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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 20 January 2015

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Turkey: EU Accession

1. **Mr Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury) (Con): What his policy is on Turkey's accession to the EU. [907094]

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): We remain strong supporters of Turkey's EU accession process. We believe that Turkish accession would be in the national interest of the UK and would contribute to the security and prosperity of the British people. But like any other new member Turkey would have to meet the tough and demanding conditions for entry before she could join.

Mr Robertson: If Turkey or any other country were to come into the European Union, how will the Government prevent large-scale migration to this country from those countries under the current rules of the single market?

Mr Lidington: As the Prime Minister has already said publicly, we believe that future arrangements for freedom of movement from new member countries cannot take place on the same basis as has happened with transitional arrangements in the past. The Commission, in its annual report on enlargement, acknowledged that these matters did need to be considered and we would insist that these changes be made before any new member state is admitted to full membership.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): I would very much like to see Turkey joining the EU, but the repression and imprisonment of journalists and the clampdown on the press continues every day in Turkey. What representations are we making to the Turkish Government?

Mr Lidington: We regularly raise human rights concerns, including freedom of the media, with Turkish officials, and Ministers and will continue to do so. I believe that the EU accession process provides the best mechanism through which to press and encourage Turkey to move further in the right direction.

Sir Richard Ottaway (Croydon South) (Con): On the last point, is the Minister aware that Turkey has had more cases referred to the European Court of Human Rights than Putin's Russia? Also, if Turkey wishes to be taken seriously, it must become a more reliable ally. Will he press Turkey to make its bases available to coalition aircraft and to control its border with Syria much more tightly than it is at the moment?

Mr Lidington: I acknowledge Turkey's commitment to the international coalition against ISIL and the tremendous burden that Turkey has shouldered in looking after roughly 1.5 million refugees from Iraq and Syria. But we do continue to talk at the top level to the Turkish Government about how to improve that alliance further to secure more effective action against ISIL.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): If the UK is still a member of the EU at the time of any future accession by Turkey, does my right hon. Friend think that it would be appropriate for the British people to be asked in a referendum whether they think Turkey should be allowed to join the EU?

Mr Lidington: It will be up to this House to decide whether or not to approve a Turkish accession treaty. Of course it will be open to Parliament, if it wanted to do so, to make that subject to a referendum but, in the past, all new accessions to the EU have been dealt with in this country by parliamentary process. The coalition have strengthened that to make sure that there must be an Act of Parliament before any new accessions take place.

Arms Trade

2. **Sheila Gilmore** (Edinburgh East) (Lab): If he will discuss with the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills the imposition of further restrictions on the sale of arms to countries his Department has identified as having a record of disregarding human rights; and if he will make a statement. [907095]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): The Government are satisfied that we have a robust system in place. All arms licensing applications are subject to a case-by-case assessment against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria. That is the best way to ensure that UK goods are not supplied in circumstances where there is a clear risk they might be used for internal repression. Risks around human rights abuses are a key part of our assessment.

Sheila Gilmore: Even if it would appear that arms will not be used internally, would it not be a real marker of the Government's commitment to human rights to use the restrictions on arms sales against countries that are treating their own subjects badly in terms of human rights?

Mr Hammond: The purpose of the consolidated criteria is to ensure that arms are not exported into situations where those arms will make the situation worse. I believe that the current regime is effective. The hon. Lady is suggesting something that goes far beyond that; a form of trade sanctions against countries based on their human rights performance. She is singling out arms exports, but she could equally argue for trade sanctions involving other forms of export. That would be a significant further step and the Government have no plans to go down that route. But I recognise that what the hon. Lady has suggested is a perfectly credible idea and people may wish to consider it.

Alistair Burt (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): May I ask the Foreign Secretary to recommit the United Kingdom to its commitment to making fully effective the arms trade treaty that we signed last year? Will he also ensure that during discussions this year on the rules and procedures to make the arms trade treaty effective, the engagement of NGOs will be seen to be constructive and there will not be procedures that will enable some NGOs that oppose the spirit of the arms trade treaty to subvert it?

Mr Hammond: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend and I know this is an area in which he has taken a great interest and played a very important role over many years. The UK was instrumental in bringing about the arms trade treaty, and it is an extremely important step forward. My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that some NGOs do not accept the principle of the arms trade treaty, but I agree with him: we must now make this treaty, as it is now in force, effective, ensure that the key states sign up to it and then ratify their engagement with the treaty, and make this work for the benefit of the whole world.

Robert Ffello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): Perhaps if the Secretary of State were tempted to have a meeting with the Business Secretary, they might also invite the Defence Secretary to join them. Despite the appalling human rights record of the Colombian Government, we seem very happy to sell weapons—and, indeed, provide military training—to them. Should the Foreign Secretary not be sitting down and having a tripartite discussion with the other Secretaries of State about that, looking into why we seem so happy to provide support to a country that is quite happily terrorising its own people?

Mr Hammond: As the hon. Gentleman will, I think, understand, these are always carefully balanced judgments, and in many cases—[*Interruption.*] It is all very well for the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) to comment from a sedentary position, but very often we have to deal with conflicting agendas in unstable and fragile countries, where there will be human rights concerns that we have to take into account and manage, but also counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics concerns, and we have to act to keep our own population safe—where we have to make the balanced judgment between engaging to support the CT or counter-narcotics agenda and maintaining pressure on Governments to comply with their human rights obligations. I think we get that balance right.

Sir Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): There is nothing fragile or unstable about Saudi Arabia, so given the public beheadings, public torture and public lashings, can my right hon. Friend confirm to the House that there are no arms sales by this country to Saudi Arabia?

Mr Hammond: I go back to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Sheila Gilmore). It is not the Government's policy that we should use restrictions on arms sales as a sanction against Governments whose policies we do not agree with. The restrictions on arms sales—the arms licensing regime—is designed to ensure that arms are not misused in their final destination.

With regard to the wider points my right hon. Friend makes about Saudi Arabia, of course the Government deplore the use of corporal punishment in the kinds of forms presented in Saudi Arabia. We have long understood that the best way to make effective representations to Saudi Arabia is through the many channels that we have with them at all levels, and we are actively doing so at the moment.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): In that case, will the Foreign Secretary please explain to the House why Britain has routinely supplied arms—anti-personnel equipment—to Bahrain that have been used to oppress and suppress demonstrations in Bahrain, and our reward is to provide yet more arms and a British military base there? Should we not really engage with Bahrain on solving the human rights issues and freeing the opposition leader, rather than have this hands-off approach on arms sales?

Mr Hammond: Let me make two responses to the hon. Gentleman. First, is the straightforward response: we apply the consolidated criteria to all arms exports, including arms exports to Bahrain, so we would not license for export any equipment where there was evidence it was likely to be used for internal repression purposes. But let me say something wider about the situation in Bahrain, because I have looked at the situation in Bahrain quite carefully. It is clearly the case that Bahrain is by no means perfect and that it has quite a long way to go in delivering on its human rights commitments, but it is a country that is travelling in the right direction. It is making significant reform. The Crown Prince, who is charged with this agenda, is directly engaged and has made significant progress even over the last few months. We continually remind the Bahrainis of their commitments and how much further they have to go, but I think we should support them to get there.

