the support of the House, and it should cause them great concern.

It is important that moderates in the debate such as me should speak out if we are turning against support for Israel. It is right that we should express our concerns. I recognise the concerns that have been raised by some in the House about Palestine's ability to govern as a state, and its ability to have the mechanisms and the government in place to accept statehood, but it is a challenge to us to help them achieve it. We must redouble our efforts to help the moderate, peaceful Palestinian people in their desire and efforts to achieve statehood. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to take part in this debate.

8.53 pm

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): Over the past weeks my in-box has been flooded with hundreds of letters from my constituents. Their strength of feeling is undeniable, their arguments are heartfelt, and their conviction is deep-seated—and for good reason. I share those arguments and that conviction.

Of the thousands of letters and e-mails I have received, there is one from Mia Thomas, extracts from which I would like to read today.

"I am a 21 year old medical student and I have just returned from 5 weeks in Ramallah in the West Bank. I am feeling

increasingly helpless and frustrated, as every day the death count of innocent Palestinians grows higher and there seems so little we can do about it and our Government will not act decisively.

By contrast with Gaza, Ramallah is very safe. It is in Area A, so in theory it is completely Palestinian-run and governed. In reality, even in the heart of Palestine, it is still an occupied territory and violence erupts at checkpoints with scary regularity.

From where I was staying you could see Jerusalem—Ramallah is only 19 km away as the crow flies, but the journey there takes an hour because Palestinian buses are only allowed to use certain roads and then you have to pass through a checkpoint, where everyone's ID cards/passports are checked at gunpoint, before changing on to an Israeli bus to carry on the journey. This sort of thing isn't particularly harmful to one's health and is viewed just as a hassle, but it also creates this feeling of being completely caged and unable to move.

As a foreigner, I was visiting cities within the West Bank that local friends hadn't been to, not because of lack of funds or curiosity but because people are afraid of getting stuck outside their city as checkpoints can be closed at any point. The occupation has limited people's movements physically, but it also massively limits people mentally in what they perceive they can and cannot do...

In a village further north near Nablus I met the mayor of the village, who was a wonderful man. He was in a wheel chair because as a young goat herder he was shot in the spine by Israeli soldiers from the military camp that looms over the village. He now runs the village and has an absolute rule of no protesting or fighting with the Israeli settlement nearby because, as he said, he 'doesn't want anyone else—Palestinian or Israeli—to lose the ability to walk'. He says just existing as a village is resistance. In the last year the Israelis have demolished 3 houses in the village, and as they try and rebuild them you can see how hard life is when just living and farming your land is an act of defiance."

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. Hundreds of constituents have also written to me on this matter, and it was discussed by the Hounslow-Ramallah Twinning Association last Friday night. Does she agree that a downside of our not supporting Palestinian statehood today could be that it will give succour to those who do not want to see a political settlement?

Lyn Brown: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend.

Mia concluded her letter with the following:

"I'm so ANGRY about what's going on in Gaza. Most people are, I think, which is why I'm confused as to why it's being allowed to continue. If this cycle of hate and violence is ever going to end, it has to start now with an end to killing—of Palestinians and Israelis."

Ms Thomas is clearly a brave woman. She came back impassioned, disillusioned and angry. That anger and disillusionment was not just about the conflict she had witnessed; it was about her frustration that those of us in this House were not giving her a voice. Today I want to give her a voice, in the same way that I believe we must give Palestinians a voice.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that UK recognition of Palestine as a state would give a tremendous boost to the moderates in a state of Palestine and significantly strengthen their voice in the international community?

Lyn Brown: I totally and utterly agree.

It is time to recognise a Palestinian state, a right they have long deserved, and use that recognition as a path to a wider process of negotiation—two equal states

living side by side in peace and security and sharing in prosperity. We cannot stand here today, say that we believe in that goal of a two-state solution and then stand by and refuse to recognise one of the states. I encourage the House to take this opportunity and support the motion.

8.58 pm

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): I have to declare an interest, as I am married to an Israeli—Israeli-born—woman and those who are married to a strong Israeli woman will know who is boss in our household. We have heard a wide range of moving and passionate contributions this evening. In the interests of time, I will not rehearse all that has been said, but I think that there is much common ground: we believe that the Palestinian people have the inalienable right to self-determination and that the Israeli people have the unquestionable right to live in peace and security, with all Arab and Muslim countries recognising and respecting the state of Israel. We regard both peoples as equal in dignity and rights and we wish the United Kingdom to remain at the forefront of international efforts to bring about an end to the conflict.

Bob Stewart: On that point, in area C there certainly are not equal rights in the occupied territories. Palestinians are under military law, while Israelis are under Israeli civil law. There have not been many prosecutions of Israelis in area C.

Robert Jenrick: I take the powerful point that my hon. Friend has made.

The question before the House tonight is not whether we wish to see a Palestinian state as part of a two-state solution or whether we wish to consider ourselves, or be perceived by others beyond the House, as strong supporters of a Palestinian state. It is whether in passing this motion today we would increase the prospect of a lasting settlement, reduce the obstacles to it and increase this country's ability—modest as it may be—to influence that process positively, not diminish it.

I have listened to the debate this evening and the debate that has surrounded it, but I have not heard the case put convincingly. Only a handful of Members have answered the question directly, notably the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw). Other Members have spoken of a gesture, a symbol or a small nudge. I do not question the intentions of the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris), but I fear that he is deceiving himself if he truly believes that passing the motion will breathe new life into the peace process.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman says that he is looking for evidence that recognising Palestine as a state in its own right will make a difference. The UK Anglican and Catholic Churches believe that. Furthermore, a former British consul-general to Jerusalem has said that we need to support moderate Israelis and Palestinians, and that recognising Palestine is the nudge that will help in that direction.

Robert Jenrick: I hear the hon. Lady's comments and hope that she is correct. We, of course, will be only the 130-somethingth country to have signed up to recognition and none of the previous nations has achieved a change.

Passing the motion will certainly antagonise and weaken to some extent our relationship with Israel and Israelis—a relationship that, for all Israel's manifest faults and frailties, I value and the House should value in a dangerous world. In a peace process, we do not show solidarity to one by antagonising and alienating the other, diminishing our relatively limited influence on events.

I do not say that the case has been convincingly disproved either. In the short term, passing the motion will not make peaceful settlement more likely; it may not have any impact at all. The long-term consequences of our recognising Palestine at this time are unclear and anyone's guess, even given the knowledgeable and informed comments that we have heard this evening. Unintended consequences abound in this region.

Jeremy Corbyn: Some 135 nations have already recognised Palestine. They obviously thought about that before they did it. They are happy with what they have done and believe that it gives a recognised right to a people who have been denied one. Should we not just join them?

Robert Jenrick: I am putting the argument that I want a well thought out strategy to end the conflict. I do not believe that this is the time for gestures. I hope hon. Members forgive the naivety of the second newest Member of the House—I welcome the newest one to her place—but I believe that this is a serious country and that we should pursue a serious foreign policy, based not on gestures, however well intentioned, but on our best efforts to address the unending quest for security and peace in the middle east. That applies in Iraq, where our decision not to address ISIS in Syria is not as serious a position as we could or perhaps should be taking. I believe that that also applies in respect of this motion.

I appreciate the powerful urge to leave this Chamber contented and able to face our electorates having done something. I am not alone in having received hundreds of e-mails and letters urging me to support this motion. I appreciate the urge to respond to the horrors of the summer in Gaza and the continued, impossibly frustrating impasse. However, if we believe in peace, we have to do what most advances it, and I do not believe that passing this motion is that. The British Government should use what influence they have once again to urge Prime Minister Netanyahu to sit down and negotiate, with no preconceptions, a realistic peace based on a two-state solution, and to urge President Abbas to accept the offer. My priority is to get the Palestinians a viable state rather than make a modest gesture here or have a momentary victory in the United Nations that will raise expectations but do little in the long term to further the interests of peace.

9.5 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab): I meant no discourtesy to the Minister earlier; I was simply aware that colleagues were anxious to make their contributions, and that is why mine will be brief. I speak in support of the motion in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) and of the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw).

[Jonathan Ashworth]

This House has a duty to support Palestinian statehood. The Palestinian claim to statehood is not in the gift of a neighbour—it is an inalienable right of the Palestinians, and tonight we should speak up on their behalf. As the right hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan) said in a superb, eloquent speech, the other half of the Balfour commitment places on us a further obligation and duty to support the Palestinians tonight.

Every speaker has spoken in favour of a two-state solution; everyone on both sides of this House is passionate about a two-state solution. However, I fear that confidence is draining away from the idea of whether a two-state solution is possible. Is it any wonder that confidence in a two-state solution is draining away when the Israelis push ahead with illegal settlements in the west bank? Is it any wonder that confidence is draining away when Bedouin Arabs in the E1 area live in fear of being moved on, and are not allowed to build proper schools for their children and so are forced to build them out of recycled tyres? Is it any wonder that confidence is draining away when those same Arabs put up swings for their children, and because they are denied the relevant permit from the authorities, the Israeli authorities come and take down the swings that the children play on? Is it any wonder that confidence is draining away when we see a conflict in Gaza that leads to 110,000 displaced Palestinians and the destruction of 22 schools?

There are times when this House has to send a message—when this House has to speak. I believe that the will of the British people is now to support Palestinian statehood. Many have questioned what is the practical purpose of supporting this motion; well, I ask what is the practical purpose of opposing it. If we oppose the motion, this House will be sending a message that we endorse the status quo, and I do not believe that that is the will of the British people.

9.8 pm

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): We are going to be told when we vote tonight that we are being naive and indulging in gestures, but sometimes one has to be naive in expressing one's hopes for a better world and to be prepared to make gestures, even if our power is very limited. I suppose that an Israeli living near Gaza will think that we are naive when missiles are raining down on them from Hamas. I have nothing but contempt for Hamas, which I view as a kind of Nazi organisation. I have nothing but respect and support for the state of Israel. I think that all of us are very philo-Semitic. We understand the horrors that the Jewish people have undergone and their desire for security and peace.

However, my viewpoint—my strong support for Israel—started to change when I talked to Abba Eban, a former Israeli Foreign Minister and a very fine gentleman. I was thinking of him only yesterday when I saw that he was an old boy of the school where my son is at the moment. He said in very powerful terms to me in his office in Jerusalem, “Look, there is absolutely no way in which we can possibly run or control the west bank. There are far too many Palestinians. We have to come to a settlement with the Palestinians and recognise their right to self-determination.” That was a former Israeli Foreign Minister.

My other Damascus moment came when I was standing at the Bethlehem checkpoint and saw the appalling humiliation heaped on Palestinian people. I spoke to a nurse at a hospital I visited as part of a charity I ran. She lived in Bethlehem, just a few miles from Jerusalem. It was just a short walk away, but she was never able to go to the city without enormous difficulties. Bethlehem, of all places, should be a beacon of hope.

I know we will be accused of making a gesture today and I understand the Government's position, but they should listen to the voice of this House. Virtually everybody who has spoken—not just lefties waving placards in Trafalgar square, but virtually every Conservative MP—has said that now is the time to recognise the justice of the Palestinians' case.

I am not speaking in anti-Israeli terms—I am proud to be a friend of that state—but they have to open their hearts. They have to start relaxing controls in and out of Gaza. I know about all the problems with terrorists and suicide bombers, but they have to start relaxing controls at the Bethlehem checkpoint I was at and they have to stop the settlements. There has to be some way forward. We have to recognise, however naive this may sound, that we are part of a common humanity, whether we are Christian, Jew or Arab. When we vote tonight—and I will vote for the motion—we will be making a gesture in favour of that common humanity, and we should be proud of that.

9.11 pm

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), who, like other Members, touched on the human realities of people whose lives are afflicted in this conflict. The question for this House is: where do we stand on the basic, core question that constantly runs through this problem?

Every time there is violence and every time the attempts at a peace process fail, fall into a lull and are followed by more violence—whether it is from Hamas or the excessive efforts of the Israeli defence forces, as we have seen this summer—people ask what the western world is doing about it. Where does the international community stand when human rights are sacrificed again and again, and what is its will when international law is violated again and again? Of course, we hear from the Dispatch Box and elsewhere that the Israeli Government are told not to be disproportionate and warned against occupations, and yet the situation continues.

People are increasingly fed up with this screensaver politics, where shapes are thrown, images projected and impressions generated, but nothing real goes on in relation to the substantive issue. People in our constituencies find it frustrating, but the people for whom it must be most frustrating are those moderate people in the middle east, including those in Israel who know that their security will never come from drenching people in Gaza with bombs, and those in Palestine who know that their peace, rights and liberation will not come through lobbing rockets into Israel. They want a peace process and they know that at the heart of that peace process there has to be a two-state solution, and that two-state solution has a better chance of happening if there is at least a semblance of a two-state process. When there is no two-state process, we are wasting our time talking about a two-state solution.

The Minister told us today, once again, that the British Government will recognise the state of Palestine at a time when it is most beneficial to the peace process, but then he went on to say that a negotiated end of occupation is the most effective way of having the Palestinian aspiration for statehood realised on the ground. Is he telling us that the British Government will move on recognising the state of Palestine only when there is a negotiated end to the occupation, whenever that is? If he is, that is no argument against the motion, and nobody could accept it as a reason for voting against the motion or the amendment.

Mrs Main: Does the hon. Gentleman share my suspicion that we will not have a vote tonight? It looks suspiciously as though there is consensus. If we do not have a vote, the House will not speak with the grand voice in the way he hopes.

Mark Durkan: That may well be, and it may add to people's frustrations. We will see whether it happens. We want to flush out a proper declaration, because there should be no obfuscation. There is a clear choice. One of the beauties of the motion tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) is that it is clear—for the purposes of providing absolute clarity, there is the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw)—and the issues have been well distilled in a very good debate.

A couple of attempts have been made to cloud some of the issues, including by the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley). He tried to suggest that the experience of the Northern Ireland peace process somehow means that we should not recognise the state of Palestine now, but leave everybody to sort everything out and then recognise it. The truth is that he and his party opposed the peace process throughout and did so shrilly. They said that the sky would fall in. They opposed American involvement. They opposed what the British and Irish Governments did to create the framework for a solution, and they opposed building a solution based on three sets of relationships—institutions in Northern Ireland, institutions in Ireland and institutions between Ireland and Britain.

The point is that people outside a conflict sometimes have to help to create some of the givens in a process. In the give and take that we expect in a negotiated process, particularly in a historic conflict, it is not in the parties' gift to do all the giving; that is where responsible international input can create some givens and new realities.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for his role in the Northern Ireland process. Does he agree that the involvement of not only the United States but of the European Union in the events of 1997, 1998 and 1999 was crucial in facilitating agreement?

Mark Durkan: Absolutely, and such involvement predated that period. People feared that it was just a gesture that might somehow lead to a dangerous outcome. In fact, the layers of understanding, initiative and input from the international community over several years helped to condition the context of the peace process and to give people a sense of reality about our problem

and the absolute and unavoidable requirements of a solution. That was done in ways that made people comfortable with those requirements, because they did not have the burden of making concessions or compromises themselves, but could take them as things that were already givens in the process.

That is why the important step from the international community in doing more to recognise the state of Palestine is the creation of a sense that the process is a more equal. Will recognition create a solution? No. Will detailed negotiations have to happen? Absolutely. People will have the huge task of trying to work out a solution, to work with the solution and to work with each other within the solution, but one thing the international community can do is to say, "We are not going to endorse anybody's excesses by retailing their excuses." That is why we should not endorse the violence of Israel by subscribing to its veto on the very process in the very basic question before the House tonight.

9.18 pm

Martin Horwood (Cheltenham) (LD): It is an honour to follow such an eloquent speech by the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan). I hope to find just a fraction of the eloquence and sensitivity of my distinguished predecessor Daniel Lipson, who was MP for Cheltenham during the horrors of the second world war. He was also mayor of Cheltenham, and president of the Cheltenham synagogue. He said as long ago as 1946 that

"the solution I want to see is a just solution—a solution which shall be just to both Jews and Arabs. I do not want a one-sided solution".—[*Official Report*, 21 February 1946; Vol. 419, c. 1374.]

It is in recognition of the one-sided nature of the various status quos that have prevailed ever since that our party finally voted last week to support recognition of Palestinian statehood alongside Israel. I very much sense that the House will take the historic decision to do exactly the same tonight. Of course, recent events in Gaza and the continued, determined pursuit of illegal settlement building by the Netanyahu Government must influence us, but there is a deeper reason to support the motion, especially as crises escalate across the region.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for referring to illegal settlement building. Does he agree that the proliferation of illegal settlements is one of the biggest threats to the viability and possibility of a two-state solution?

Martin Horwood: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman. He makes a valid point. I will come back to the message that we need to send to the Government who are responsible for that.

The deeper point to which I was referring was that if we are to tell Arabs across the region to reject extremism, rockets, bombs and massacres that are deliberately aimed at killing defenceless civilians, we must also do more to support the moderate, democratic, pluralist leaders, such as Mahmoud Abbas, who have painstakingly pursued the diplomatic path towards peace and self-determination. In answer to the hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick), if the only practical outcome of passing the motion is to strengthen the hand of Mahmoud Abbas against extremism and intransigence, however imperceptibly, we should do it. If we can tell the Iraqi Government of Nouri al-Maliki that it is not enough to be elected—even

[*Martin Horwood*]

to be elected and face an existential threat—but that Governments must also be inclusive and demonstrate a commitment to peace, we have to deliver the same message, loud and clear, to the Government of Binyamin Netanyahu.

To those who suggest that it is wrong to recognise a new state whose borders have not been finally determined, I say that this House did exactly that in 1950. In case Members have any doubt, I refer them to column 1138 of *Hansard* on 27 April 1950, when Kenneth Younger, the Minister of State in the Attlee Government, announced:

“His Majesty’s Government have also decided to accord de jure recognition to the State of Israel, subject to explanations on two points...First, that His Majesty’s Government are unable to recognise the sovereignty of Israel over that part of Jerusalem which she occupies, though, pending a final determination of the status of the area, they recognise that Israel exercises de facto authority in it. Secondly, that His Majesty’s Government cannot regard the present boundaries between Israel, and Egypt, Jordan, Syria and the Lebanon as constituting the definitive frontiers of Israel, as these boundaries were laid down in the Armistice Agreements concluded severally between Israel and each of these States, and are subject to any modifications which may be agreed upon under the terms of those Agreements, or of any final settlements which may replace them.”—[*Official Report*, 27 April 1950; Vol. 474, c. 1138-1139.]

We have been waiting for those final settlements—indeed, the middle east has been waiting for those final settlements—for 60 years and more. We have seen occupations by Jordan and then by Israel. We have seen wars and uprisings, but the Palestinian territories are closer in practice to statehood now than they have been at any other time in that entire period. If we are to reward the diplomatic path to peace, the time has come to recognise the state of Palestine, as we did the state of Israel all those years ago.

We should join the 350 Israelis who today wrote an open letter to my noble Friend Lord Alderdice—former Members of the Knesset, former Ministers, former Government officials, former winners of the Israel prize and the Nobel prize, a former Attorney-General, artists, playwrights and soldiers—who said:

“We, Israelis who worry and care for the well-being of the state of Israel, believe that the long-term existence and security of Israel depends on the long-term existence and security of a Palestinian state.”

We should support them and we should support the motion tonight.

9.23 pm

Sandra Osborne (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this debate, having visited Israel, the west bank and Gaza on numerous occasions. It is great to see such a consensus developing as the debate goes on.

We all like to believe that we are in touch with the expectations and aspirations of the people we represent. Mr Norman Kirk of the New Zealand Labour party got it absolutely right when he said that people

“don’t ask for much: someone to love, somewhere to live, somewhere to work and something to hope for.”

New Zealanders are not unique in wanting those things. People the world over are looking for those things, including the people of Palestine and Israel. They have people to love in abundance. The problem for the

Palestinians is that, too often, they lose those they love, including their children. And how many Israeli families have lost members who have died in the Israeli armed forces? The people of Gaza are left homeless when their houses are destroyed or severely damaged by Israeli bombings. In area C of the west bank, there are home demolitions and land seizures, and settlements are built on Palestinian land. A house is not a home if it has to be vacated at regular intervals in response to alarms signalling rocket attacks and the need to take shelter.

Unemployment is astronomical in Palestine, especially among young Palestinian people. What do they have to hope for? Peace, and a Palestinian state living side by side with Israel, which has already been recognised as a state with no recognised borders. The truth is that they now have little hope, trust or faith in a two-state solution in the face of ever increasing settlements, the failure of the latest rounds of talks—in spite of the efforts of Secretary of State Kerry—and the failure of the US and EU to put proportionate pressure on Israel to demonstrate real commitment to the peace process.

Bob Stewart: When I was in Bosnia, a person said to me that unless politics sorted out the Balkans, history would take care of it. In this case, unless the Government of Israel get real in understanding that they have to live with the Palestinians, and that somehow a solution has to be found, history will take care of it because one day the Arabs will be so powerful that they will invade and that will be the end of Israel. Pray God that does not happen—let us find a solution.

Sandra Osborne: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, but my point is that hope is running out for the Palestinian people. What is the impediment to the UK recognising Palestine as a state, and what do 135 other countries know that we do not? Is it that we have some special role in negotiations that would preclude recognition from the UK, or must we slavishly follow US policy? Neither argument is credible or moral. Surely we have even more responsibility towards the Palestinians because of our history.

The Palestinians who remain committed to pursuing a peaceful path to a solution have asked that we recognise their right to exist by formally recognising Palestine as a state. It is for them, not us, to judge when that should be done. I say that we should agree—no ifs, no buts—to statehood for the Palestinians, and I will be supporting the motion tonight.

9.27 pm

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): As the chief cheerleader of “Get real, United Kingdom” about our place in the world, I say to my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr Lilley), and perhaps to my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) and others who have questioned the importance of this debate, that having had media bids from France, Turkey, al-Jazeera, Channel 4 and the BBC World Service in connection with this evening—unknown for me—I must say to the House that people are listening to the debate, and in the Occupied Palestinian Territories they will be listening very attentively because of our history.

I am immensely proud to have my name on tonight’s motion after that of the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris), and I also support the amendment

that was so well tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan), and others, which makes the purpose of the motion clearer.

I have been involved with this issue for an awfully long time. Twenty years ago I accompanied my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kensington (Sir Malcolm Rifkind) when he was the first British Defence Secretary to visit Israel, where he went to deliver the Balfour lecture. We have been reminded on more than one occasion this evening of the second part of the Balfour declaration that has not been delivered. It was a rare period of hope for the Israel-Palestine issue at the time. Yitzhak Rabin was Prime Minister, the Oslo accords had been signed, yet already the rejectionists were at work. There was a bus bomb in Israel when we were there, and tragically a few months later Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by a Jewish rejectionist of the Oslo accords. Even in 1996, I recall my right hon. and learned Friend as Foreign Secretary summoning the Israeli ambassador to give him a lecture about the settlements that were beginning to be constructed. That was before the deadline on the Oslo accords, which were supposed to deliver the final settlement arrangements by 1998.

Jeremy Corbyn: Does not the hon. Gentleman think it is also important to make some reference to the problems facing Palestinian refugees in camps and in the Diaspora? They should not be left out of this equation and our recognition will help to bring their cause to the fore.

Crispin Blunt: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The right of return will have to be dealt with at some point during the negotiations. In the course of the debate I was delighted to hear the contribution of my right hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Sir Richard Ottaway) and see the scales begin to drop from his eyes, with the latest land grab by the state of Israel. I was slightly surprised by his characterisation of the six-day war as an effort to destroy Israel. It was a brilliant Israeli feat of arms to dissipate what appeared to be a coming threat to Israel, but it certainly was not a response to an attack on Israel.

Dr Julian Lewis: My hon. Friend predicted that he would provoke me to intervene and he has succeeded in that aim. I think the laying of mines across the straits of Tiran could just conceivably be described as an act of war.

Crispin Blunt: I will let the lawyers and my hon. Friend come to their own conclusion on that.

My last visit to Israel was with a collection of colleagues from this House to again play cricket for the parliamentary cricket team. I note that the chairman of the Israeli cricket board who entertained us so magnificently—he is a Jew from South Africa who is now an Israeli citizen—said that in his view Israel had begun to lose its moral and legal authority from 1967. Since 1967, we have to understand and consider Israel's approach to the negotiations and the realities that have been created on the ground. I am afraid that in recent years it has become clearer and clearer that Israeli politicians have avoided the opportunity to deliver a settlement. As the realities on the ground have changed, so it has become

more difficult for Israeli leaders to deliver a settlement. The 400,000 settlers in the occupied territories form the most enormous political problem for any Israeli leader to have to address.

Robert Halfon: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Crispin Blunt: I cannot. I am out of time.

Israel now has the existence of the Arab peace plan. It has the offer of full recognition and peace from its Arab neighbours. The Palestinian negotiating position, in the words of Saeb Erekat, is nothing: the Palestinians have nothing to give in the negotiations. The one thing that we can give them by this vote this evening is some moral and legal authority for their position. Even if it is only a small amount of moral and legal authority, it can begin to help the Palestinian moderates face down those who think violence against Israel is an intelligent course of action. Violence has, of course, been an utter and complete disaster for the Palestinian cause. Israel responds, as we have seen in Gaza, with disproportionate force—I use that term advisedly. The explanation for Israeli action simply does not stand the test. The Israeli Government, faced with the political problem it has in bringing a settlement, has all too often not sought to find the ground on which to deliver that settlement. By this vote tonight, we can give the Palestinians, who have had an appalling deal from history, a little bit of moral and legal authority.

9.33 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) on tabling this very important motion. I observe that earlier this evening the hon. Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) said that the motion did not matter, that we were just Back Benchers and that it did not come from the Government. I say to him that I am surprised he takes being a Member of Parliament so lightly. I also say to him that no Government can long withstand the settled will of both sides of the House of Commons.

When we have these debates, there is sometimes a tendency to imply that being against any policy of a particular Israeli Government at a point in time makes a person anti-Israel, anti-Jewish and even an anti-Semite. Let me say this: I represent Hackney, one of the historical centres of the Jewish community in this country. We had the oldest synagogue in the country in Brenthouse road, and there is an impressive roll-call of illustrious persons of Jewish origin who came out of Hackney: Moses Montefiore, Nathan Mayer Rothschild, Jack Cohen, Alan Sugar and Harold Pinter. I think that is one of the finest roll-calls in the country, and I deprecate the suggestion that just because somebody disagrees with the Israeli Government at any point, that makes them anti-Israeli. Of course I support the Israeli people and of course I support the right of Israel to exist, and I believe that that is mainstream public opinion. But it is also mainstream public opinion that something must be done to move the peace process forward, because the peace process is effectively stalled, and it is also mainstream public opinion that the public were horrified by what they saw—the sights and the killing—in Gaza over the summer, and I think the British public will be very disappointed if we do not have a decisive vote on these matters today.

Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): It is very easy to call anyone who opposes the views of the Israeli Government an anti-Semite. Does my hon. Friend believe that building a wall and separation barrier on Palestinian land and building settlements that now house some 400,000 settlers is any way forward and gives the international community any confidence that Israel is willing to go through any sort of peace process? Does she also agree that this vote today is going to send a message to the Israeli Government that this Parliament and this country feel very strongly about their attitude towards Palestine?

Ms Abbott: I entirely agree about both the walls and the continuing proliferation of settlements.

In this debate we have heard what has almost been a mantra from Members opposed to the motion: "Make Palestine a state, but not just yet." It is absurd for opponents of this motion to argue that it undermines negotiation. There is so much to negotiate, so much to do, so much for both sides to talk about. It is almost disingenuous to say that recognising Palestinian statehood cuts across any negotiation, and the idea that recognition of Palestinian statehood should be conditional or a bargaining chip must be wrong.

I believe that the time for justice for the Palestinians has come and the time to recognise Palestinian statehood is tonight in this House of Commons, and I believe that our own constituents, and above all Palestinians overseas, are looking to this House tonight to do the right thing.

9.38 pm

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): By introducing this motion today, my friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris), has given voice to the hopes and aspirations of the Palestinian people, who have been denied justice for far too long. Like me, he will have watched with horror and anger as an ailing peace process has descended into a cycle of violence, much of it directed at children, and like me he will stand with all those Palestinians and Israelis who reject this, and who understand that every single action taken in anger makes Israel less secure and the prospect of peace for both sides diminish.

The only path to real security lies in political, not military, action, but the political process is failing. I say this to those Members who have sought to argue that the motion would make the situation worse: what are those Palestinians who have remained committed to the peace process meant to say after a summer that left 800 dead and more than 5,000 injured and resulted in yet another announcement from Israel that it is expanding its illegal occupation—and when the product of this process is half a million more settlers in the west bank and the occupied Palestinian territories in recent years, children shackled by the ankles in the military courts, and living with the daily humiliation of life under occupation? They have had 48 years of military occupation; if not today, then when will this country and this House give the Palestinian people the hope that things will get better? Too many Palestinians can see, as I can, that this process is not a negotiation between equals. The current situation, to which the UK remains wedded, allows Israel—in practice if not in principle—a right of veto over Palestinian statehood. In what sense can those negotiations be called meaningful?

This is why I support and welcome the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw). Equality is an essential precondition for peace. A two-state solution requires two states with equal status. They must be equal partners, with an equal future. It shames us in Britain, with our historical obligation to the Palestinian people, that 135 nations have now taken the step of recognising Palestine while we remain among the handful of states in the United Nations that refuse to join them.

Half the population of Gaza is under the age of 18. Their lives are characterised by suffering, humiliation and despair. As Jonathan Freedland wrote recently, their childhoods have been

"broken by pain and bloodshed three times in the past six years" while the UK stands by and watches. The UK, not Israel, determines our foreign policy. We are members of the European Union and the United Nations, we are in a special relationship with the United States of America and we are permanent members of the UN Security Council. As such, we occupy a privileged position in world affairs, and it is about time we showed the world why.