Mr Speaker: It would be good to get through some questions.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): But will not the Foreign Secretary accept that what undermines the UK's credibility on these matters is the charge of double standards? In relation to Bahrain, it has been estimated that 54 people have been arrested just this month. There is no consistency between our arms sales policy and our human rights policy. Will the Foreign Secretary not accept that we need to address that more seriously than we have done up till now?

Mr Hammond: The hon. Gentleman seems to be suggesting that, as I said to the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Sheila Gilmore) earlier, rather than using the consolidated criteria, we should develop a set of arms trade sanctions based on human rights performance. That is a radical suggestion and he is perfectly entitled to make it. The Government have no plans at present to go down that route.

EU Reform

3. **Nigel Mills** (Amber Valley) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on reforming the EU to make it more competitive and accountable. [907096]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): I have already visited 18 member states to discuss EU reform with my counterparts—most recently from Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia last week. Leaders across Europe agree that the EU needs to change. We are setting out the case for Britain's view of the reforms required to make the EU fit for purpose in the 21st century. We have already made some progress: the June European Council agreed that EU reform was necessary and that the UK's concerns should be addressed.

Nigel Mills: Mr Juncker yesterday appeared to rule out reform of freedom of movement as a way of reinvigorating our loveless marriage with the EU. Is there more hope from my right hon. Friend's discussions with his counterparts that real reform of that can be achieved?

Mr Hammond: As the Prime Minister has set out on more than one occasion, we have increasing agreement across the European Union that we need to address abuse of free movement. Free movement to work is one of the principles of the European Union; free movement to freeload is not one of the principles of the European Union. Britain is not the only country affected by this problem and not the only country determined to address it.

Mr Speaker: I note the sibling solidarity as brother and sister Vaz are today seated together.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): We will do this every day, if it gets me called, Mr Speaker.

Will the Foreign Secretary join me in welcoming the decision taken 30 minutes ago by the EU to raise the ban on the import of Alphonso mangoes from India? Does he agree that a lesson should be learned by the EU that before it makes such decisions, there should be proper consultation and full transparency?

Mr Hammond: Yes, I am absolutely clear that there should be full transparency on all issues concerning mangoes, and I am delighted to see the greatest possible level of free trade in the international market for mangoes.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): That is a difficult one to follow. I have a little experience in EU negotiations, so may I encourage my right hon. Friend not to do as some suggest, which is to set out clearly precisely what our red lines might be in the negotiations? That would make the negotiations 10 times more difficult.

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend is right. This will be a negotiation. In the present pre-negotiation phase, we are quite properly setting out our broad agenda. Understanding our partners' concerns, where their agendas coincide with ours and where their red lines are is all perfectly legitimate. It is clear already that some of our partners are beginning to line up for a negotiation. Giving away our hand at this stage would be foolish.

22. [907117] **Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab):** My constituents are extremely concerned about the payment of child benefit for children living not in this country, but in other European countries. Did the Foreign Secretary make any progress with Chancellor Merkel recently on this, or is it still the Government's

view, as expressed by the Prime Minister in May, that it would be impossible to stop this? Is that why the Government have resisted publishing an accurate estimate of the cost?

Mr Hammond: There are accurate estimates in the public domain of the amounts of child benefits paid overseas. I have seen them regularly. When I was shadow Chief Secretary in opposition, I remember briefing them to the media regularly, so those data are published. The Prime Minister has made it clear that the Conservative party intends, if re-elected, to proceed down a route that will include ending the payment of child benefits in respect of children not resident in the United Kingdom.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): The Prime Minister has made it clear that democratic accountability and flexibility must be the pillars of any forward-looking European Union that this country would be willing to remain a member of. Following the Foreign Secretary's discussions with senior EU officials, does he believe that that view is shared across the European Union?

Mr Hammond: I do. I think European politicians are beginning to get the message after successive elections to the European Parliament in which the percentage of participation has fallen and fallen again. Politicians across the European Union understand that something has to be done to reconnect the EU with the people who pay for it and the people whom it is meant to represent. In our case, we believe that the best way of doing that would be to give a greater role to our national Parliament in overseeing the operation of the European Union.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): What progress has the Secretary of State made in his discussions on furthering the single market so that Britain can have greater access to trade and export opportunities for businesses based here? While he has been in those discussions, has he also made any assessment of the effect on the UK economy of being outside the single market, which is where we would be if we withdrew from the EU—an option that he has said he might favour?

Mr Hammond: Clearly, being inside the single market is of great and significant benefit to the UK economy. We want reform of the European Union that satisfies the requirements of the British people so that Britain can remain inside the single market and inside the EU. We want a European Union that is fit for the 21st century, rather than one that looks as though it was designed for the last one. And yes, we have made significant progress in our discussions on completing the single market, including the digital single market, the energy single market and, most importantly for Britain, the single market for services.

Libya

4. **Annette Brooke (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD):** What assessment he has made of the political and security situation in Libya. [907097]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): I met the Libyan Foreign Minister last week. The UK is

concerned by the increasing violence across Libya. We continue to support the efforts of the UN to resolve the crisis and pave the way for peaceful dialogue. We welcome recent UN talks in Geneva, and call on all Libyans to resolve their differences through negotiation and compromise.

Annette Brooke: I thank the Minister for his answer. What lessons have been learned from our intervention in Libya four years ago? Will he comment further on the potential for peace following the Geneva talks?

Mr Ellwood: The situation is very delicate indeed, but our military action in Libya did save lives. The UK's actions in 2011 were consistent with our obligations under international law and, as the House will be aware, after four decades of misrule, Libya had been left with a political and constitutional vacuum. It was therefore perhaps inevitable that it would end up with a large number of groups jostling for power.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Did the Minister see the Economist Intelligence Unit's appraisal of politics across Europe, which shows just how fragile the situation is at the moment? Surely, if Europe is to be something of which we can be proud, it should have a view on Libya and be active on the Libyan question. The chaos in Libya is spilling over and affecting migration in the whole of the rest of Europe. When is he going to get Europe to do something about that?

Mr Ellwood: As the Foreign Secretary has just said to me, that subject is on the agenda for the next foreign affairs meeting in Brussels. It is important to recognise where things stand with Britain's contribution. We are working incredibly hard with our special envoy, Jonathan Powell, and with the United Nations envoy, Bernardino León, to bring the political parties together. The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, however. If we do not get a resolution and find a political path to follow, that space will be taken up by insurgent groups such as Ansar al-Sharia and ISIL.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Do not the vicious civil war in Libya, the high number of casualties and the fact that the Parliament has had to take refuge on a Greek car ferry prove that there is a deficit of analysis at the centre of our foreign policy-making process?

Mr Ellwood: I can only repeat what I said—that we are working extremely hard to bring the political parties together. There is a danger that if these parties do not recognise the importance of taking advantage of the UN's direction of travel, we will indeed suffer problems connected with ISIL taking advantage of the space, just as we saw in Syria.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): "There is a civil war, we are working hard and it is on the agenda next week", but I still have no sense of what precisely the United Kingdom will say we should be doing practically to bring the two warring sides together and do what the United Nations suggests—building confidence so that we can find a resolution. What are we actually going to do?

Mr Ellwood: It is for the United Nations and the UN special representative to lead on this. We are supporting the UN in its endeavours. The hon. Lady simplifies the situation, however. She seems to suggest that it is just two sides acting against each other, but that is not the case. The country is made up of 35 main tribes and 100 other tribes. We are dealing with a complex history, and we simply cannot expect that, after 40 years of misrule, all parties will suddenly come together, because Gaddafi did not take advantage of that period to build the infrastructure and the political basis on which to move forward.

Belarus

5. **Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to promote human rights in Belarus. [907098]

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): We make our concerns known through regular meetings between the British embassy in Minsk and the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and through representations by our senior officials in London to the Belarusian ambassador based here.

Maria Miller: I thank the Minister for that reply. There are likely to be Belarus presidential elections this year. Last time, such elections led to candidates being arrested, beaten up and even imprisoned. On this day, which is, after all, the birthday of our Parliament, what encouragement can he give to those who want to see free and fair elections in Belarus, which is such an important part of Europe?

Mr Lidington: We will continue to speak up publicly as a Government and through the European Union and other international organisations of which we are a member to draw attention to the continuing abuse of human rights within Belarus, to urge the Belarusian authorities to take the path towards European and democratic values of pluralism and the rule of law, and to speak up for individual Belarusian human rights defenders—men such as Mikola Statkevich, still in prison in Belarus today—and demand that those prisoners be not only released but fully rehabilitated.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): If Britain were to leave the European convention on human rights, what sort of message would that send to human rights supporters in Belarus?

Mr Lidington: Of course, Belarus is not party to the European convention on human rights and is not subject to the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights. Whether we are looking at the European convention on human rights or the international covenant on civil and political rights, it is important to continue to urge the Belarusian authorities to end their flagrant abuse of normal human rights and democratic standards. That is something on which I hope the whole House will be united.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): On that point, given that Belarus is the only one of 48 European states not to be under the aegis of the European Court of Human Rights, will the Minister make it clear that he disagrees with those of his colleagues who think we should join that elite grouping?

Mr Lidington: As the Prime Minister has made clear, we want to see reforms to the way in which human rights are dealt with in this country. We have a very long tradition of respecting human rights—one that is embodied in our parliamentary procedures and in our legal arrangements—and we want to make sure that it is the United Kingdom courts who stand up for human rights and that it is ultimately their judgments that interpret how human rights standards are applied here.

Hamas (Turkish Support)

7. **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): What assessment he has made of the extent to which the Turkish Government provide support to Hamas in its conflict with Israel. [907100]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): We are aware of reports that Turkey maintains a dialogue with Hamas. We call on those in the region with influence over Hamas to press them to end the armed violence and to support reconciliation and peace talks with Israel.

Mr Hollobone: With Khaled Meshal, the exiled Hamas leader, reportedly expelled from Qatar to safe haven in Turkey, will the Minister insist that the Turkish Government, as a NATO ally, renounce any affiliation to, and support for, this internationally recognised terrorist organisation?

Mr Ellwood: I had an opportunity to meet President Erdogan just before Christmas. We raised the issue of what more Turkey could do to assist the peace process, and it is very much on board. I am not aware of information that Khaled Meshal has left Qatar, although I have seen the media reports as well, but wherever he is, it needs to be understood that Hamas must play a role in working with the Palestinian authorities to move the peace process forward.

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Turkey supports Hamas, at a time when it is being reported that Hamas is building more rockets that will be able to go further into Israel, and is starting to rebuild the terror tunnels. What action is being taken to stop Hamas's preparations for a new war of aggression against Israel?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Lady is right to speak of concern about what is being done by the military wing of Hamas, because it is undermining what we want to do in moving the peace process forward. We need countries such as Turkey and Qatar to join in, to influence Hamas, and to say that it needs to participate with the Palestinian authorities in order to allow Gaza itself to move forward. They could start by undoing the 1988 charter which states that they want to destroy Israel.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): Will the Minister continue to address—by himself, and with his officials—the whole nature of the wider political Islamic movement of which Hamas is part, so that we can begin to disinter part of the Palestinian national struggle from Hamas's role as part of the Muslim Brotherhood?

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend speaks very wisely on these matters, and I have travelled to the region with him. We are working extremely hard, not only with the Palestinian authorities but throughout the region, to bring the parties together, although the process is currently on hold because of the Israeli elections.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman) was right to mention reports that Hamas is developing new rockets instead of contributing to a peace process, and building more tunnels instead of building the homes and businesses that people in Gaza need. What more can our Government do to contribute to the reconstruction and demilitarisation of Gaza?

Mr Ellwood: The Department for International Development is contributing an awful lot of funds, and we participated in—indeed, I attended—the donors' conference in Cairo. However, the hon. Gentleman is right to point out that Hamas is having a disruptive effect on the process. I have visited Shujaiyya in Gaza, and I have seen the destruction that has resulted not just from the conflict in the summer, but from previous conflicts as well. The cement is starting to move in following the conference, and we do not want it to be used to build more tunnels.

Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

8. **Neil Carmichael** (Stroud) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with his EU and US counterparts on progress in negotiations on the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. [907101]

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister discussed TTIP this month with both Chancellor Merkel and President Obama. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I regularly raise the subject of TTIP, and the benefits that it would bring to businesses and consumers, in our conversations with both European and United States colleagues.

Neil Carmichael: Given that misinformation verging on conspiracy theory is emerging from various quarters about the impact of TTIP, what more can the Minister and his colleagues do to promote and highlight the economic and trade advantages that a successful agreement would bring to this country?

Mr Lidington: Ministers continue to speak up for the benefits of TTIP, with my noble Friend Lord Livingston in the vanguard. A successful TTIP deal would benefit the average British family by about £400 a year by delivering a greater choice of products at lower prices, and would give our small businesses much better access to the 300 million consumers in the United States.

Sri Lanka (Presidential Election)

9. **Jenny Chapman** (Darlington) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential effect of the Sri Lankan presidential election result on democracy and human rights in that country. [907102]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): We have welcomed the election of President Sirisena and his early commitments to good governance, to restoring the independence of the police and judiciary, to respecting the freedom of the media, and to protecting the rights and freedoms of all religions in Sri Lanka. We hope that the new Government will honour those commitments.

Jenny Chapman: Does the Minister agree that the United Nations inquiry into war crimes in Sri Lanka should continue? If he does agree, does he accept that it would be much better if it proceeded with the full engagement of Sri Lanka, and, if so, what will he do to try to bring that about?

Mr Swire: The hon. Lady is absolutely right, and we continue to urge the Sri Lankans in that regard. I had a conversation with Prime Minister Wickremesinghe in which I congratulated him, and I stressed the importance of engagement with the community. I hope to travel out to meet the new Government as soon as I can, and I echo the words of His Holiness Pope Francis, who said there recently:

“The process of healing also needs to include the pursuit of truth, not for the sake of opening new wounds, but rather as a necessary means of promoting justice, healing and unity.”

That is exactly what we feel, too.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Following on from the very successful Commonwealth conference in Sri Lanka and the peaceful transition from the Rajapaksa regime, does the Minister agree that there is now a chance for our Government to focus on positive trading opportunities between Sri Lanka and the UK, so that we can travel in the right direction?

Mr Swire: I know the hon. Gentleman is a great fan of Sri Lanka, I welcome his endorsement of the new Government and I hope he will continue to take as active an interest now under them. Trade is important and so, too, are human rights. We have a large diaspora community in this country, from both sides of the divide, and we want to see peace and reconciliation. We believe that until there is justice, peace and reconciliation, trade cannot grow in the way it should do and prosperity will not benefit the whole country as he and I would both wish.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I am sure we all hope that President Sirisena’s election marks a new era for Sri Lanka. Following on from the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Jenny Chapman), does the Minister agree that if the President is to gain the trust of the international community, he must now demonstrate his support for the UN inquiry? From the Minister’s initial conversations, does he believe that the new Administration will fully co-operate with the UN and will fully commit to securing truth and justice for the Sri Lankan people?