9.41 pm

Katy Clark (North Ayrshire and Arran) (Lab): It is a pleasure to have this opportunity to contribute to the debate this evening. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) on securing the debate and on enabling the space to be created for such powerful arguments from both sides of the House that tonight is the time for the UK to send a clear message that we recognise Palestine as a state. Those who say that this is just a gesture and that it does not matter what the UK Parliament says are simply mistaken. Our historical position in the world in relation to Israel and Palestine, the fact that we still hold a highly influential position and have a close relationship with the United States, and the foreign policy positions that we have taken over many years, mean that we can now send an incredibly powerful message from this House tonight.

This is the right thing to do morally, but it is also the right thing to do politically. It is important in relation to all our other foreign policy in the region that we should be seen to be even-handed and fair, and that we should no longer be accused of having double standards or of failing to stand up for the Palestinians. We have to give our support to those Palestinians who believe in a political route to self-determination based on non-violent action and international pressure. All too often, those people feel that they have not been given that support by the United States and the United Kingdom.

My constituents gave me a clear message this summer that they did not believe that the Israeli response was proportionate to whatever was happening in Palestine. Between 8 July and 27 August, there were 2,104 Palestinian deaths, including those of 495 children. In that period, there were 72 Israeli deaths, seven of which were civilians. The UK urged Israel to avoid civilian deaths, but made no condemnation of Israeli actions. The then United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, stated on 23 July:

"There seems to be a strong possibility that international law has been violated, in a manner that could amount to war crimes". She also condemned Hamas for "indiscriminate attacks".

Recognition of the state of Palestine would mean a more regulated relationship between the international community and Israel and Palestine. At the moment, we are not seen as being even-handed. Whatever people in this House might believe, the reality is that we are the ones who are supplying the components for the weaponry being used against the Palestinians. I asked a series of parliamentary questions this summer and did not get any answers out of Ministers, but on 2 August *The Independent* detailed the weaponry being used against civilians in Palestine that had been produced from components made by the UK—in particular, that being used by drones and tanks against civilian populations. I say to the House that we need to send a clear message tonight that we are even-handed, that we believe in justice and that we recognise the Palestinian state.

9.45 pm

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): I congratulate the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) on securing this debate on a matter that is important to many people throughout the UK, Wales and Arfon. My local authority, Gwynedd, has taken a lead in condemning the Israeli Government for the indiscriminate violence used in the recent attacks in Gaza and will not invest in or trade with Israel. Gwynedd sees this debate, and our vote, as a key measure of our concern for Palestine, and of progress on the peace process and on a two-state settlement. That process is vital for both Palestine and Israel alike. People in Palestine who long for progress and peace, and many Israelis, will take encouragement from a positive vote here tonight. For we can vote for politics, for discussions between equals and for an end to war, or we can stall, find excuses and point to the latest outrage. That will help and encourage nobody, other than those who choose the gun, the rocket, the air strikes and the blockade.

Our Government can decide to recognise Palestine. We make our own policy and we are subject to no outside veto. We can recognise Palestine, we can judge that the time is right, and we have a responsibility to seize the opportunity and to wield our influence as a permanent member of the Security Council, as a member of the Quartet, and as the imperial power historically responsible for the mandate. Others today have discussed the history of this question but I will not. I will just say that throughout my adult life there has been war between Israel and its neighbours. We have seen constant invasion, the expropriation of territory by the supporters of war in Israel and, to be clear, repetitive retaliation and a determined cry from the war party, “Not now, not just yet, not until they have stopped it.” That “it” could be bus bombings, hijackings or rockets, but whatever it is at the time we have seen constant blocking and constant concentration on the latest outrage. Those Israelis and Jewish people across the world who work for peace, reconciliation and a just settlement have been sidelined, ignored and worse. Recognition of Palestine by the UK would call time on this constant conflict.

I have heard arguments that the vote tonight will change nothing. We have seen such arguments in an article in *The Daily Telegraph* today by my close neighbour, who is unaccountably not in his place, the hon. Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb). He says that the vote is “non-binding and has no implications for British foreign policy.”

Paradoxically, he says that it will damage decades of hard work towards peace. He says that “international opinion won’t be swayed by a few squabbling MPs on Britain’s Opposition benches”

but also that the motion

“damages Britain’s role in the Middle East”.

With such confusion and contradiction coming from one opponent—

Sir Alan Duncan: Does the hon. Gentleman not find it astonishing that having tabled an amendment and withdrawn it, and clearly feeling so strongly about this issue, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy then advocates abstaining not just from the vote, but from the debate itself?

Hywel Williams: I know him of old and I am not surprised. As I said, with such confusion and contradiction coming from just one opponent, let alone opponents of the motion as a group, it is not surprising that many of them will, apparently, choose to abstain tonight.

I want to take the opportunity to reject yet again the conflation of opposition to the Israeli Government’s war policy with supposed enmity towards the Jewish people. That is a peculiar charge, given that a significant number of Jewish people support peace. It will hardly surprise anyone in the House to hear that Plaid Cymru MPs say that to recognise Palestine is to recognise Palestinian people’s rights to self-determination. We support the rights of all people to self-determination, and that is why we will support the amended motion in the Lobby tonight.

9.49 pm

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) on securing this debate and on setting out the case for recognising Palestine. I support the motion and the amendment in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) because it is the right and just thing to do. It is time to act to save the prospect of a two-state solution. The feeling among my constituents, a great many of whom have contacted me about today’s vote, is strong. From the hundreds of e-mails and letters I have received from Nottingham South, one message above all stands out. It is simply that our Government should recognise the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel.

Throughout my life, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has ground on and on. We have seen a chronic cycle of violence, stalled negotiations and recrimination. Today, Parliament has the opportunity to reiterate and confirm our resolve to help end the suffering and conflict that began before I was born and continues to this day. It is not just the people whom we represent who are looking towards this House in the hope of finding leadership on this matter, and it is not just the people in Palestine. People across the world look to Britain because they are conscious of our historic role.

More than 60 years of history frames today’s debate, but this summer’s violence in Gaza is very much in our minds. All of us were horrified by the images we saw from Palestine this summer. We saw shocking images of dead and wounded civilians—men, women and of course children—shattered homes and wrecked lives. I am sure

[Lilian Greenwood]

that we were also appalled by the indiscriminate rocket attacks on Israeli civilians from positions within Gaza. We cannot stand by and allow this conflict to continue. Sadly, it seems that the window of opportunity for a two-state solution is narrowing. That is why it is time to show political leadership in an effort to break the impasse, providing, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) said, a bridge to negotiations.

Britain recognised the state of Israel in 1950. Recognising Palestine now is about equality of treatment. It is about sending a message that a peaceful lasting solution depends on both parties, Israel and Palestine, coming to the negotiating table as equals. It is about sending a message to Israel that it should recognise the state of Palestine as the state of Palestine has recognised Israel. It is about sending a message to Palestinians that gives them hope that freedom is possible, resolve in rejecting the path of violence that brings no solutions and belief that a diplomatic and political settlement can be reached.

Last week, Sweden became the 135th state to recognise Palestine, joining 134 other members of the United Nations that have already done so. Britain can and should join them. Israel has a right to exist in peace and security and Israelis have as much to gain from the peace process as Palestinians. A just and lasting resolution is needed. We have an opportunity tonight to bring that possibility closer. We must grasp it.

9.53 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): A power struggle is going on not just in the whole Arab world but within Palestinian society, between those who believe in a democratic and secular way forward and those who believe in political Islam that will wipe out not just moderate, secular Arabs but the Christians and the other religious minorities in Palestine. This motion is about not just the question of recognition but what kind of Palestinian state will be created—whether it will be a state that is in the hands of Hamas or, even worse, al-Qaeda elements within Gaza. It is about whether we, at this time, as an international community, recognise the momentous challenges that are facing the whole region. It is not possible for us to go on as we have for the past 15 or 20 years. The programme “The Gatekeepers”, to which some Members have referred, was very clear. It talked about a series of missed opportunities, and only one Prime Minister who had the courage to take the necessary action, paying for it with his life. I am talking about Yitzhak Rabin. The fact is that the current Israeli Prime Minister and Israeli Government do not have that courage and are not doing that.

I speak as a long-standing friend of Israel. I have been denounced as some kind of Zionist child killer by certain people in e-mails and on Twitter. I was even attacked today when I said I was going to vote for the motion by somebody who thought, “No, he can’t possibly be.” The fact is that this is an historic moment because the Palestinian people need a way out of the despair they face. We as an international community—the United States must also heed this message—must help the moderate forces in Fatah by getting their strategy, which is to take the issue internationally, to provide the way forward. Otherwise, the people who believe in the rocket attacks, the suicide bombs, the destruction of civilian

communities and the killing of children—not just Israeli children but their own children, who are used as human shields—will gain the ascendancy.

This is not a position that Hamas wants brought to the UN, and Hamas opposed the previous attempts by the Palestinian Authority. The leader of my party was quite right when he said that Hamas is a vile terrorist organisation. We need to support Fatah and the democratic and secular voices in Palestinian society. This is the chance for us to do so and for that reason I will vote for the motion and support the amendment. I hope that all other friends of Israel in this country will understand that this is the right thing to do.

9.56 pm

Grahame M. Morris: I will wind up very quickly. I thank everyone who has participated in the debate. I counted more than 43 Members who made speeches and numerous interventions. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for having the foresight to allocate time in the Chamber. We have had a tremendous debate. I am perhaps a little biased, but it is a rare occasion on which the House speaks with one voice, as I think it has this evening. Excellent points have been made. It would be unfair to pick out anyone, but some people have made excellent contributions.

I want to impress on the Minister, in view of everything that has been said—he has sat patiently and he is a decent man—the need to reflect on the debate. The will of Parliament has spoken tonight. It is the right thing to do to recognise Palestine and I hope that he will go away and implement the motion.

Amendment agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put.

The House divided: Ayes 274, Noes 12.

Division No. 54]

[9.58 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Brooke, rh Annette
Abrahams, Debbie	Brown, Lyn
Ainsworth, rh Mr Bob	Brown, Mr Russell
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas	Bruce, rh Sir Malcolm
Alexander, Heidi	Bryant, Chris
Ali, Rushanara	Buck, Ms Karen
Allen, Mr Graham	Burden, Richard
Anderson, Mr David	Burnham, rh Andy
Ashworth, Jonathan	Byrne, rh Mr Liam
Bacon, Mr Richard	Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Campbell, rh Sir Menzies
Bain, Mr William	Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Baker, Steve	Carmichael, Neil
Banks, Gordon	Caton, Martin
Barron, rh Kevin	Champion, Sarah
Beckett, rh Margaret	Chapman, Jenny
Begg, Dame Anne	Clark, Katy
Benn, rh Hilary	Clarke, rh Mr Tom
Benyon, Richard	Coaker, Vernon
Betts, Mr Clive	Connarty, Michael
Birtwistle, Gordon	Cooper, Rosie
Blackman-Woods, Roberta	Cooper, rh Yvette
Blenkinsop, Tom	Creasy, Stella
Blomfield, Paul	Crockart, Mike
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Crouch, Tracey
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Cruddas, Jon
Brennan, Kevin	Cryer, John
Bridgen, Andrew	Cunningham, Mr Jim

Cunningham, Sir Tony
 Curran, Margaret
 Dakin, Nic
 Danczuk, Simon
 David, Wayne
 Davidson, Mr Ian
 Davies, David T. C.
 (*Monmouth*)
 Davies, Geraint
 De Piero, Gloria
 Denham, rh Mr John
 Dobson, rh Frank
 Docherty, Thomas
 Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
 Doran, Mr Frank
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Jim
 Doyle, Gemma
 Dromey, Jack
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Field, rh Mr Frank
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Ffello, Robert
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Flynn, Paul
 Fuller, Richard
 Gapes, Mike
 Garnier, Sir Edward
 George, Andrew
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Gilmore, Sheila
 Glindon, Mrs Mary
 Goodman, Helen
 Greatrex, Tom
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffith, Nia
 Hames, Duncan
 Hamilton, Mr David
 Hancock, Mr Mike
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harvey, Sir Nick
 Healey, rh John
 Heath, Mr David
 Hemming, John
 Hendrick, Mark
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hermon, Lady
 Heyes, David
 Hillier, Meg
 Hilling, Julie
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Hood, Mr Jim
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Horwood, Martin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Hunter, Mark
 Huppert, Dr Julian
 Irranca-Davies, Huw
 Jackson, Glenda
 Jamieson, Cathy
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
 Keeley, Barbara
 Khan, rh Sadiq
 Latham, Pauline
 Lavery, Ian
 Lazarowicz, Mark
 Leech, Mr John
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Llwyd, rh Mr Eifyn
 Long, Naomi
 Loughton, Tim
 Love, Mr Andrew
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian
 Lumley, Karen
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
 Mactaggart, Fiona
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Malhotra, Seema
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCartney, Jason
 McClymont, Gregg
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, John
 McGovern, Jim
 McInnes, Liz
 McKechin, Ann
 McKenzie, Mr Iain
 McKinnell, Catherine
 Meacher, rh Mr Michael
 Mearns, Ian
 Menzies, Mark
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Miller, Andrew
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Moore, rh Michael
 Morden, Jessica
 Morrice, Graeme (*Livingston*)
 Morris, Grahame M.
 (*Easington*)
 Mudie, Mr George
 Mulholland, Greg
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Nash, Pamela
 O'Donnell, Fiona
 Ollerenshaw, Eric
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osborne, Sandra
 Owen, Albert
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillipson, Bridget

Pound, Stephen
 Pugh, John
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Reid, Mr Alan
 Reynolds, Emma
 Riordan, Mrs Linda
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robathan, rh Mr Andrew
 Robertson, Angus
 Robertson, rh Sir Hugh
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Rotheram, Steve
 Roy, Mr Frank
 Roy, Lindsay
 Ruane, Chris
 Ruddock, rh Dame Joan
 Russell, Sir Bob
 Sanders, Mr Adrian
 Sarwar, Anas
 Sawford, Andy
 Seabeck, Alison
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheridan, Jim
 Shuker, Gavin
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Mr Andy
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smith, Sir Robert
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stewart, Bob
 Straw, rh Mr Jack
 Stuart, Ms Gisela
 Stunell, rh Sir Andrew
 Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry

Swales, Ian
 Tami, Mark
 Teather, Sarah
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thornberry, Emily
 Thornton, Mike
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Vickers, Martin
 Walley, Joan
 Ward, Mr David
 Watts, Mr Dave
 Weir, Mr Mike
 Wharton, James
 White, Chris
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Williams, Roger
 Williamson, Chris
 Wilson, Phil
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
 Wishart, Pete
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wright, David
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Yeo, Mr Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Alex Cunningham and
Crispin Blunt

NOES

Beith, rh Sir Alan
 Blackman, Bob
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
 Freer, Mike
 McCrea, Dr William
 Mills, Nigel
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Paisley, Ian
 Shannon, Jim
 Simpson, David
 Syms, Mr Robert

Tellers for the Noes:
Jeremy Corbyn and
Mike Wood

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House believes that the Government should recognise the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel, as a contribution to securing a negotiated two state solution.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The House has voted emphatically tonight to support the recognition of the Palestinian state. That is good news, which will be well received by many people, and we should bear witness to those thousands who marched and demonstrated and those thousands who e-mailed us.

If I may, I will briefly explain why I and my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mike Wood) were tellers for a position that we do not actually hold. It was to ensure that democracy could take place and that Members could record their vote, because those

[Jeremy Corbyn]

who were opposed to the motion declined to put up tellers. We have thus ensured democracy here tonight. The constituents whom we all represent will be able to see what influence they were able to have on their Members of Parliament, ensuring that this historic vote took place.

Mr Speaker: Residents of Islington North and the nation at large are now fully apprised of the motivation of the hon. Gentleman and of his colleague. I thank him.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE

That the draft Representation of the People (Supply of Information) Regulations 2014, which were laid before this House on 6 May 2014, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—(*John Penrose.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

ROAD TRAFFIC

That the draft Drug Driving (Specified Limits) (England and Wales) Regulations 2014, which were laid before this House on 3 July, be approved.—(*John Penrose.*)

Question agreed to.

Isle of Wight (Ferries)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(John Penrose.)

10.11 pm

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): At its closest point, the Isle of Wight is just 4 miles from the mainland, but if one cannot cross that stretch of water when one needs to at a reasonable cost, the mainland might as well be a thousand miles away. We have no scheduled air services, so the two ferry operators and the hovercraft provide lifeline services for island residents. They also carry visitors and holidaymakers, business traffic and goods, and, of course, islanders and their families and friends.

The ferry links are essential to our economy. We need them to be regular, reliable and affordable. The two main operators each have an effective geographical monopoly on their own routes. Islanders have always grumbled about the ferry services. It is a popular local pastime. But the ferry companies were taken over by huge financial institutions—Wightlink by Macquarie in 2005 and Red Funnel by Prudential in 2007. Since then, things have become more difficult for the ferry companies.

The companies were sold during the boom years for completely unrealistic sums. The then chief executive walked away with £30 million when Wightlink was sold to the Australian Macquarie bank. He and other former owners have benefited hugely, but the island's economy has suffered. Like all islands, the Isle of Wight faces particular challenges. Looking at a key economic measure, the gross value added figure for Hampshire is well over £22,000. On the island, it is a smidgeon over £14,000. Our economy is fragile and wholly dependent on good connectivity.

In 2008, I asked the Office of Fair Trading to investigate the cross-Solent ferries. The OFT suspected that there were issues

“preventing, restricting or distorting competition”

but found

“limited evidence of consumer detriment”.

But I do not think that it looked very hard to see the damage being done to the island, because it also made it clear that there was no obvious regulatory answer to the problems. When it found no easy answers, it put it in the “too hard to deal with” box and closed the lid. The blunt truth is that Macquarie and Prudential paid well over the odds for these lifeline public services, but it is the island and islanders who are suffering from over-inflated prices and service cuts caused by those decisions.

It is sometimes claimed, including by the ferry companies, that talking about high ferry fares damages tourism, but they never suggest that the fares themselves might put off tourists. David Thornton of Visit Isle of Wight says that he gets few complaints, but he does not hear from people who do not visit the island because the ferry is too expensive. Tourists sometimes get very good deals. Some buy packages with a low ferry price hidden in the total. Surely it has got to the point of madness when it can be cheaper to book a week's holiday, including the ferry and accommodation, than to pay for the fare alone. Some visitors come for an annual break or a few days away. They book in advance and can be flexible about the route and time of travel. They, too,

can get reasonable fares. But those who need to get to work, education, a hospital appointment or a funeral do not have that flexibility, and it is overwhelmingly the islanders who make such journeys.

I believe that the huge debts of the two ferry companies have prevented them from serving islanders as well as they should. In contrast, Hovertravel, a UK family-owned firm without any debt, has high levels of customer satisfaction. In 2012, Wightlink's debt was £192 million on a turnover of £59 million. Red Funnel was in a better position, with £80 million of debt on a turnover of £14 million. The ferry companies deny that such large debts could impact on their services, but the OFT disagreed, stating:

"We remain of the view that the high levels of debt and gearing carry a higher risk...that the operators might have to cut back on service improvements."

I told the OFT that if it did not act, prices would rise and services would go. Since its report in 2009, Wightlink has cut crossings by 26% and Red Funnel has cut them by 14%. It is very difficult to compare prices for vehicle travel because of the airline-style yield management pricing that both ferry companies use. Fares change constantly, and some of them are eye-watering, with people paying up to £200, or even more, for a vehicle crossing.

Two initiatives, the Isle of Wight Better Ferry campaign and the "Are Wightlink the Right Link" Facebook group, have 5,000 supporters between them. I would like to give a flavour of some of the comments:

"I'm fed up with not being able to book with my Multi-Link ticket, only to find that there are dozens of spaces if I pay the Non-Residents fare. Get a grip, Wightlink."

Another islander says:

"My daughter and grandchildren live on the mainland. They can't afford to visit the island and I haven't seen them since February."

Here is another comment:

"Once again, same ferry, same stretch of water, same travel time but different prices...They're pirates."

I have deleted the expletive. Here is another comment:

"Both these companies are disdainful of their captive market and are doing a huge amount of damage to the island economy."

Finally:

"It's just too expensive to get off the island. It's not fair for island people. The prices make it difficult for us to take our children over to see friends and relatives. Please do something about this. Make a blessed change."

There are hundreds of similar comments, and more are added every day.

I thank the Better Ferry campaign, which has supported me on this issue for years, and John Keyworth and Steven Caudle, who set up the Facebook page. John Keyworth told me:

"Since we set up our campaign, we have been flabbergasted at some of the stories that we've heard. There are very high levels of distrust and concern at the outright abuse and overcharging by this industry which provides an essential service to Island residents."

The Barnett formula gives the Scottish Parliament money to spend on many things that this Government cannot afford. CalMac provides ferry services to Scottish islands. It received a grant of £73 million last year—more than half its revenue. My constituents living on the island receive no such benefits. They pay the full operating costs and profits and the fares that they pay also have to

service the company's massive debts. Through their taxes, they subsidise Scottish ferries. Will the Minister explain why Scottish island residents get a much better deal than my constituents? For the life of me, I cannot. Channel islanders are protected from unfair ferry fare increases because the companies operate under licence from the islands' authorities—another protection denied to Isle of Wight ferry users.

There are other worrying issues. Wightlink operates a multi-link ticket system for islanders. People pay for multiple crossings, giving the company hundreds of pounds in advance. They are rewarded for their loyalty by being denied access to many popular ferry crossings. In July this year, the mezzanine deck on the 30-year-old St Helen ferry collapsed. The investigation is ongoing, but even before that happened it was known that St Helen would need to be replaced. However, we are told that there is no money in Wightlink's coffers to replace her and the banks are apparently refusing to stump up. I have yet to hear plausible plans from Macquarie to maintain this vital link for the island's economy.

In preparing for this debate, I spoke to all the operators, including Kevin George, the new chief executive of Red Funnel. Under his leadership, Red Funnel seem to be getting it and are looking for ways to address some of the concerns—2014 prices have been held into next year; ferries refurbished at a cost of more than £2 million each; a greater focus on customer satisfaction; and new plans and discounts designed to benefit islanders.

Red Funnel has been taking market share. Recent figures show that, for the first time in living memory, it has overtaken Wightlink as the most popular route to the island. In a properly competitive market, that would be good news, but in a duopoly with no prospect of new competitors, it can be destabilising. It is more difficult for the company losing market share to build an investment strategy and to develop services rather than cut them. Worse still, if the trend continues, the company taking customers may be unable to cope properly with the increased capacity. That could lead to deteriorating services or even price increases to manage the market.

The UK's largest constituency needs support. One option would be helping us to go back to the competition authorities. The customer detriment not found by the OFT in 2009 is now woefully apparent. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will support us if we need to do that. However, even if we do there is still no easy regulatory solution, so I want to suggest a bigger and more imaginative way forward.

The island must find a sustainable solution to its transport issues. To be fair, the ferry companies, their owners and the banks also need to find a way forward. There have been constructive discussions between the Better Ferry campaign and the owners of Wightlink and Red Funnel. If we could find a new way of managing our transport infrastructure in which the ferry owners had a smaller stake in a bigger investment pot, they might welcome the reduction of risk. We need a model in which the community's needs are recognised and addressed. The ferry owners would need to be realistic and take a patient approach, but we may be able to find a structure with a longer-term opportunity for investment, and we would surely want them to participate. The island would then have a public transport system that addressed the unique challenges that separation from the north island present.

[Mr Andrew Turner]

The current ownership model of the ferry companies represents a real danger to the island's economy, because the ferries are just small cogs in much larger businesses. They are expected to achieve profitable growth to enhance their market value. The end game is typically to sell them on for a higher price than was paid for them, scooping a windfall profit. However, that would burden the companies with even more debt on which interest must be paid from the fares. It is therefore a totally unacceptable model for businesses with weak competition offering lifeline services.

I ask the Minister to help us to explore whether there is a possible win-win situation. The future of Island Line, our railway, is under review. I have been involved in asking the Government to support an expert taskforce to look carefully for a viable, long-term outcome for Island Line. I would ask that this taskforce is not only supported but extended to include the whole of the island's transport infrastructure. We need to take the connectivity of the Isle of Wight out of the "too-difficult" box that the OFT put it in in 2009. This must not be a way of kicking this issue into the long grass but a genuine attempt to find the best way forward, with support and expertise given by the Government. There is already support on the island for such an approach, and we can work to build allegiances on a cross-party basis to find a solution to this difficult situation. Informal discussions with Isle of Wight council have been encouraging. One of its priorities is to improve cross-Solent travel so that it is secure, accessible and affordable. This is a positive way of delivering that aspiration.

At the request of the ferry companies, I would like to turn to two further issues: first, tonnage tax. In January 2000, Red Funnel entered the tonnage tax regime. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs now wants to throw it out. After mountains of correspondence, HMRC, in some desperation, decided that the Solent no longer qualifies as a sea. I would be very grateful if Department of Transport officials tried to help to resolve this. Secondly, Wightlink is concerned about the effect that new marine conservation zones may have on its operations. I hope that the Minister will support me in making representations to colleagues in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for these costs to be taken seriously.

My right hon. Friend is also a friend in the much more widely used sense of the word, and I would like to extend an invitation to him to visit the island once again. I will work with his office to put together a useful itinerary, as I did when he held another ministerial post. During that visit, as is so often the case, he went a little off-message and said exactly what he thought. I very much look forward to him doing so again in his current job, and in doing so helping us to find a creative solution to the long-standing transport issues that beset the Isle of Wight.

10.28 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr John Hayes): Donne said that

"No man is an island"

but can there be a Member of this House who is more for and of the people he represents than my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Turner), who so admirably and with such dedication advances the case

of the island people of his home? You know as well as I do, Mr Speaker, that one should not be a captive of the ordinary, and my hon. Friend is extraordinary in his dedication to this subject, which he has taken up on many occasions. He met me recently to take the case further, and he has secured this debate, on which I congratulate him.

Moving reluctantly from the metaphysical to the literal, it is my duty in the short time available to avail the House of a variety of facts relating to the case my hon. Friend has made. The essence of his argument—which he described tellingly as an imaginative solution to the island's problems—seems to me to be absolutely right. I know that he has worked very hard for many years on behalf of his constituents in raising concerns about cross-Solent issues. He did so with my predecessors—my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mike Penning)—as well as with the ferry operators. He has worked hard behind the scenes, as well as in his public activities, to ensure that his constituents' concerns are raised. His persistence, dedication and continued work are most welcome and have, of course, led to today's debate.

As an island nation, ships and ports are vital to the economic well-being of this country, and so much of this country's trade—95% by volume—arrives or departs by sea. That is doubly the case for our island communities, of which the Isle of Wight is the largest and most populous, as my hon. Friend has said. Ferries are vital to the island, not only for those who work on the mainland each and every day, but for all the island's residents, as they are the only means for goods to reach the shops and for products to be exported.

The three ferry operators—Red Funnel, Wightlink and Hovertravel—are clearly well used, with nearly 9 million journeys each year between Hampshire and the island across six routes. That is nearly 25,000 journeys a day on roughly 200 sailings to and from the island.

It was not until I was preparing for tonight's debate that I realised the long history of the Red Funnel services, which go back nearly 200 years. The company that operated the Isle of Wight Royal Mail Steam Packet Company began those journeys from the island to Southampton and back in 1820. Hovertravel is the world's longest-running hovercraft service: it was established in 1965 and is currently the only scheduled passenger hovercraft service in Europe. That shows the long history of innovation among those serving the needs of the Isle of Wight's inhabitants.

Those innovations were by commercial operators, and decisions on the service levels today have to be for the three individual commercial ferry operators to make, without Government support. Similarly, the level of fares is also a commercial matter, although I hear what my hon. Friend says: I understand his concern about the impact that fares have both on his constituents and on visitors to the island. Through the use of season tickets and discounts for island residents, costs can be less expensive. I shall come in a moment to my hon. Friend's other, broader ideas about how costs can be driven down.

As with railway services, those who wish to turn up and go will find their tickets more expensive than those bought in advance. That means that fares on some services may be more expensive than on others, which is

to the detriment of those who are unable to be flexible on the timing of their journeys or who are unable to book in advance.

My hon. Friend referred specifically to the 2009 report by the Office of Fair Trading, which was replaced by the Competition and Markets Authority in April when the OFT was merged with the Competition Commission. The report summarised and its press notice concluded:

“The OFT’s study found limited evidence of problems for consumers that interventions in this market could address, but found room for improvement both in customer satisfaction levels and the amount of information available to users on the performance of the ferry operators”.

I understand that both Red Funnel and Wightlink provide information on their websites on service performance and customer satisfaction. I would hope that they and Hovertravel will continue to improve the information provided to their users. That is vital if more people are going to take advantage of the discounts I mentioned a moment ago and, therefore, avoid the higher fares.

Establishing user groups, as Wightlink has done with its two ferry user groups, can allow company managers to understand better the concerns of their customers and what impact changes to services and facilities will have on them. It is important that such opportunities are used.

There are improvements in the pipeline. In July, as part of the local growth funding, the Solent local enterprise partnership included £15 million of funding to modernise the Red Funnel terminals in East Cowes and Southampton. Part of that—£6 million—will be available in 2015-16 and it will be matched by Red Funnel investing £15 million to refurbish its fleet. That will allow the ferry terminals to be moved, which in turn will allow important regeneration schemes for East Cowes and Southampton royal pier to proceed. For East Cowes, this will allow for 550 new homes and provide 48,700 square metres of business space. It is an important development for the island, to ensure economic growth as well as provide much-needed housing. I spoke about that to my hon. Friend when we met recently.

My hon. Friend mentioned the Isle of Wight Better Ferry campaign, which seeks a fairer and more flexible ferry service for the island through the community working with ferry operators to improve efficiency, flexibility and good connections at fair prices. That is part of a bigger campaign to get Isle of Wight council to develop a plan for building infrastructure for all transport on the island. Hence his proposal for a taskforce to review the whole of the island’s transport infrastructure, look at what is needed and identify a solution.