Mr Swire: That is certainly what I want to see. After all, I am part of a Government who went out to Colombo for the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting when the hon. Lady’s party said we should not go. We have engaged consistently on this matter. We pressed the Government of President Rajapaksa and

we press the current Government—[*Interruption.*] It is no good Opposition Members chuntering, because the Labour party’s position was for us not to go to CHOGM—we went, and the Prime Minister went to the north. We continue to engage, and I shall be travelling to Sri Lanka again shortly to make these points.

Lebanon (Syrian Refugees)

10. **Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab):** What assessment he has made of the capacity of Lebanon to support refugees from conflict in Syria. [907103]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): I had the pleasure of visiting Lebanon—and indeed Jordan—last month, and I pay tribute to the enormous efforts that are being made in taking on 1.2 million registered refugees. This is a concern we have relating to the Syrian crisis, and the UK is providing more than £160 million-worth of help to manage the influx of refugees.

Kate Green: The Lebanese interior Minister said recently that Lebanon lacked capacity to host more displaced people, given the substantial number of refugees to whom our Minister referred. The UK has received just 90 Syrian refugees to date. Does he agree that that limits our ability to press Lebanon to keep its borders open? Will he have discussions with the Home Secretary to ensure that the UK plays its part?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Lady raises a question which has been put to the House before, and I should highlight something that has also been raised before: the amount of funding that Britain is providing and the emergency cases that we bring across to the UK. I raised with refugees in the Zaatari camp, which has 80,000 people, the issue of whether they would prefer to be in the locality or to be taken away. It is very much the case that they would like to remain in the region—as close as possible. Britain is doing its best: we are one of the largest donors to support these countries in providing refugee camps, to give them the stability they need in this hour of need.

Sir Menzies Campbell (North East Fife) (LD): I am glad to hear that the Minister visited Jordan, one of our closest and most loyal allies in the middle east, which has paid a terrible price from the impact of refugees. Given our special relationship with Jordan and the fact that the country is fragile both economically and politically, do we not have a special responsibility to the people of that country?

Mr Ellwood: I could not agree more with my right hon. and learned Friend. I saw for myself when I visited the country the closeness of the relationship that we have, which also extends to the security relationship, which he will be very familiar with, given the Committees on which he serves. We are working very hard to make sure that Jordan receives support, and I know that the Prime Minister has a very strong relationship with the King, too.

Mr Frank Roy (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): What recommendations have the Government made to the United Nations to ensure that the food voucher system remains for Syrian refugees fleeing to Lebanon?

Mr Ellwood: That is actually a matter for DFID, but it did come up on my visit as well. There was a concern that there was a breakdown in the food voucher system because the funding was not there. I understand that the funding streams have now been repaired, but we will keep an eye on the situation. It is important to ensure that the refugees have the food that they require.

Sir Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): Reports at the weekend suggested that Islamic forces were massing on the Lebanese border around the town of Qalamoun. Is the Minister in a position to update the House on the situation, and does he agree that any threat to the territorial integrity of Lebanon would be extremely serious indeed?

Mr Ellwood: I pay tribute to the work of my right hon. Friend in this area. He was in Lebanon this summer. I had the chance to visit the Bekaa valley and see the work that the British are doing in training the Lebanese armed forces and in creating the watchtowers, which will help to enable the Lebanese to monitor and provide security themselves. But the situation is very intense indeed, and there is a threat of ISIL punching into Lebanon.

Mr Douglas Alexander (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): The Minister is absolutely right to pay tribute to the neighbouring countries of the Syrian conflict, Jordan and the Lebanon, for the extraordinary work that they have done in receiving a huge population of refugees as a consequence of the conflict. On the point about the UN food vouchers, given the reports last week of the value of those food vouchers having been cut as well as the importance of ensuring the availability of vouchers, what further steps are the British Government taking to encourage international partners to provide a level of resource needed by the United Nations to meet the humanitarian crisis?

Mr Ellwood: Given the right hon. Gentleman's previous job, I know that this is a matter that is close to him as well. As I have said, I raised that issue in meetings with the United Nations representatives both in Lebanon and in Jordan. I was assured that, for the moment, the funding streams are in place. It might be helpful if I get a colleague from DFID to write to him with an update.

Mr Alexander: In these exchanges, we have already heard of the importance of the bilateral relationship between the United Kingdom and Jordan. Beyond the very welcome humanitarian support that is being provided to refugees in Jordan and the Lebanon, what specific additional support is being provided to Jordan to maintain stability within that country given that a significant number of refugees are not in camps such as Zaatari, but with host populations?

Mr Ellwood: We are adopting a number of initiatives to support a country that has already been described as being very, very close to Britain. The Secretary of State has met his counterpart to look at improvements to the security situation, and I have visited Zaatari, the biggest refugee camp. We are not simply pouring money into the area, but funding support for the local towns that feel the burden of having large numbers of Syrians coming into their area. We are providing support to the

Jordanian towns in the area as well so that they do not feel so burdened with what is happening in the north part of Jordan.

Ebola (Sierra Leone)

11. **Stephen Mosley** (City of Chester) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the Ebola infection rate in Sierra Leone. [907104]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): The number of new cases and the rate of infection are, I am pleased to say, both now decreasing in Sierra Leone. The fall in the infection rate is a clear demonstration that UK-led efforts are slowing the spread of this deadly disease. The UK remains fully committed to providing the resources and leadership needed to defeat Ebola in Sierra Leone.

Stephen Mosley: I thank my right hon. Friend for that really positive response, but what support is he offering to British nationals, including health workers, to ensure that they are fully protected from this disease?

Mr Hammond: As my hon. Friend will know, we have established a military-run facility in Sierra Leone to provide health care to health workers who may have been exposed to Ebola. We also regularly arrange medevac flights, where necessary, to bring out health workers. In fact, two health workers were brought out on a precautionary basis in the past few days.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): What advice would the Secretary of State give to anyone planning to travel from the UK to Sierra Leone at the present time?

Mr Hammond: Our advice is that unless they are going as a health care worker to fight the Ebola emergency as part of an organised humanitarian programme, they should not travel. The advice is to avoid travel.

Cuba

12. **Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough) (Lab): What the Government's priorities are for the UK's relationship with Cuba; and if he will make a statement. [907105]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): I visited Cuba in October, the first British Minister to do so in nearly a decade, and signed three memorandums of understanding to drive forward our bilateral relationship. We continue to encourage progress on economic reforms and human rights, and support a closer EU-Cuba dialogue.

Andy McDonald: Last December, online customers buying Cuban coffee from The Bean Shop in Perth were reported to US authorities by PayPal, which sent e-mails to those customers threatening to close their accounts if they continued to breach US law. In light of last month's announcement of a new start to US-Cuban relations, will the Minister secure a guarantee from the US Government that UK companies and citizens will not be penalised for trading with Cuba?