Mr Andrew Turner: Will my right hon. Friend encourage members of the public and businesses, such as Red Funnel, Wightlink and Hovertravel, as well as the council, to look at the issues as soon as possible?

Mr Hayes: I want to go a lot further than that, because my hon. Friend has made a persuasive case

tonight. If Adjournment debates mean anything, they mean Members influencing how the Government do their business, as I know you would acknowledge, Mr Speaker. It would be helpful for me to meet my hon. Friend, the different ferry operators and perhaps other interested parties, such as the local council, to hear at first hand the challenges that they face and to encourage their participation in exactly the kind of holistic review of transport infrastructure that, as I know, is so dear to his heart.

It would be my pleasure to host the review, which should work, where appropriate, with bus and train operators to co-ordinate departures and arrivals of services to facilitate journeys, and should consider the long-term transport needs of the island’s residents and visitors. It would have to be done with a bottom-up approach, led by those who know best—those who deliver the services and those who know the needs of the island—but if we can act as a facilitator or co-ordinator, I will be delighted to do so.

My hon. Friend has done a great service to the House by drawing its attention to the kind of imaginative approach that he outlined and which I have endorsed. The Government very much support such an approach. As he knows, we have adopted it with local enterprise partnerships, which bring together local authorities and businesses to agree infrastructure priorities in their area for which they can bid for local growth fund resources. It is only by working together that businesses and local government can ensure that funding decisions made by central Government have the relevant impact in meeting local peoples’ needs. That is precisely what my hon. Friend has epitomised—indeed, one might say personified—in his helpful contribution.

I have no desire to delay the House unduly, but I must suggest that my hon. Friend work closely with the Isle of Wight council—he mentioned this himself—to establish a team or what we might call a taskforce to prepare the terms of reference so that we can begin to put together the plan that he outlined to me briefly in private and has now described to the House.

As my hon. Friend spoke tonight, I thought of Dryden, as I am sure you did too, Mr Speaker. Dryden said:

“Fairest Isle, all isles excelling,
Seat of pleasures, and of loves;
Venus here will choose her dwelling,
And forsake her Cyprian groves.”

I do not think that Dryden was speaking of the Isle of Wight, but he might well have been. In bringing these matters to the House’s attention, my hon. Friend has not only won my support for the concept of examining them in a more rounded way, but done a great service to his constituents, once again confirming himself as the lord of his isle.

Question put and agreed to.

10.39 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 13 October 2014

TREASURY

Bilateral Loan to Ireland

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne): I would like to update the House on the UK's bilateral loan to Ireland.

In 2010, the Government committed to providing a £3.2 billion bilateral loan to Ireland as part of an international assistance package of €67.5 billion including loans provided by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), European Union (EU), euro-area member states and other bilateral lenders Sweden and Denmark.

The UK provided this bilateral loan in order to help put Ireland back on a sustainable path, ensure economic stability and because Ireland is a key trading partner and ally. I regard Ireland's stability to be a key component of the stability of the UK economy and the banking sector, particularly in Northern Ireland.

Ireland has now set out its intention to repay early up to €18.3 billion of loans obtained from the IMF. The IMF loans carry a significantly higher interest rate than other elements of the programme.

The loan agreements of all other creditors under the assistance package, including the UK, each have a clause requiring that Ireland makes a proportional early repayment to them in the event that Ireland repays any creditor under its assistance programme ahead of schedule. On 19 September, Ireland formally requested that the UK, and all other lenders besides the IMF, provide a waiver for this clause.

I can inform the House that I have today provided a waiver under clause 19.3 of the Credit Facility Agreement (Amended 4 October 2012) enabling Ireland to make early repayments to the IMF of up to €18.3 billion without the requirement to make pro rata early repayments to the United Kingdom. This decision does not amend the amount or timing of interest and principle repayments owed to the UK as originally foreseen in the Credit Facility Agreement (Amended 4 October 2012).

It is clear to me that, where all other lenders provide similar waivers, granting a waiver for the UK bilateral loan delivers significant benefits to Ireland's fiscal position and debt sustainability in the coming years. However, the benefits of these actions are not exclusive to Ireland, as the potential improvements also enhance the likelihood of repayment of the UK's loan.

The waiver I have agreed is conditional upon all other assistance providers, besides the IMF, issuing similar waivers. Ireland has also committed to ensuring the IMF continues to play a role in monitoring Ireland in the coming years. All member states have now agreed to provide a waiver to Ireland on the outstanding loans.

In addition to this announcement, HM Treasury has today provided a further report to Parliament in relation to Irish loans as required under the Loans to Ireland Act 2010. The report relates to the period from 1 April 2014 to 30 September 2014.

A written ministerial statement on the previous statutory report regarding the loan to Ireland was laid in Parliament on 28 April 2014, *Official Report*, column 33WS.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Work of the Department during Conference Recess

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Eric Pickles): I would like to update hon. Members on the main items of business undertaken by my Department since the House rose for conference recess on 12 September.

Getting Britain building

The coalition Government's housing investment is supporting the construction industry to get Britain building the homes that our country needs. House building is now at its highest level since 2007, which shows our long-term economic plan is working and bringing in results. But there is more to do.

On 26 September, I launched a new £400 million Rent to Buy programme to boost the building of new rental homes that will help hard-working people rent now and buy later. This new scheme provides more flexibility for those who want to rent affordably now, save for a deposit, and then buy their home. Under the scheme, housing associations and other providers can bid for a share of £400 million in low-cost loans to build up to 10,000 new homes across the country. Landlords must then make these homes available for rent at below-market rates for at least seven years giving the tenants the opportunity to save a deposit and get ready to buy their new home.

Figures published by my Department on 25 September showed how almost 53,000 households in England have already benefited through the Government's Help to Buy schemes. These schemes enable hard-working people to buy a home with a fraction of the deposit they would normally require.

On 30 September, we announced plans to help 11 areas across England to be at the forefront of helping aspiring self-builders. The chosen areas—Cherwell, South Cambridgeshire, Teignbridge, Shropshire, Oldham, West Lindsey, Exmoor and Dartmoor, Pendle, Sheffield, South Norfolk and Stoke-on-Trent—will establish and maintain a register of prospective custom and self-builders in their area and begin identifying, shovel-ready sites for them.

On 9 October, my Department announced new powers for councils to help them build new affordable homes across the country, building on the reforms we have already delivered to the decentralised Housing Revenue Account. This will allow 22 councils to borrow an additional £122 million over the next two years to deliver more than 1,700 new affordable homes and support local growth. There is further funding available to local councils, which is only available thanks to the decisive action we have taken to reduce the deficit left by the last Labour Government.

On 10 October, we announced a new £3 million Site Delivery Fund to get work on housing sites back on track. The money will help deliver up to 25,000 new homes across the country on sites that have been given planning permission but remain caught up in red tape.

The fund is being shared across 60 bids from councils for areas where large housing developments have been agreed, and councils have shown how Government support will allow them to tackle planning barriers and accelerate delivery on as many sites as possible.

Boosting local infrastructure

The Local Infrastructure Fund is another way we are getting Britain building and boosting local economies. It is targeted at housing schemes that could deliver real benefits to their communities but are struggling to move forward. Already 85,000 homes have been unlocked through this scheme. On 24 September, my Department announced a £16.5 million cash boost to fast forward the development of a further 1,600 new homes at Newton Leys, Milton Keynes, which despite receiving planning permission for development in 2006, has been stalled for years.

On the same day, we also published a progress report on the Growing Places Fund, which showed local enterprise partnerships are continuing to make excellent progress in delivering the economic growth, jobs and homes that communities need. The fund has supported 323 projects across the country leveraging £2.8 billion of extra investment including some £1.8 billion from the private sector. I expect this to support almost 70,000 new housing units and four million square metres of commercial and industrial floor space.

Supporting the Right to Buy

Since the launch of the reinvigorated Right to Buy scheme in 2012, 22,500 social tenants have benefited from expert support and thousands of pounds worth of discounts in order to become home owners. But such a right cannot be exercised if those eligible do not know about it.

On 25 September, my Department began writing to almost one million social tenants across the country to remind them of their Right to Buy. This letterbox campaign will be supported through advertisements in selected local newspapers. These people will be informed about the new levels of discount available and the Right to Buy Agent service launched in August which provides reliable personal advice from start to finish of the process. There might never be a better time for eligible council and housing association tenants to make this life-changing decision for them and their families.

Delivering a localised planning system

On 29 September, I announced my Department's latest estimates on planning permissions being granted for new homes. Based on our analysis of Glenigan data, a total of 230,000 new homes received planning permission in England in the 12 months to Q2 2014. Combined with the fact that the number of planning appeals has fallen, this shows that our locally led planning system, following the abolition of the Labour's top-down regional strategies, is working.

Despite house building levels being on an upward trajectory there is still an acute need for more homes, especially in London. Since May 2013, those looking to convert offices into new homes have been able to do so under a permitted development right without applying for planning permission. Decentralisation is not just about bringing power down to councils, but also down to neighbourhoods and individual firms and householders. Such rights have been enthusiastically adopted by the housing industry, with a particular move towards providing new studio and one-bedroom flats.

This has included the conversion and refurbishment of the Archway Tower in Islington. However, Islington council issued an inappropriately wide Article 4 Direction, seeking to abolish these rights across the whole borough. This is despite there being a previous exemption process. After discussions with the council, on 17 September we took steps to ensure empty and redundant office space in Islington can continue to be converted into new homes for Londoners. Avoiding a blanket ban across the borough, office to residential conversions have been disapplied in very small, targeted parts of the borough instead.

On 2 October, my Department published new figures showing that during the three months up to June 2014, councils received 1,900 applications to enable redundant office buildings to be turned into new homes. They also revealed 900 had been approved during the same period. Permitted development rights are also enabling people to extend their homes without having to apply for planning permission. These figures revealed councils received 7,700 applications for home extensions—6,500 of which got the go-ahead without needing to go through the whole planning process. These figures are just for one quarter, but illustrate how our local planning reforms are helping deliver new homes and support home improvements.

Protecting the countryside and Green Belt

The coalition Government are determined to protect our countryside and the green belt, as stated in the coalition agreement.

On 2 October, my Department published new planning guidance reaffirming how councils should use their local plan drawing on protections in the National Planning Policy Framework, to safeguard their local area against urban sprawl. This guidance explains that, once established, green belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional cases, through the preparation or review of the local plan. It also states that housing need does not justify the harm done to the green belt by inappropriate development. Unlike the Labour's discredited regional strategies, we have been very clear that there is no central diktats demanding that councils rip up the green belt.

On 14 September, we announced proposals for consultation on amending planning policy and planning guidance on Travellers. The new measures that will ensure fairness for all in the planning system and provide greater protection for our green belt and countryside. The measures will crack down on unauthorised Traveller sites to tackle those who flout planning rules and abuse the system.

It also proposes that the definition of Travellers in planning law will be changed so that local authorities would only be asked to plan ahead to meet the needs of those who lead a genuine travelling lifestyle. This would mean any application for a permanent site by someone who has stopped physically travelling would be considered in the same way as an application from the settled population—rather than be considered under policies relating to Travellers.

Ensuring high standards in private rented housing

On 1 October, my Department brought forward new rules that require letting agents to join one of three redress schemes, to ensure tenants and leaseholders have a straightforward option to hold them to account.

The vast majority of landlords and letting agents provide a good-quality service to those looking for a home in the private rental sector. The redress schemes will help ensure standards are maintained and provide tenants with somewhere to go if they feel like they are getting a poor deal.

The schemes run by the property ombudsman, Ombudsman Services Property and the property redress scheme offer independent investigation into complaints about hidden fees or poor service.

Increasing accountability and transparency in local government

Greater power for local government must go hand in hand with greater local transparency and accountability. The public should be able to hold local councils to account about the services they provide. But to do this, people need information about what decisions local councils are taking, and how local councils are spending public money.

This Government have introduced a new publicity code for local councils in England, to help defend the independent free press. The code sets out a range of provisions on the frequency, content and appearance of taxpayer-funded news sheets. Alas not everybody follows these guidances. So on 26 September, my Department warned 11 councils that legal action could be taken in a matter of weeks if they fail to stop or justify actions considered not to be in compliance with this code. Action is being taken against the London Boroughs of Enfield, Greenwich, Hackney, Hillingdon, Lambeth, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest, as well as Luton, Medway and North Somerset councils over the frequency of their municipal newspapers. Tower Hamlets was also notified about the provisions in the code on lawfulness of council publicity.

On 3 October, my Department also updated the local government transparency code, which will further extend and entrench local accountability and openness on how councils spend taxpayers' money and make decisions. This will now become a legal requirement, subject to the passage of the associated secondary legislation through Parliament.

Enhancing efficiency and resilience of local fire and rescue services

On 10 October, my Department published the September updates of the Future Control Room Services Scheme and an update on the marketing and disposal of the Regional Control Centres. These updated national summaries provide good evidence to show that the Future Control Rooms projects remain on track to deliver the benefits outlined in the original national summary. Good progress is also being made to market and dispose of the remaining Regional Control Centres which were a legacy of the failed FiReControl programme and its flawed contracts (signed by the Labour Government) with no break clauses.

Improving local welfare provision

The nationally run community care grants and crisis loans were poorly targeted and failed to help those most in need. So, in 2012 as part of wider welfare reform, the Department for Work and Pensions made the decision to abolish these discretionary funds and transfer responsibility to councils so they could deliver and tailor new local support because they best know their areas' needs. In contrast to the centralised grant system,

under the Department for Work and Pensions' reforms, councils could choose how best to provide support in their areas.

The Department for Work and Pensions has provided a separate fund for 2013-15 and is currently conducting a review of the provision to date. On 10 October, the Government published a consultation on how local welfare provision should be funded in 2015-16. We will analyse the responses to this consultation alongside the findings of the ongoing Department for Work and Pensions' review into the existing provision. The Government will make a decision on funding for 2015-16 in time for the provisional local government finance settlement in December 2014.

Improving governance of public-sector pensions

On 10 October, my Department published consultations on the governance of the pension schemes for local government and firefighters, as part of the coalition Government's wider public service pension reform to ensure better value for taxpayers' money.

Celebrating and rejuvenating the Great British high street

The high street has been the cornerstone of our communities for decades and we are starting to see them re-emerge with a renewed sense of self confidence. The Great British High Street Awards to find Britain's best high streets is shining a light on hard-working traders and communities around the country and showing what can be done to help shopping streets evolve to be places where people want to shop, socialise and work.

On 3 October, my Department published a shortlist of 21 high streets which are battling it out in seven categories—coastal, market town, city, village, local parade, town centre and London—for the coveted Great British high street crown.

Championing united communities and British values

To mark International Day of the Girl on 11 October, the Government announced further funding to help tackle, both at home and abroad, the unacceptable practices of female genital mutilation and forced marriage. This package includes funding from my Department to support community engagement, such as working with local faith leaders and improving education to make clear that such practices have no place in modern Britain.