Mr Swire: The hon. Gentleman refers to the Helms-Burton Act, which will, I have no doubt, be part of the discussion between the Americans and the Cubans. I am pleased that the US Assistant Secretary of State for the western hemisphere, Roberta Jacobson, with whom I discussed these matters in Washington before I went to Cuba, is in Havana this week. That is the good news. As for the question of bilateral trade between the UK and Cuba, if the hon. Gentleman has a company in his constituency that wishes to trade and to sort out such matters with Cuba, I would suggest that he gets in touch with Lord Hutton and the Cuba initiative, as they are putting together a multi-sector trade delegation visit later this year to support economic reforms in Cuba and to contribute to jobs and growth back here in the UK.

Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): Following President Obama's welcome Cuban initiative, what is the Minister's expectation of improving human rights and political freedom in Cuba? Following on from his previous answer, what is the Government's assessment of the opportunities for British businesses and for broader relations with Cuba?

Mr Swire: The three memorandums of understanding that I signed covered foreign policy, trade and investment and sport. I have referred already to the fact that Lord Hutton and the Cuba initiative are taking a large delegation there in a few months' time. On the human rights front, I am particularly encouraged by the recent release of prisoners from both sides. I discussed human rights with Cardinal Jaime Ortega, the Archbishop of Havana, and I also met Mariela Castro, the director of the Cuban National Centre for Sex Education in Havana and an activist on gender and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights. We continue to stress the need to release prisoners of conscience and I also call on Cuba to ratify the UN covenants on political and economic rights.

Sanctions: Russia

13. **Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab):** What recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in other EU member states on sanctions against Russia imposed in response to the situation in Ukraine. [907106]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): We had a long discussion on Russia at the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels yesterday. I have also discussed Russia bilaterally with the 18 counterparts in the European Union that I have visited over the past six months. Sanctions are delivering a real cost to Russia for its aggression in Ukraine. The EU is clear and resolute in its determination to maintain them and the UK argues consistently and robustly for maintaining the pressure on Russia until it delivers on its obligations under the Minsk agreement.

Mrs Hodgson: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. Has he had a discussion with his Russian counterpart to make it clear that there is another path that Russia could follow in Ukraine by ceasing support for the Russian nationalist rebels, which could pave the way for the lifting of the sanctions?

Mr Hammond: I do not have direct action with my Russian counterpart on Ukraine, because we handle this issue through EU channels, but I have spoken to him on the margins of E3 plus 3 meetings on Iran. The Russians are well aware of what they have to do to see the sanctions removed and the EU is keen to be able to reduce sanctions at the earliest opportunity, but only when Russia comes into compliance with its obligations.

Colombia

14. **Pat Glass (North West Durham) (Lab):** What recent assessment he has made of the human rights situation in Colombia. [907107]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): We welcome the Colombian Government's efforts to improve the human rights situation, including through their land restitution and victims reparations processes. There has been a worrying increase in the number of threats against human rights defenders and we continue to raise that with the Colombian Government.

Pat Glass: I heard the Secretary of State's response to an earlier question on human rights in Colombia and found it very disappointing. The UK is the second largest investor in Colombia, so does that not give us leverage in securing commitments from the Colombian Government to dealing with sexual violence in conflict, with trade unionists being locked up for being trade unionists and with human rights in general?

Mr Swire: Yes, and we regularly use it. In fact, we pushed hard in negotiations with the EU, Colombia and Peru for a legally binding and robust human rights clause in the text of the EU-Andean free trade agreement. These matters are raised regularly in the House by followers of the situation in Colombia and I always argue the same, which is that I think that the big prize is the peace process. I am glad that that has kicked off again in Havana. I can also announce to the House that I have got the Colombian ambassador to agree to host a meeting for Members of both Houses on 10 March for a full discussion on all of our interests in Colombia. I am sure that the hon. Lady would like to come along to that and raise her questions with the ambassador.

Topical Questions

T1. [907083] **Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con):** If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): Since the last Foreign and Commonwealth Office questions we have continued to focus on the major foreign policy challenges and international crises that we face: the threat from Islamist terrorism, including ISIL in Iraq and Syria, and Boko Haram in Nigeria; Russian aggression in Nigeria—in Ukraine; we have not got there yet—the middle east peace process; the Iran nuclear talks; and the Ebola outbreak. In addition, I have continued my programme of visits to EU capitals, exploring common ground on

the need for EU reform. On Thursday, I will co-chair a meeting in London of key partners in the coalition against ISIL.

Jason McCartney: I celebrated Christmas with Huddersfield's Ukrainian community only a fortnight ago. They are concerned about the situation in Ukraine. What support and communications can the Foreign Office offer my constituents, who are worried about family and friends in Ukraine?

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): We will continue to speak up strongly and in public to defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. We will work bilaterally and through the European Union and the international financial institutions to provide Ukraine with the financing and technical support that it needs to carry through an ambitious programme of political and economic reform.

Mr Douglas Alexander (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): I have written to the Foreign Secretary raising the case of Saudi blogger Raif Badawi, who has been sentenced to 10 years in prison and 1,000 lashes for the content of his blog. I am still awaiting a reply. Earlier, the Foreign Secretary mentioned the importance of effective channels of communication to the Saudis. Does that include him? Would he tell the House whether he has raised this matter directly with the Saudi Government?

Mr Philip Hammond: As I said earlier, we deplore this punishment—we deplore the use of corporal punishment in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere—but we have found in the past that the best way of influencing Saudi behaviour is to message them privately through the many channels available to us. The deputy Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia—the Foreign Minister is undergoing medical treatment—will be in London on Thursday, and I shall speak to him directly on this issue. We have already made our views known to the Saudi authorities at the highest level.

T2. [907084] **Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD):** A stable and prosperous Egypt could play an important part in resolving some of the problems in the area. What steps has my hon. Friend taken to develop the economic relationship between the UK and Egypt, and does he agree that political development and economic development in Egypt can be mutually reinforcing?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): As part of our efforts to support Egypt's economic recovery, I was delighted to lead a trade mission of 51 companies to Egypt last week. That was the largest delegation to Egypt in 15 years. We are the largest foreign direct investor in Egypt, and it is absolutely right that we should seek to deepen our trade and investment partnership with it. A more secure, prosperous and dynamic country can only be founded on a growing and dynamic economy, which creates jobs and opportunities for all Egyptians.

T4. [907086] **Gemma Doyle (West Dunbartonshire) (Lab/Co-op):** Earlier this month, some 2,000 people lost their lives in brutal attacks in Nigeria at the hands

of Boko Haram. What is the Foreign Secretary's response to Angela Merkel's call for the EU to help to fund a force to combat Boko Haram?

Mr Philip Hammond: The Boko Haram terrorist group continues to wreak havoc across north-east Nigeria, and we must see that as part of the broader challenge of militant Islam across a swathe of the globe, from west Africa to the middle east. We continue to support the Nigerians and work closely with them. We are one of the leading partners for the Nigerians, and we have provided a substantial package of UK military intelligence and development support to Nigeria. Last week, I had a meeting with the US Secretary of State to co-ordinate our response to the crisis in Nigeria with the United States, and I expect to visit Nigeria with him after the Nigerian elections.

T3. [907085] **Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con):** My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I are campaigning hard for a majority Conservative Government at the next election so that we can have a referendum on our membership of the European Union. Should, heaven forbid, despite our best efforts, we fall short of our goal, does he agree that our Conservative party commitment to an EU referendum should be a red line in any coalition negotiation?

Mr Hammond: The Prime Minister has made it clear that any Government of whom he is Prime Minister will be committed to that referendum.

T9. [907091] **Dame Anne McGuire (Stirling) (Lab):** This week, as part of the congregation of Stirling Methodist church, I joined other local politicians in writing to the UN about a global climate agreement in Paris. Can the Secretary of State tell us what work is being done on the agreements reached in Lima in December 2014, leading up to the Paris conference in 2015?

Mr Hammond: As it happens, I can, because the item was on the agenda at the European Foreign Affairs Council yesterday, when there was an update report on the work programme that was agreed at Lima. My French colleague reported on the progress that is being made. The French are confident that we are making good progress towards a substantive agreement in Paris later this year. EU colleagues agreed that we should continue to lobby the countries that are perhaps considered to be back-markers; and, in particular, that European Union countries should seek to exert as much pressure as possible on China and the United States, both of which appear now to be in a good place on this agenda. We need to make sure that they stay there.

T5. [907087] **Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con):** The Minister reaffirmed earlier that the Government are in favour of Turkey joining the EU. Have they estimated the additional financial cost to the UK of Turkey joining the EU, and the additional immigration to the UK resulting from Turkey joining the EU, beyond any transitional arrangements; or do they support Turkey's membership of the EU at any long-term cost to the UK?

Mr Lidington: The answer to my hon. Friend's last point is no, we support Turkish accession to the EU because we believe that would be the interests of the United Kingdom. We have made it clear that the

arrangements for transitional controls on freedom of movement would have to be radically reformed before we could agree to new countries becoming full EU members. The question about cost would have to be settled in negotiations. Of course, it would depend very much on the prosperity not only of Turkey but of existing EU member states at the time when Turkish accession seemed likely to be on the cards.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Tensions on either side of the Jammu-Kashmir line of control have escalated in recent weeks, and human rights violations have been consistently reported that are of global concern. I appreciate that a lasting resolution will be down to India and Pakistan. However, given Prime Minister Modi's visit to the UK next month, will the Minister be discussing this with him, and what, specifically, will he ask?

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): Of course, these things are also followed very closely by the Kashmiri community who are such an integral part of life here in the United Kingdom. The Government provide £2 million of funding to Kashmir through the tri-departmental conflict pool. We are aware of the allegations of human rights abuses on both sides of the line of control. Officials from our high commissions in New Delhi and Islamabad discuss the situation in Kashmir with the Governments of India and of Pakistan. Next week, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is meeting the Prime Minister of Pakistan, and he will no doubt raise this matter. At the end of the day, however, it has to be resolved by those two countries.

Mr Speaker: Order. It is quite useful if we have time for the questions as well as for the answers.

T6. [907088] **Nigel Mills** (Amber Valley) (Con): I am grateful for the earlier confirmation about the EU referendum if the Prime Minister remains the Prime Minister. Is there now an update on what the date of that referendum might be? Will it be earlier than 2017?

Mr Philip Hammond: The Government's position is that we will negotiate a reform package in the European Union—that will take some time—and then present it to the British people before the end of 2017 for their endorsement or otherwise. The British people will have the last say, unlike under the position of the Labour party, which is apparently that the European Union is perfect. Let us remember that the Leader of the Opposition said on the BBC that, in his opinion, Brussels does not have too much power, and therefore he does not have a European Union reform policy.

Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab): What recent discussions has the Minister had with the Palestinian leadership to ensure that Christian communities living under Palestinian Authority jurisdiction in the west bank and under Hamas rule in Gaza are allowed to practise their religion without fear or intimidation?

Mr Ellwood: We are deeply concerned by the difficulties facing many Christians and, indeed, other religious minorities in the middle east, and we deplore all discrimination and constraints on religious freedom.

We will certainly raise those issues. I raised the issue in question when I met the President during my visit last autumn, and I will raise it again when I visit the region in the next month.

T7. [907089] **Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Given this country's historic strength in soft power and its potential to further our foreign policy objectives, has the time not come to reconsider funding cuts to soft power institutions such as the BBC World Service and the British Council, as well as others?

Mr Swire: The House will know that, as of this financial year, the BBC World Service is funded by the BBC Trust. The British Council is extremely well funded and undergoing a trilateral review at the moment. I am sure my hon. Friend would agree that this country probably does soft power better than any other country. The GREAT campaign, which is funded by Government, has already delivered a direct return to the economy of more than £1 billion. The combination of the British Council, the GREAT campaign, the BBC World Service and others showcases the UK at its best.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): Further to the question about the persecution of Christians in Africa and in other countries overseas, what discussions have taken place within the G8 and the European Union to lessen the threat to religious freedom?

Mr Lidington: The EU strategic guidelines on freedom of religion very much reflect the ideas that the United Kingdom Government put forward. Of course, it was during our chairmanship of the then G8 that there was an international initiative through the G8 to try to give greater focus to human rights. Human rights and the freedom of people to practise their religion as they choose are absolutely at the heart of everything we do in foreign policy, whether bilaterally or through the various multilateral institutions.

T8. [907090] **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): I congratulate the Government on initiating the resettlement feasibility study of the Chagos islands, which is due to report imminently. May I seek an assurance that that issue will be debated when the findings of the report are known?

Mr Swire: My hon. Friend is right and I congratulate him on all he does for the Chagossian community. The resettlement report will be completed by KPMG by the end of this month and the Government will publish it shortly thereafter. Should Mr Speaker agree to a debate in the House once the report has been published, the Government would, of course, be pleased to participate in it.

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): With some 50 murderous, marauding militia operating in eastern DRC and some 5 million dead during the conflict, what assessment have the Government made of the role of MONUSCO in bringing that violence to an end?

Mr Lidington: We strongly support the role that MONUSCO is playing, but we continue to work with European and international colleagues to see whether improvements need to be made. Ultimately, that will

depend in large part on getting the co-operation of the neighbouring countries to work towards peace in the great lakes region.

T10. [907092] **Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): On Yemen, taking into account that the Houthis are now in effective control of the country, where does the future of the Friends of Yemen group lie?

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend is right to raise that issue. I spoke to our ambassador there this morning, to make sure that our embassy personnel are safe. As the House will be aware, violence in Sana'a has escalated, with heavy clashes breaking out yesterday between the Houthis and Yemeni security forces. Those who use violence and the threat of violence to dictate Yemen's future are undermining security, and we are calling for all parties to work together to implement the ceasefire and return to dialogue.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): Yesterday a large group of Zimbabweans came to Parliament to express their concerns about human rights in Zimbabwe—I think the Minister joined them later—and about the Home Office delaying decisions on their cases. What action has the Minister been taking to make sure that the Zimbabwean constitution's commitment to human rights is actually delivered in practice?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Lady raises a very important issue on which we are trying to have similar conversations with the Zimbabweans. Perhaps once those conversations have taken place I will be able to write to her with an update.

Sir Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) (Con): Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti) on Yemen, will the Minister confirm that it is Her Majesty's policy to support the legitimate Government of Yemen? *[Interruption.]* I meant Her Majesty's Government's policy—we hope that both policies are the same. Will he also confirm that the policy is not in any way to cave in to militia who wish to displace a legitimate President and Prime Minister?