On 3 October, Ministers gave their best wishes to Muslims in the United Kingdom for Eid ul-Adha, which is the second of two religious holidays celebrated by Muslims worldwide each year. Ministers also gave their best wishes to Jewish people for Yom Kippur (also known as Day of Atonement), which is the holiest day of the year for those of the Jewish faith.

This Government have been championing local communities continuing to cherish and celebrate traditional ties and community spirit, including flag-flying. On 29 September, my Department raised the flag of Westmorland to celebrate Westmorland Day and on 1 October, my Department raised the flag of Lincolnshire to celebrate Lincolnshire Day. England's counties and historic counties continue to form an important part of our cultural and local identity in this country and many people remain deeply attached to their home county.

I am placing copies of the associated press notices and documents in the Library of the House.

DEFENCE

Reserve Forces (Defence Objectives)

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mr Mark Francois): Changes brought about by the Defence Reform Act 2014 allow reservists to be called out under new section 56(1B) of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 if it appears to the Secretary of State that it is necessary or desirable to use members of a reserve force for any purpose for which members of the regular services may be used. Reservists called out under this power may be required to serve for a period of up to 12 months.

In line with these changes and our policy of having more capable, usable, integrated and relevant reserve forces, I have today made four call-out orders under section 56(1 B) of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 which will allow reservists to be called into permanent service in support of defence engagement (for example the provision of short term training teams and military capacity building overseas); Global Counter- terrorism and Counter-Piracy; operation of our permanent joint operating bases in Cyprus, the Falkland Islands, Ascension Island, Diego Garcia and Gibraltar; and maritime security operations.

We anticipate calling out only a small number of reservists under these call-out orders (initial estimates suggest fewer than 250 over the course of the next year) and currently plan on only calling out willing and available reservists, who have the support of their employer. For operations that fall outside the scope of these orders, for example Military Aid to the Civil Authorities, war fighting, or operations which are likely to involve a large number of reservists, I would expect to make separate call-out orders.

These orders take effect from 1 October 2014 and cease to have effect on 30 September 2015.

Reserve Forces (Security and Humanitarian Relief)

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mr Mark Francois): A new call-out order has been made under section 56(1B) of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 to enable reservists to be called into permanent service as part of the UK's contribution to stabilising the security and humanitarian situation in Northern Iraq.

We anticipate calling out only a small number of primarily RAF reservists, with the necessary skills and experience who will operate alongside their regular colleagues. This is fully in line with our policy of having more capable, usable, integrated and relevant reserve forces.

Currently, we plan on calling out only willing and available reservists, who have the support of their employer.

The order takes effect from 3 October 2014 and ceases to have effect on 30 September 2015.

Defence Nuclear Safety Committee and Nuclear Research Advisory Council (Triennial Reviews)

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon): I am today announcing the publication by the Ministry of Defence of the findings of the triennial reviews of the Defence Nuclear Safety Committee (DNSC) and

the Nuclear Research Advisory Council (NRAC). Triennial reviews are part of the Government's commitment to ensuring that non departmental public bodies (NDPBs) continue to have regular independent challenge and to improving the accountability and effectiveness of public bodies.

The DNSC's remit includes all safety aspects relating to the naval nuclear propulsion plant and nuclear weapon systems, including related issues of design, development, manufacture, storage, in-service support, handling, transport, operational training, support facilities and capabilities, and the safety of workers and the public.

The NRAC is responsible for reviewing the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) nuclear warhead research and capability maintenance programme, including the requirement for above-ground experiments and other facilities and techniques necessary to develop and maintain a UK nuclear weapon capability in the absence of underground testing; NRAC also examines AWE's programme of international collaboration.

The reviews concluded that DNSC and NRAC not only provide a valuable source of independent advice, but that they also undertake a vital challenge function on behalf of the Government, and that both bodies should be retained as advisory NDPBs. The reviews also noted that the terms of reference and governance arrangements for both bodies are entirely appropriate.

The reviews also looked closely at the option of merging the two bodies, but concluded that, although their scope is complementary, they do examine different aspects of the deterrent programme, and that there would be no advantage in merging the two.

The review was carried out with the participation of a wide range of internal and external stakeholders and I am grateful to all those who contributed to these triennial reviews.

The Triennial Review Report: Nuclear Research Advisory Council (NRAC) and Defence Nuclear Safety Committee (DNSC) has been placed in the Library of the House. It is also available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/nuclear-research-advisory-council>

and

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/defence-nuclear-safety-committee>

Maritime Support Delivery Framework Contracts

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon): I am notifying the House that the Ministry of Defence has awarded two contracts to support the management of the UK's naval bases and maintain and repair the Royal Navy's warships. These contracts, which have a combined value of £3.2 billion, represent a new approach to contracting for support services at the naval bases, known as the maritime support delivery framework (MSDF).

Contracts have been awarded to both our industrial partners at the naval bases. The contract awarded to Babcock, to provide support services at Her Majesty's naval bases (HMNB) at Devonport and Clyde, is valued at £2.6 billion, while BAE Systems has been awarded a contract worth £600 million to provide support services at HMNB Portsmouth.

The Babcock MSDF contract is for five and a half years, running from 1 October 2014 to 31 March 2020. The BAE Systems MSDF contract is for four and a half years initially, also running from 1 October 2014, with an option to extend it for an additional year. These contracts replace the three warship support modernisation initiative contracts as well as ship services contracts with BAE Systems and Babcock, plus a number of support-based contracts with Babcock for engineering services.

The MSDF contracts will sustain around 7,500 jobs across the three naval bases, with 1,500 of these jobs at HMNB Clyde, up to 4,000 at Devonport and more than 2,000 at HMNB Portsmouth.

MSDF is a modern commercial and financial strategy replacing existing contracts with one wider contracting framework to incentivise industry to transform and rationalise to meet the needs of the Royal Navy.

By bringing the provision of naval base support services and ship services contracts under MSDF, the MOD is able to deliver a saving of some £350 million, drive continuous performance improvement and thereby provide a better deal for defence and the taxpayer.

UK Operations Against ISIL

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon):

On 26 September 2014, the House voted in favour of military operations in support of the Government of Iraq's fight against ISIL, including the use of air strikes. Military action is part of the Government's comprehensive strategy, working in consultation with our allies in the wider coalition, to tackle ISIL.

As set out in statements on 2 September, *Official Report*, column 15WS, and 9 September, *Official Report*, column 33WS, our Armed Forces had already been involved in Iraq supporting humanitarian efforts, delivering equipment, weapons and ammunition to the Kurdistan Regional Government and contributing to coalition surveillance of ISIL. We are now undertaking military action in support of the coalition campaign.

The RAF began flying Tornado GR4 strike missions on 27 September. As of 10 October they have conducted 20 missions over Iraq. The Tornado provides strike capability with its highly accurate Brimstone missiles and Paveway guided bombs, allowing strikes against ISIL while minimising the risk of civilian casualties, and supports the coalition's need for greater intelligence and surveillance with its reconnaissance pods. The first UK strike took place on 30 September, and six Tornado missions have resulted in weapons being released, hitting eight separate targets. The presence of armed jets in the skies has also curtailed ISIL's ability to move freely and given Kurdish and Iraqi defenders time to organise and space to attack. ISIL fighters have been observed changing their tactics and trying to draw the coalition into inflicting civilian casualties as they take shelter amongst the civilian population.

We announced the short term deployment of two additional Tornado GR4s to RAF Akrotiri to provide resilience to our operation and allow us to maintain our tempo of missions. The new Voyager air-to-air refuelling capability and the Rivet Joint surveillance aircraft which began operation on 9 August continue to provide vital support to both British and coalition aircraft.

We are continuing to deliver support to the Kurdistan Regional Government forces at the request of the Government of Iraq. C-17 and C-130 aircraft in co-ordination with Canadian and Danish transport planes have so far delivered over 300 tonnes of supplies to Erbil for Kurdish Peshmerga units. This includes over 100 tonnes of UK-gifted weapons and equipment and over 200 tonnes of weapons and ammunition from supportive countries.

A training team has begun instructing Peshmerga soldiers on the operation of 40 UK-gifted heavy machine guns. Other training teams addressing soldiering skills, medical and counter-explosive device knowledge are planned.

Our network of liaison officers in Iraq and the region has expanded to better understand the situation, work with our partners and help sustain the coalition which critically includes regional partners involved in operations. The Ministry of Defence is working closely with the Foreign Office to ensure our activity is co-ordinated to support the Iraqi authorities in providing a more inclusive government in Sunni areas liberated from ISIL control.

Throughout the campaign C-130 transport aircraft remain ready to deliver more humanitarian aid provided by the Department for International Development (DFID) and pre-positioned in Cyprus.

I will continue to keep the House informed of defence activities.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Informal Energy and Environment Council

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Mr Edward Davey): I am writing to report discussions at the Informal Energy and Environment Council in Milan on 6 October, where I represented the UK.

The Council discussed the Italian presidency's report on energy security in the EU, which put forward a number of medium to long-term measures to address energy security, as required by the June European Council conclusions. Following a detailed discussion the report went forward as a presidency document, because of concerns expressed by some member states. A number of member states wanted to ensure that energy security was discussed in tandem with the 2030 framework for climate and energy policies and others had concerns over interconnection targets. I broadly supported the report as a useful contribution to the debate on energy security.

The Council then considered the completion of the internal energy market. The European Commission opened the session by outlining the main challenges to completing the internal energy market, focusing on the need for completion of the network code process, and the cross-border interconnections covered by the projects of common interest process. The importance of regional co-operation was also focused on as a key priority by the discussion. The importance of the internal market for climate change action and energy security policy was made clear in the discussion.

Over lunch, Ministers discussed the Commission's Communication on the contribution of energy efficiency to energy security and climate-energy policies.

In the afternoon there was a round-table discussion on the EU 2030 framework for climate and energy policies I urged member states to agree a package by the October European Council. I stated that the UK wants to see a package that is ambitious and has a target for EU domestic greenhouse gas emission reductions of at least 40%; that addresses the challenges of energy security and investment that Europe faces today; and that reflects the principles of fairness, solidarity and cost effectiveness. I reiterated the importance the UK places on the need for member states to have flexibility in the way they implement the package.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Afghanistan Monthly Progress Report (July/August 2014)

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): I wish to inform the House that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, together with the Ministry of Defence and the Department for International Development, is today publishing the 40th progress report on developments in Afghanistan since November 2010.

The announcement of the preliminary results of the second round of the presidential election by the IEC on 7 July triggered a political crisis. Presidential candidate Abdullah Abdullah threatened to pull out of the process. Intervention by the US Secretary of State John Kerry secured the agreement of both Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani to abide by the result of a full audit of the second round vote under a UN supervised process. The Afghan Government are currently facing significant fiscal challenges, exacerbated by the protracted election process.

On 12 July, UNAMA published their mid-year report "Protection of civilians in armed conflict" which recorded a 24% rise in civilian casualties, compared to the first six months of 2013. It attributed 74% of these to Taleban action, undermining their claims that they try to minimise civilian casualties. The insurgent offensive in Northern Helmand that began in June persisted, but reduced in intensity, through July. The ANSF were better prepared compared to last year's fighting season and resisted Taleban attempts to make significant gains.

In contrast, Kabul has experienced an increased number of insurgent incidents compared with last year, with 52 by 20 August, compared to only 30 incidents in the whole of 2013. Throughout July there were also significant attacks that threatened or struck Kabul International Airport.

On 5 August, at the Marshal Fahim National Defence University in Kabul, Major General Harold J. Greene (US Army), the Deputy Commander of the Combined Security Transition Command - Afghanistan was killed by an Afghan National Army soldier. Two UK personnel were amongst the wounded.

ISAF redeployment continues and the number of bases has now reduced to just 42 locations. There are only 18 locations left to transfer or close before the end of the current ISAF mission.

I am placing the report in the Library of the House. It will also be published on the gov.uk website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghanistan-progress-reports

Hong Kong

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): I have been following the situation in Hong Kong particularly closely in recent weeks. The Government have called on all sides to ensure that the demonstrations remain peaceful. Equally, it is important that Hong Kong's fundamental rights and freedoms continue to be respected, including the rights to freedom of speech and freedom of assembly in accordance with the law. The Government remain fully committed to the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration, on the implementation of which the Foreign Secretary will continue to report to Parliament regularly.

On the question of constitutional reform, the Foreign Secretary and I have consistently expressed to all parties the Government's view that Hong Kong's future is best served by a transition to universal suffrage, in line with the Basic Law, which meets the aspirations of the people of Hong Kong, and which offers them a genuine choice in the election of the Chief Executive.

The Government continue to encourage all parties to engage in dialogue and to work towards a consensus that allows a significant step forward for democracy. I look forward in due course to the resumption by the Hong Kong Government of the official consultation on plans to implement universal suffrage in 2017.

HEALTH

Informal Health Council

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): EU Health Ministers met in Milan on 22 and 23 September. The UK was represented by a senior official from the Department of Health. The agenda included discussions on therapeutic innovation for patients' benefit, the Ebola outbreak and the European Union's response, cancer prevention and pharmaceutical policy in the commission.

The meeting began with a discussion on therapeutic innovation for the benefit of patients, led by the Italian presidency. The discussion encompassed a broad range of issues including the increasing interaction between industry, patients, prescribers and regulators, the need for greater transparency and sharing of data, and the budgetary challenges posed by high cost new medicines. The UK strongly supported the better use of regulatory flexibilities to support patient access, highlighting the introduction, in the UK, of the early access to medicines scheme, and recognised the importance of encouraging innovation within sustainable healthcare systems.

In terms of the Ebola outbreak, there was a discussion informed by presentations from the Italian presidency, the Chair of the European Parliament Public Health committee and the WHO European Regional Director. The UK recognised the importance of maximising collective resources by sharing information through the EU's early warning system and in terms of work in-country

invited international partners to join their 700 bed initiative (which involves providing 700 beds for Ebola patients in Sierra Leone).

Discussions concerning the prevention of cancer centred on tobacco control, inequalities, screening and a cross-sectoral innovative initiative. The UK stressed the importance of investing in prevention, regarding obesity, tobacco control and alcohol misuse and agreed on the importance of a cross-sectoral approach, also stressing that healthier choices should be the easiest for consumers. The need for flexibility for member states to take initiatives to promote public health was also emphasised by the UK.

A ministerial lunch meeting also took place which focus on palliative care in the context of an ageing population.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Her Majesty's Passport Office

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): In June, following exceptional demand for passport applications and renewals, I asked the Permanent Secretary of the Home Office to commission two reviews to ensure that HM Passport Office is run in as efficient and accountable a manner as possible. I have considered the outcome of those reviews and relevant Cabinet Office guidance. On 1 October, Her Majesty's Passport Office ceased to be an Executive agency of the Home Office and now reports directly to Ministers.

On 26 September, I wrote to the chairmen of the Home Affairs Select Committee and Public Accounts Committee to notify them of my decision. A new director general of HM Passport Office will be appointed, taking on HM Passport Office responsibilities, including civil registration.