Mr Ellwood: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. As envoy to the region, he is well versed in what is happening there. The House will be aware that Houthi

forces have moved from the north-west of the country down into the capital and are now probing even further. We call on all parties to come together, go back to the UN resolution and try to secure a ceasefire.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): What steps have been taken to secure the release of the kidnapped schoolgirls in Nigeria?

Mr Philip Hammond: The UK has contributed considerable resources, including military surveillance resources, to assist the Nigerians, and we have produced some intelligence that could have been helpful in the ongoing manhunt. However, the capacity of Nigerian forces on the ground in that region is not as great as we would like, and the constraints on their freedom of action in the north-east region are growing all the time because of the increasing role of Boko Haram.

Duncan Hames (Chippenham) (LD): Allied warplanes cross the skies above Syria while Assad's helicopters drop barrel bombs on the civilian population, unimpeded by any flight restrictions. How can this apparent indifference possibly help to discourage Syrians from turning to the ISIL militia?

Mr Hammond: There have been proposals, principally promoted by the Turks, for the introduction of no-fly zones and safe havens in northern Syria. We have not dismissed these proposals out of hand. We are engaged with the Turks in looking at them—the hon. Gentleman will probably know that the Turkish Prime Minister is here in London today—but there are some practical difficulties with them. Both we and the United States have said that we would need to look very carefully at any such proposal before we could consider it further. The House of Commons, given the view it clearly expressed about UK engagement in Syria, would undoubtedly want to have a very significant say in this matter.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry to disappoint remaining colleagues. I would have liked to take more questions, but time is our enemy. We must move on.

Points of Order

12.36 pm

Alison Seabeck (Plymouth, Moor View) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On democracy day, I am concerned that the fisheries Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), has made a statement on his personal Facebook page specific to changes in bass fishing, saying that he has made a breakthrough. However, when I checked the Order Paper, the official website of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Marine Management Organisation website, I found no formal statement. The EU website says that the deal has not been finalised, and fishers directly affected are finding out about it from cross-posting from sea anglers. I would welcome your advice on whether it is appropriate for ministerial statements to be put out in this way.

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

Mr Speaker: I will come to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

I thank the hon. Lady for giving me notice of her point of order. I understand that her concerns relate to the Minister's comments on Facebook about the December Agriculture and Fisheries Council. I believe that there has been no ministerial statement to the House, following that Council meeting, but that a number of parliamentary questions on it have since been answered. Off the top of my head and on the basis of such thought as I have been able to give to it, it is not clear to me that the Minister is on this occasion guilty of breaching the important principle that Parliament should be informed first of significant developments in public policy. Nevertheless,

I am sure that the Treasury Bench has taken note of the point, and will convey its gist to Ministers from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

I do not know whether the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) had a point of order, but I am all agog if he has.

Sir Edward Leigh: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This morning, we had an excellent debate in Westminster Hall on Holocaust memorial day. I thought that it would be appropriate, as we celebrate our 750th birthday today, for this House—I recognise that you are the head of our House, Mr Speaker, and you are of Jewish ancestry—to proclaim that, even if our House survives for another 750 years, we will not, in this, our time, be found wanting in standing up for the right of Jewish people to live in peace and freedom wherever they are in the world.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the point of order, and the consideration that underlies it. I think that the reception to it tells its own story. It will be endorsed by everybody from across the House. It might be thought a particularly timely point of order for the hon. Gentleman to raise given the pervasive threat of anti-Semitism in many parts of the world, and the fact that it is a significant problem in the United Kingdom as well.

The hon. Gentleman's wider point—namely, the 2015 anniversary and celebrations—will be of great interest to the House. All sorts of plans have been developed to mark and commemorate that anniversary, about which Members will hear, and with which they will be involved, during the year. I will of course have something to say on that matter not today, but in the course of the week.

Road Fuel Pricing (Equalisation)

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

12.39 pm

Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require that companies selling road fuels be required to charge prices equalised between rural and urban areas; and for connected purposes.

The retail market in road fuels is complex. According to the Petrol Retailers Association, the UK has 8,605 road fuel retailing sites—what the normal consumer would refer to as petrol stations. Petrol stations are administered by a variety of operators, including small, independent dealers, companies that own a significant number of petrol stations, or what the PRA refers to as hypermarkets but are more familiar to us as supermarkets—Sainsbury's, Tesco, Asda, and Morrisons. In addition, motorway based service stations are owned and operated by a different set of retailers.

Consumers are familiar with the provision of petrol stations. In the majority of cases, the petrol station will have a familiar brand name—BP, Shell, Esso—yet it is less well understood by the consumer that the large petrol corporation does not necessarily own and operate the petrol station displaying the brand name. In the majority of cases, brand name petrol stations are operated by either independent companies or smaller retailers. These so-called dealers operate 5,385 of the 8,605 petrol stations across the UK—some 62.5% of the outlet share. Similarly, petrol companies, many of which are in the process of divesting their portfolio of outlets, comprise just 1,846 of the open outlets, or a 21.5% outlet share. The remainder of the outlet share is taken by just 1,374 supermarket outlets—a small 16% of the outlet share.

To look simply at the number of petrol retail sites is to fail to appreciate how the market works and what factors affect the pricing of petrol and diesel, and a number of factors drive the price of petrol in various areas. In the far outlying regions of the country, scarcity of population means that the number of cars per outlet becomes small, and accordingly petrol stations are small as well. The economy of scale vanishes, and petrol stations can be as simple as a single pump. Although that makes for high price road fuel, in reality the choice in many cases is high price or no fuel at all, and the Government have already helped with a fuel duty subsidy in outlying and hard-to-reach regions. In other areas there is a high degree of competition, with many outlets and a high number of cars per fuel pump. Again, that drives healthy competition, and cheap road fuel prices are available to the lucky people who live within the petrol station catchment area.

I am an enthusiast for markets being allowed to drive positive outcomes for the consumer; I am an advocate of free market economics and support healthy competition. However, in our complex world, from time to time markets fail to deliver exclusively fair outcomes, and when markets go wrong I believe intervention should happen, as is the case with road fuel pricing.

I have already stated that petrol companies own 21.5% of the outlet share in the UK, with dealers owning 62.6% and supermarkets just 16%, but those figures fail to highlight the inequality within the market.

Although companies own 21% of outlets, they hold 24% of the volume sales share—the amount of petrol and diesel sold—and dealers with 63% of the outlets transact just 32% of the volume sales. Supermarkets, however, with just 16% of outlets, dominate the market with 44% of the volume market share—just four big supermarket chains in the UK hold 44% of the market.

Trying to understand the supermarkets' pricing model is like trying to read and understand a dark art. Many hon. Members will be aware that there are peculiar price anomalies between their constituencies and neighbouring ones. In Kidderminster, Stourport and Bewdley, we frequently find that petrol and diesel prices are up to 7p more expensive than in neighbouring Bromsgrove just 10 miles down the road. Having written to supermarkets in my constituency, only Tesco agreed to meet me and discuss how it constructs prices in Kidderminster. It seems that the supermarkets look to the competition within three miles of their local petrol station and decide, on an undisclosed and opaque basis, the best price to charge at any given petrol station.