JUSTICE

“Our Commitment to Victims”

The Minister for Policing, Criminal Justice and Victims (Mike Penning): On 15 September 2014 the Government published *Our Commitment to Victims*, setting out a bold new vision for the treatment of victims in the criminal justice system.

This Government have made significant progress in how we support victims: investing more than ever in services for victims, tailoring provision for individual and local need, being clearer about what every victim can expect. But the criminal justice system can be daunting and victims—especially the most vulnerable—can find their experiences traumatic, with no idea where to turn for advice and support.

We need to do more to help victims of crime navigate the system and access the information and support they need, to protect vulnerable victims and witnesses in court, and to guarantee their rights in law. As part of *Our Commitment to Victims*, we will:

1. Establish a new nationwide Victims' Information Service by March 2015, and develop this into a comprehensive service that allows victims to access the information and support they need.

2. Strengthen the protection for vulnerable victims by making the experience of going to court a better one.

3. Increase transparency and accountability, to ensure criminal justice agencies are held to account for the services they provide to victims.

4. Introduce a Victims' Law to guarantee key entitlements for victims.

5. Develop plans for paying compensation to victims up front, rather than victims having to wait for their money.

For the first time, we will create a joined-up experience for victims of crime. A new helpline and website will help victims navigate the criminal justice system, understand progress in their case, and access the support they need to help them to cope and recover from the impact of the crime.

Where vulnerable victims give evidence, we will give them more options about how and where they do so: whether before the day of the trial, or from a location away from the courtroom.

We will require all publicly funded advocates in cases involving serious sexual offences to have appropriate training on working with victims.

Where things go wrong, victims will be helped to direct their complaints more easily. And we will consider whether the ombudsman or other organisations need new powers—underpinned by law—to make sure victims get redress where they deserve it.

Where offenders are ordered to pay compensation, the victim should not have to wait to receive the money until years afterwards, whenever the offender can afford it: we will consult on how they could opt to be paid up front.

Our reforms will be underpinned by legislation when parliamentary time allows but I would hope for a suitable vehicle in the first session of the next Parliament, to ensure that the rights of victims are enshrined in law, putting the key entitlements of the Victims' Code into primary legislation, and ensuring their voice is heard in court.

Criminal justice and the provision of care and services to victims of crime is a devolved matter in Scotland and Northern Ireland. These proposals apply to England and Wales only.

A copy of *Our Commitment to Victims* has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The document is also available online, at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-commitment-to-victims-september-2014>.

PRIME MINISTER

Anti-corruption

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): I am pleased to announce that I have appointed my right hon. Friend, the Minister for Business and Enterprise, as the Government's new Anti-Corruption Champion. He will oversee the Government response to domestic and international corruption and his appointment demonstrates the Government's continued commitment to tackling this issue both at home and abroad.

TRANSPORT

HS2

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Robert Goodwill): The Department for Transport and HS2 Ltd have announced two new funds that will provide an additional £30 million of Government support for communities and local economies situated close to the route of HS2 phase one.

HS2 is crucial to the long-term prosperity of this country. It will free up space on our railways, cut journey times between our biggest cities and drive forward our economy for years to come. However, it is only right we do all we can to help those living and working close to this vital railway. The Community and Environment Fund and the Business and Local Economy Fund are being introduced to further help those on phase one of the route between London and the West Midlands.

The £30 million that will be provided from these two funds is in addition to the comprehensive package of support we have already announced and will further help communities and businesses make the most of this once-in-a-generation scheme and crucial part of the Government's long-term economic plan.

The Community and Environment Fund will support local projects that bring community and environmental benefits to areas affected by HS2, in a similar way that the countryside initiative did for HS1. Examples of projects that could be supported include refurbishment of local community centres or sports grounds and environmental conservation and enhancement. All projects supported by this fund will be in addition to the extensive environmental mitigation already set out within the HS2 Bill and environmental statement.

The Business and Local Economy Fund will support local economies and hence employment, for example, by supporting activities that increase footfall in areas affected by HS2 construction. This fund responds to the representations that honourable Members have made on behalf of businesses in their constituencies that are on the phase one line of route. It is in addition to the wide-ranging measures that we will put in place to enable local people and businesses to obtain employment and contracts arising out of the construction and operation of the railway.

HS2 Ltd will be working with the not-for-profit charity New Philanthropy Capital, which has extensive experience of similar grant schemes, to ensure the funds are delivered in the most effective way possible. They will also advise HS2 Ltd on eligibility and application criteria informed by engagement with local authorities and local enterprise partnerships. We expect to announce full details of the funds, following this work, in early 2015 with the funds becoming available following Royal Assent of the HS2 hybrid Bill.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Cold Weather Payments Scheme 2014/15

The Minister for Pensions (Steve Webb): I am pleased to announce that on 7 October 2014 regulations were laid to amend the cold weather payment scheme. The

changes detailed in these regulations will come into force on 1 November this year, in time for the beginning of the winter period.

There have been no Royal Mail postcode changes affecting this year's scheme. The Meteorological Office however has recommended that the primary station at Manston be replaced with Langdon Bay and the primary station at Lyneham will be replaced with Westonbirt. The Morpeth, Cockle Park station is proposed as a more suitable station than the primary station at Boulmer. There are no proposed changes to postcode linkages for these stations.

Also, and as a result of MPs' representations, a few postcodes will be re-assigned to suitable weather stations.

This will ensure that the weather stations to postcode links are as representative as the current arrangement.

I am writing to each Member who made representations about the administration of the scheme last winter to make them aware of the advice from the Meteorological Office.

Cold weather payments are separate from, and in addition to, winter fuel payments.

The amendments resulted from the Department's annual review of the cold weather payments scheme. The review drew on expert advice from the Meteorological Office and took account of representations from benefit claimants and Members of Parliament.

For winter 2014/15 the cold weather payment rate will continue to be £25 for each seven day period of very cold weather.

Welfare Reform

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Iain Duncan Smith): Today I can confirm plans for the next stage of implementing universal credit to all remaining jobcentres and local authorities as we progress national expansion through 2015-16 and secure delivery of universal credit across Great Britain.

Universal credit is a major reform which is restoring work incentives and transforming the welfare state in Britain for the better.

Once fully implemented, universal credit will account for £70 billion of benefit spending each year with up to £35 billion of potential economic benefits to society over 10 years. It is estimated to increase those in work by up to 300,000 once its impact is fully realised.

For a programme of this scale, the Government's priority has been, and continues to be, safe and secure delivery. This started with the successful launch of the pathfinder in April 2013 where our test and learn approach enabled us to test that universal credit was working as intended. We have maintained this careful, controlled expansion of universal credit, continually learning as we go, from October 2013.

Universal credit claims are now taken in over 50 jobcentres and will be available in nearly 100 jobcentres by Christmas—more than one in eight across Great Britain.

We have increased the groups who can claim universal credit to include couples and, from this autumn, we will extend this further to include families in the north-west.

Now national expansion will progress from February 2015 to all remaining jobcentres and local authorities for new single claimants previously eligible for jobseeker's allowance, including those with existing housing benefit and tax credit claims.

The Department continues to deliver universal credit based on experience and early evidence, with changes in perceptions and attitudes beginning to lead to positive changes in behaviour, and will shortly publish its report '*Universal Credit at Work*' alongside an associated evaluation.

The universal credit service is being continuously improved, working with our local authority delivery partners to enhance support offered to households. I can confirm:

We are now trialling key aspects of universal support—delivered locally in 11 partnership areas across Great Britain to inform future delivery. These include triaging household needs to tailor personalised integrated services, and the sharing of data, skills and estate to support more households into work—to ensure the right integrated local foundations are established for further universal credit expansion.

We will put in place funded delivery partnership agreements between Jobcentre Plus and local authorities to make available more support for those who need extra help, including developing co-commissioning capability as we establish personal budgeting support in all local communities through expansion.

Through national expansion we will establish these partnerships to help households progress into work as we develop Universal Support—delivered locally building on the Local Support Services Framework—ensuring effective integrated services are established locally ahead of expansion to all claimant groups from 2016 as legacy benefit systems close to new claims.

We are also bringing forward further test and learn innovations. I can confirm:

Universal credit work coaches will engage with all households at their work search interviews to assess financial capability,

referring to co-commissioned personal budgeting support for advice as appropriate; and identifying if an alternative payment arrangement is necessary for the housing element of universal credit.

In-work progression pilots will be extended to help households increase their earnings once they have found work. These trials will ensure we develop our approach further based on evidence as we progress universal credit labour market transformation, working in partnership with local authorities, employers, colleges and other partners to boost in-work support and progression.

We will also build smarter segmentation capability for work coaches, including via enhanced digital channels, to maximise the impact and efficiency of early interventions for those who need extra support.

We will commence testing an enhanced digital service for universal credit later this year for the full scope of universal credit households in a limited local area.

Taken together, these steps will secure the delivery of universal credit.

This plan—assured by the Major Projects Authority and signed off by HM Treasury—delivers national expansion and transition, enabling natural migration to build the universal credit case load over time as household circumstances change and they become eligible for, and claim, universal credit.

The Department will personalise support to maximise flows into work as more households move onto universal credit as legacy benefits close to new claims from 2016. This establishes the universal credit service across Great Britain, complete by 2017, with the case load continuing to build naturally thereafter.

We will keep all longer-term plans under review as we progress universal credit based on our test and learn approach, securing long-term transformation of the welfare state and UK labour market in a safe and secure way.

Petitions

Monday 13 October 2014

OBSERVATIONS

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Clocaenog wind farm (Vale of Clwyd)

The Petition of residents of the Vale of Clwyd,

Declares that Clocaenog wind farm is currently being developed; further that the Petitioners believe that all cables connecting the wind farm to the electricity sub-station should be underground so as to minimise the visual impact on this beautiful area, to minimise the health risks to residents, to limit the devaluation in property prices and to respect the democratic will of the people of Henllan, Cefn Meiriadog and surrounding areas who unanimously voted to endorse the placing of these cables underground; further that Tir Mostyn, the first wind farm near Clocaenog Forest, placed its cables underground; and further that the offshore wind farms off the coast of Rhyl also placed its cables from the seashore to St Asaph underground.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to encourage local authorities to ensure that planning inspectorates recognise and carefully consider local residents' views when making planning permission decisions and further that the House urges the Government to encourage Denbighshire County Council to show the same consideration to residents' views in relation to the development of the Clocaenog wind farm as it has in the development of other wind farms.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Chris Ruane, *Official Report*, 14 July 2014; Vol. 584, c. 650.]

[P001366]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, received 8 October 2014:

There is a proposed electricity connection project to connect four onshore wind farms in North Wales, including Clocaenog. The project is being progressed within the nationally significant infrastructure planning regime, where it is classified as being at “pre-application” stage. The applicant (Scottish Power) aims to submit an application for a Development Consent Order to the Planning Inspectorate later in 2014.

The nationally significant infrastructure planning regime is designed to enable communities to engage early on and, in particular, to do so during the first three stages of the process: “pre-application”, “pre-examination” and “examination”. After the examination stage, the inspectors write a recommendation for Ministers, and after the ministerial decision there is an opportunity to make an application for Judicial Review.

Dealing first with the “pre-application stage”, this is when scheme proposers develop their application and during this period they are required to engage in significant consultation with local interests. The developer is required to submit a Statement of Community Consultation outlining their approach to consultation, and to work closely with the relevant local authority or authorities on this. Further details on pre-application guidance is

available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-the-pre-application-process-for-major-infrastructure-projects>.

At “application stage”, developers must demonstrate how they have taken notice of consultation responses, and summarise these in a consultation report to the Planning Inspectorate. An application will only be accepted for examination if the Planning Inspectorate is satisfied that the consultation requirement has been met, and the views of the local authority will be considered as part of that assessment.

The “pre-examination stage” begins once an application has been accepted for examination. The application is publicised to ensure that all relevant parties can be made aware, and people and organisations can then register to be involved in the process. Having registered (as an “Interested Party”), individuals and groups will then receive regular updates on progress with the application and have the right to request an open floor hearing as part of the examination.

During the “examination stage”, the “Examining Authority” for the application (comprising one or a small number of Planning Inspectorate inspectors) invites the local authority (or authorities) to provide a Local Impact Report on the likely effects of the development on the local area. Local residents who have registered as “Interested Parties” are notified and can make submissions to the Examining Authority.

All evidence available to the Examining Authority is available to “Interested Parties” and the wider public through the Planning Inspectorate website. The Planning Inspectorate publishes all documents submitted to them in connection with applications with the exception of draft or working documents which are incomplete or potentially misleading.

After the examination stage, the Examining Authority makes a recommendation to the relevant Secretary of State. The decision on any application for the proposed North Wales wind farm connection would be a matter for my Right Honourable Friend, the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change.

Once a decision has been issued by the Secretary of State, there is a six-week period during which the decision may be challenged in the High Court. This process of legal challenge is known as Judicial Review.

In conclusion, the Planning Inspectorate administers the nationally significant infrastructure planning regime with openness, transparency and fairness, and ensures the affected local individuals, businesses, organisations and other interests have opportunities to understand and react to proposals to develop infrastructure projects.

EDUCATION

Child protection law

The Petition of Monte Arora, a chartered accountant living in London,

Declares that she reported her partner to the police for his drinking in 2006. As a consequence of this she was referred to the local authority children's services. Over a period of seven years there have been numerous hearings in the family division and her children have been removed from her and put up for adoption. She

was unable to get legal aid for the appeal and had to pay around £220,000 to Hughmans Solicitors. Additionally she has had to pay the bridging costs of finance and various medical costs adding up to an additional £200,000. However, the system has refused to return her children to her. It is important to note about this case that according to the court judgments at no stage have the children suffered “significant harm” and that they have been put up for adoption on the basis that they are at the risk of “likely emotional abuse” as a consequence of the mother’s relationship with their father. Their father died in 2013, but the children are still being kept away from their mother. The local authority’s view is that she was dependent upon alcohol. She accepts that she consumed perhaps one or two glasses of wine up to three times a week. She has medical reports from 2013 by Dr Mike McPhillips who stated that he was unaware of any

“current psychiatric reason why she should, not be judged fit to parent her children”;

Sheron Green who stated

“I have no reason to believe that Ms. Arora has misused either Antabuse or alcohol during her appointments with me or outside of the therapy”

and Dr Neil Boast who stated

“I agree with Dr McPhillips that Mr Ball’s (unfortunate early death improves the prognosis”.

However, the court still refused to accept that she should be reunited with her children. The court has relied upon the opinion of the local authority and its agents which is contrary to *Lashin v Russia* (Application no. 33117/02) that requires a truly independent assessment for any material decision. The Petitioner believes that the government pressure to increase adoption numbers has destroyed her family. The Petitioner now regrets having asked the system for help as it has destroyed her and her children’s lives.

The Petitioner therefore requests that the House of Commons Justice Select Committee reviews child protection law to ensure that parents get a fair hearing with independent evidence; the House of Commons instructs the Government to stop pressing for ever increasing adoption numbers; and an investigation is started by the Education Select Committee into how public policy should change to fulfil the needs of the large numbers of children wrongly removed from their families.

And the Petitioner remains, etc.—[Presented by John Hemming, *Official Report*, 14 July 2014; Vol. 584, c. 5P.]

[P001369]

Observation from the Secretary of State for Education, received 10 October 2014:

Decisions as to whether children are to be placed into care are taken by the courts. Our system of family justice is based firmly on the principle that children should not be taken into care without a court independently assessing all of the evidence first. We feel that this is the right approach.

Under the Children Act 1989, local authorities cannot and should not remove children from their parents’ care (unless this is with the parents’ consent) without first referring the matter to a court. In every case where a child is taken into care on a care order, the courts must consider all the evidence and can only proceed if there is reasonable cause to believe that the child is suffering from, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.

Parents have legal representatives who are appointed to support them and ensure their views are heard, and to ensure that evidence put forward can be challenged. In addition, applications made to the court are subject to separate scrutiny by the child’s guardian who must submit their own analysis of the evidence, and ensure that the child’s interests and views are properly represented. Where, despite these checks and balances in the system, there are concerns about any individual case and its conclusion, cases can be subject to appeal.

Where the court makes an order placing a child in the care of a local authority, the authority should continue to work with the family with a view to the child returning home. At some point, it may become apparent that the child cannot return home. It is at this stage that the local authority must make alternative plans to provide the child with a permanent family home. One option that should be considered is whether the child can be placed with a member of the child’s wider family, such as a grandparent, and this option should be explored before considering placement with a foster carer.

I want to make it clear that there are no targets on the numbers of children in care or who should be adopted. In fact the law is clear that children should live with their parents wherever possible and that families should be given extra support to help keep them together. In most cases, support from the local authority enables concerns to be addressed and children to remain with their families.

There is nothing more important than promoting the welfare of children and protecting them from harm.

The coalition Government commissioned Professor Munro in May 2010 to undertake a review of the child protection system. This review considered the underpinning legislation and guidance and made a number of recommendations which have already been implemented. The Government are continuing to work with sector partners to reinforce existing legislation.

Home-to-school transport to the Colne Community School (Essex)

The Petition of residents of Harwich and North Essex,

Declares that Essex County Council’s new home-to-school transport policy has removed school transport funding for residents of Wivenhoe with children attending the Colne Community School in Brightlingsea; further that the Petitioners believe that the policy does not recognise the long-term close community link between Wivenhoe and the Colne Community School; further that the cost of running an underutilised service to the allocated catchment school would better be spent on transport to the Colne Community School; and further that the journey time to the Colne Community School is likely to be the same as, or shorter than, to the allocated catchment school.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to encourage the Essex County Council to continue to provide residents of Wivenhoe with equitably funded home-to-school transport to the Colne Community School in Brightlingsea.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Mr Bernard Jenkin, *Official Report*, 22 July 2014; Vol. 584, c. 1355.]

[P001378]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Education, received 3 October 2014:

Local authorities (LAs) must provide free home-to-school transport for pupils of compulsory school age who are attending their nearest suitable school, provided that the school is beyond the statutory walking distance.

LAs must also make arrangements for those children who are unable to walk to school because of their special educational needs (SEN), disability or mobility problems. These arrangements also apply to children who cannot reasonably be expected to walk because the nature of the route is unsuitable to walk in reasonable safety.

Entitlement to free school travel is extended for pupils from low-income families, i.e. those that a) are entitled to free school meals, or b) their parents are in receipt of maximum Working Tax Credit. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 seeks to improve home-to-school travel and transport arrangements and therefore secure fair access to schools, especially for children from low-income groups, where a lack of affordable transport can act as a barrier to choice.

Outside the statutory duties, LAs have a discretionary power to provide free or assisted transport if they believe it is necessary and local funding is available. Essex County Council (ECC) has previously gone beyond the statutory requirements and exercised their discretion to link transport entitlement to school catchment areas, including from Wivenhoe to Colne Community School, though there is no requirement in law to do this.

ECC carried out a public consultation on home-to-school transport which ran from 16 September 2013 to 25 October 2013. Following the consultation, a decision was made to cut the discretionary transport currently in place for children of Wivenhoe to Colne Community School in Brightlingsea. The school has historically been deemed a catchment school for pupils living in Wivenhoe. However, it is not the nearest school; this is Colchester Academy. Good practice would suggest that the introduction of any changes should be phased in so that children who start school under one set of transport arrangements continue to benefit from them. ECC are following this practice and introducing their revised policy for all new starters from September 2015. However, they will continue to provide discretionary transport from Wivenhoe to the Colne Community School for those pupils who currently receive it.

Funding and decisions on discretionary home-to-school transport are a matter for LAs and not something in which Ministers can usually intervene. We have no grounds to believe that the Minister can intervene in this case.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Human rights in Jammu and Kashmir

The Petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that the Petitioners believe that Kashmiris suffer daily human rights abuses; further that the Petitioners believe that more needs to be done for Jammu and Kashmir to progress the right of self-determination for all Kashmiris; and further that a local Petition in Chesham on this matter has received over 228 signatures.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons hold a debate on the human rights situation in Jammu and Kashmir.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Mrs Cheryl Gillan, Official Report, 10 September 2014; Vol. 585, c. 13P.]

[P001388]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, received 8 October 2014:

First, I would like to extend, on behalf of the British Government, my deepest sympathies to all those who have been affected by the extensive flooding in India Administered Kashmir (IAK), Pakistan Administered Kashmir (PAK) and elsewhere in the region. The British Government continue to monitor the humanitarian situation in the aftermath of the floods. We have not, to date, received a request from either Government for assistance, but are in close contact with relevant partners in both countries, and stand ready to help.

I understand the strength of feeling about the situation in Kashmir among those who have signed the petition. The parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the Hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), in a Westminster Hall debate on Kashmir on 11 September, reiterated the long-standing position of the UK, which is:

“that it is for India and Pakistan to find a lasting resolution to the situation in Kashmir, one which takes into account... the wishes of the Kashmiri people. It is not for the UK to prescribe a solution or to mediate in finding one.”

We continue to follow developments in the region and officials from our High Commissions in both New Delhi and Islamabad discuss the situation in Kashmir with both Governments and travel to the region periodically to witness the situation on the ground, in line with our travel advice. We recognise that there are human rights concerns in both IAK and PAK. Any allegations of human rights abuses should be investigated thoroughly, promptly and transparently.

During the Westminster Hall debate the FCO parliamentary Under-Secretary of State said that the British Government

“recognise the importance of a strong relationship between India and Pakistan not only for its own sake, but for regional stability. We encourage both sides to maintain dialogue, the pace and scope of that dialogue is for the two countries to determine.”

The full record of the Westminster Hall debate on Kashmir on 11 September can be found at:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm140911/halltext/140911h0001.htm#14091137000001>

Palestinian water rights

The Petition of a resident of the UK,

Declares that the Petitioner believes that the Government of Israel is not respecting the human rights of the Palestinian people by failing to ensure that they have an adequate water supply.

The Petitioner therefore requests that the House of Commons urges the Government to encourage the Government of Israel to respect the human rights of the Palestinian people to adequate water supply.

And the Petitioner remains, etc.—[Presented by Tim Farron, *Official Report*, 17 June 2014; Vol. 582, c. 1085.]

[P001360]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, received 7 October 2014:

I understand and sympathise with those who have signed this petition. I share their concerns regarding the situation of an adequate water supply for the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs).

The UK raises issues of water in the OPTs with the Israeli authorities, we last raised this issue with Israeli Ministry of Defence officials from the Co-ordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) Unit on 22 April. We continue to stress the urgent need for Israel to take immediate and practical measures to improve the current unacceptable situation and ensure fair distribution of water in the West Bank and Gaza. The UK does not directly fund water projects in the OPTs since a large number of organisations already work on water and sanitation issues. However, UK support to the EU contributes to EU-funded projects in the water, sanitation and basic infrastructure sector.

There is a huge disparity in the way that resources are allocated, as Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers have seen during their visits to the region. For example, while an average Israeli settler uses 242 litres of water a day, an average Palestinian can only use 75 litres a day.

The fair and effective distribution of shared water resources across the Middle East is of great concern to us. These resources are limited and therefore require the effective co-operation from all parties to manage them in such a manner that ensures there will be enough for all.

Although this issue transcends the Arab-Israeli conflict, it is essential that Israel and the Palestinians discuss this issue and ensure that there is a just solution on shared water resources as part of any final status agreement.

TRANSPORT

Dual carriageway for the A303

The Petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that the Petitioners believe that urgent action is needed to make the A303 road west of Stonehenge a dual carriageway following dramatically increased traffic levels caused by the closure of the A344; further that the Petitioners believe a bypass road should be created to relieve the village of Winterbourne Stoke and other blighted communities; further that increased traffic has been diverted onto local roads to the detriment of those resident in the surrounding villages; and further that the Petitioners believe that the Government's feasibility study into improving the A303 must take the impact of disruption on their lives caused by increased traffic into consideration.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to improve the A303 west of Stonehenge by constructing a dual carriageway at the earliest possible opportunity.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by John Glen, *Official Report*, 9 July 2014; Vol. 584, c. 404.]

[P001367]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Transport, received 30 September 2014:

This Government have been clear about the importance of the A303 corridor and its role in facilitating economic growth and providing access to the south-west.

As part of the 2013 spending review, the Government committed to identify and fund solutions, through feasibility studies, to a number of long-standing and notorious hot spots on our national road network, including A303/A30/A358 corridor.

In April this year, the Department published details of the scope, timing and management arrangement of the A303/A30/A358 feasibility study which is available from the Department for Transport website.

The aim of the study is to identify the opportunities and understand the case for future investment solutions on the A303/A30/A358 corridor that are deliverable, affordable and offer value for money. The study is currently considering a range of solutions to the problems identified along the route, including to the congestion problems identified on the Amesbury to Berwick Down section which passes through the Stonehenge world heritage site and the village of Winterbourne Stoke.

The Government have committed to report back at autumn statement 2014 with solutions to the problems on this route, and through this feasibility study we will identify potential future investment proposals as part of our process for longer-term investment planning.

The outcomes of this feasibility study will inform the Department's Roads Investment Strategy that is currently being developed and which we have committed to publish by the end of this year.

Proposed airspace changes at Birmingham Airport

The Humble Petition of Communities Affected by the Proposed Airspace Changes at Birmingham Airport Limited.
Sheweth,

That we wish to bring to the attention of the Secretary of State that local communities in the vicinity of Birmingham Airport Runway 15 have been significantly affected by the noise and disturbance of aircraft flying departure routes established by Birmingham Airport Ltd (BAL) as part of their air space change proposal. BAL is conducting trial flights in relation to their preferred route options as submitted to the CAA (Options 5 & 6 of BAL's proposal). During the public consultation process the community raised significant concerns about the loss of the existing Noise Preferential Route, and accurately predicted a significant increase in noise disturbance. Members of the community made detailed submissions to BAL highlighting how a departure that included a turn at altitude could closely replicate the existing Noise Preferential Route and accommodate the extended runway. This is an option that gained a great deal of community support but was rejected by BAL without any meaningful qualification. Additionally the CAA has confirmed that two of the departure routes from Runway 15 are not producing the intended flight paths. We should also like to bring to the Secretary of State's attention that BAL has no mechanism for gathering community feedback on the trial routes being flown. Given that a technically valid alternative exists, which would substantially accommodate the noise preferential routing, but was not included in BAL's submission to the CAA, we have no other recourse but to submit this petition to The Honourable House of Commons.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House urgently review the proposed flight path changes at Birmingham Airport in view of the sharp increase in noise nuisance to the communities living at the southerly end of the extended runway and the failure of the trial to ensure aircrafts follow the new flight path options accurately and to explore an alternative option which was previously submitted to BAL by the community itself and which would substantially minimise noise nuisance.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.—[Presented by Mrs Caroline Spelman, *Official Report*, 16 July 2014; Vol. 584, c. 974.]

[P001370]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Transport, received 29 September 2014:

The Secretary of State for Transport, having policy responsibility for UK aviation matters, notes the concerns of the local communities which have been affected by the proposed airspace change at Birmingham Airport.

I understand that Birmingham Airport made an application to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) last December for an airspace change. It is the CAA's responsibility, as the UK's independent airspace regulator, to make the decision on whether to approve the proposal and this is a long-standing process which means that decisions can be made on the basis of their merits.

I wish to assure the local communities around Birmingham Airport that environmental factors are also taken into consideration by the CAA, and my Department's Air Navigation Guidance to the CAA makes it clear that the mitigation of noise up to 4,000 feet is, after air safety, the key priority which must be met in an airspace change.

In the case of the Birmingham Airport application, when the CAA received it they had some concerns around the predicted environmental impacts of the two options for southbound departure routes (options five and six). Birmingham preferred option five based on their assessed impact, while the CAA considered that option six—which goes closer to Hampton—might have slightly less impact. The CAA then decided to pause the airspace change process while the airport carried out trials of both routes for six months.

I understand that these trials have not been as successful as they might have been. While option five is considered to be working as planned, option six is proving difficult with aircraft being more dispersed than is desirable. The CAA appreciates the importance of rectifying this and has stepped in to offer its technical help to resolve the design of option six. The CAA hopes that this should help to resolve the current issues and enable the trials to continue.

Proposed airspace changes such as at Birmingham are complicated matters and the Government appreciate that residents have valid concerns. I would therefore

encourage them to continue to make their views known to the airport, in order for it to reflect them in its final application to the CAA.

Traffic calming measures on Broadway in Morecambe

The Petition of members of the community in Morecambe,

Declares that the Petitioners believe that there should be traffic calming measures introduced at the junction between Broadway and Marine Road East in Morecambe as the junction is dangerous and further that the Petitioners believe that this should be in the form of a roundabout.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to encourage Lancashire County Council to take steps to support the residents in Morecambe and to ensure traffic calming measures are introduced at the junction between Broadway and Marine Road East.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by David Morris, *Official Report*, 2 September 2014; Vol. 585, c. 250.]

[P001384]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Transport, received 9 October 2014:

I recognise the concerns that having a dangerous junction such as this can cause and how the introduction of traffic calming measures might help.

Responsibility for the introduction of traffic calming measures is, however, the responsibility of individual traffic authorities. They are free to make their own decisions about the design of the streets under their care, provided they take account of the relevant legislation. This includes the provision of traffic management measures such as traffic calming.

The DFT has also published guidance on the design of traffic calming measures in Local Transport Note (LTN) 1/07 "Traffic Calming" which is available on the DFT website at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-transport-notes>

The decision on whether to introduce a roundabout is also for local authorities to make. The Department for Transport (DFT) provides guidance on the provision of roundabouts in section 8, chapter 5 of the Traffic Signs Manual. This can be viewed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/traffic-signs-manual>

Detailed guidance on the design of roundabouts is provided in the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) in TD 16/07 "Geometric Design of Roundabouts" which is available at:

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/ha/standards/dmr/vol6/section2.htm>

In line with the coalition Government's commitment to localism, Ministers and officials have no remit to intervene in the day-to-day affairs of local authorities except where specific provision has been made in legislation.

ORAL ANSWERS

Monday 13 October 2014

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