That process throws up anomalies. In a city such as Birmingham there is healthy competition between retailers and across the city, and it is unlikely that there will be a three mile gap between retailers. Therefore, a supermarket such as Asda can cut its price on one side of the city, and that will transmit quickly through the entire city to reduce prices for everybody. In addition, petrol retailers are not just competing against each other, but against an efficient public transport system. Prices locally in a city such as Birmingham can be significantly cheaper, but in a town such as Kidderminster the area is surrounded by a void of petrol stations far wider than three miles. Kidderminster, and any similar small town, will find itself in a closed and inefficient market for road fuel. Add to that the fact that local residents rely on their cars much more, not least because of a less than optimal public transport system, and the supermarkets can charge more for their fuel locally.

The question inevitably follows: is the significant price anomaly between same-brand supermarkets and road fuel prices a healthy outcome of market forces, or a cynical attempt by supermarkets to charge premium prices for fuel in areas where competition is weak, to subsidise their activities where competition is strong? A similar question needs to be answered with regard to motorway service stations, which charge even higher premiums for urban fuel prices. Again, is that driven by genuine market forces, or by opportunism to overcharge motorists who would otherwise have to detour off their motorway route to search for properly priced fuel?

There are certainly significant anomalies within regions, but when looking at regional pricing there seems to be a more efficient market operating. The AA, in its November fuel price report, notes that the difference between the highest priced region for petrol, London, and the lowest, Yorkshire and Humberside, is just 0.4p. However, the price differences within those regions mean that many people are paying a significant rural premium for their essential road fuel. My Bill will seek to address the problem by giving reserve powers to the Competition and Markets Authority to intervene when price anomalies cannot easily be explained by significant pricing factors.

It is clear that the factors affecting a single pump retailer in a sparsely populated region with hundreds of miles to the nearest wholesaler will result in a higher

[*Mark Garnier*]

than average fuel retail price. However, the factors that decide Kidderminster is charged a 7p premium over neighbouring Bromsgrove are not so easy to determine. In this event, the CMA will expect an immediate explanation of the anomaly, which, if not satisfactory, will mean an intervention to iron out the price discrepancy. The reserve power can also be used to determine anomalies with motorway service stations, and the discrepancy between petrol and diesel prices.

We have already seen a drop in the wholesale prices of road fuel and crude oil, one that lessens the impact of fuel prices on households. However, while that is in part welcome—the phenomenon of fuel prices rising like a rocket but falling like a feather has not yet been resolved satisfactorily—there is no reason not to address the price anomaly that sees rural communities being required, in the main by supermarkets, to pay a significant premium for their fuel over communities in better served areas such as conurbations. My proposals seek to bring that inequality to an end by providing a mechanism that, I hope, those people guilty of infringement will respond to before intervention by the CMA is necessary. That will begin to bring to an end the premiums paid by rural communities for their road fuel.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Mark Garnier, Jason McCartney, Jim Shannon, Oliver Colvile, John Thurso, Mr James Gray, Mr Philip Hollobone, Peter Aldous, Jeremy Lefroy, Guto Bebb, Simon Hart and Pauline Latham present the Bill.

Mark Garnier accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 6 March, and to be printed (Bill 157).

Opposition Day

[13TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Trident Renewal

12.49 pm

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House believes that Trident should not be renewed.

It is a pleasure to move the motion, which stands in my name and those of my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Scottish National party, Plaid Cymru—the party of Wales—and the Green party. I am also pleased that the motion is supported by other Members, such as the hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), who has a long-standing, principled position on this issue.

I thank, in advance, the Secretary of State for Defence for replying to this SNP-Plaid Cymru debate and the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne), who has responsibility for defence equipment, support and technology, for closing the debate, and the shadow Secretary of State for his participation on behalf of the official Opposition.

Today's debate is the first opportunity to debate Trident replacement since the publication of the Government's 2014 update to Parliament on Trident, published on 18 December. That document confirmed that a further £261 million had been reprofiled to be spent on the project ahead of the maingate stage, when MPs will decide whether to authorise construction of new submarines, thereby confirming that Trident is not subject to the Government's austerity agenda. The document also confirms that the maingate decision will be reached in early 2016. MPs re-standing for election in 2015 and candidates for all parties can expect to be asked by electors how they would vote on Trident.

This debate also offers the first opportunity for the Government and Members to report back from the international conference on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, held in December in Vienna, and comes ahead of a demonstration on scrapping Trident taking place this Saturday in London, organised by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. The event starts outside the Ministry of Defence on Horse Guards avenue, just off Whitehall, at noon, and I encourage as many people as possible who want Trident scrapped to attend.

I also put on the record the sincere appreciation of myself, my colleagues and others in the House to Kate Hudson of CND UK, John Ainslie of CND Scotland and Ben Folley, who supports parliamentary CND, as well as all colleagues in other disarmament and non-proliferation organisations.

Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is being fulsome in his praise for CND. Does he think that that organisation was right during the cold war to dismiss the Soviet threat?

Angus Robertson: I do not think anybody should dismiss threats at any time, but the question is whether one believes that the threat of catastrophic nuclear annihilation worked. I happen to believe that nuclear deterrents have not worked, and there are plenty of examples of conflicts that were not avoided—

Mr Spellar *rose*—

Angus Robertson: Forgive me, but I want to make some progress. The right hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to make a speech later, and I look forward to hearing it.

The time has come to put down a marker about scrapping Trident and not replacing these weapons of mass destruction. At present, a UK Trident submarine remains on patrol at all times, and each submarine carries an estimated eight missiles, each of which can carry up to five warheads. In total, that makes 40 warheads, each with an explosive power of up to 100 kilotons of conventional high explosive—eight times the power of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945, killing an estimated 240,000 people from blast and radiation.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): The hon. Gentleman and I have agreed on a number of foreign policy and defence issues, but can he not see that recent events, even on NATO's border, again remind us of the importance of retaining the ultimate insurance policy in order to help keep Britain and its allies safe?

Angus Robertson: The difficulty with that position, of course, is that, were it true, it would mean that Germany, Italy and Spain were not safe and required nuclear weapons. In fact, it is the same argument made by the North Korean regime, which believes it needs nuclear weapons to protect itself. It is a dangerous argument to pursue.

I have yet to hear a supporter of Trident convincingly explain in what circumstances they would be prepared to justify the killing of hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women and children and the causing of massive environmental damage to the world for generations to come. Those are the consequences of using nuclear weapons, and surely if one has them, one has to be prepared to use them. I have yet to hear anybody give an example of circumstances where they would be prepared to kill millions of people.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

Angus Robertson: Will the hon. Gentleman explain in what circumstances he would be in favour of using nuclear weapons?

John Woodcock: Will the hon. Gentleman explain the logic of his party's position? It thinks that nuclear weapons are an abomination, but wants an independent Scotland to remain part of NATO, which is an explicitly nuclear alliance founded on the concept of overall nuclear protection.

Angus Robertson: The hon. Gentleman overlooks the fact that the position of the SNP on NATO is exactly the same as that taken by the Governments of Denmark and Norway—countries that have provided the most recent NATO Secretaries-General. Those countries do not want to possess or host nuclear weapons, which is exactly the SNP's position, but that has not precluded their participation in NATO. Perhaps having countries take that position might offer the opportunity to change the global approach to nuclear weapons currently pursued by NATO and nuclear-hosting states.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con) *rose*—

Angus Robertson: On the basis of the hon. Gentleman's long-standing and principled support for nuclear weapons, I would be pleased to take an intervention.

Dr Lewis: In return, I acknowledge the seriousness of the hon. Gentleman's point about not finding anybody prepared to kill millions of people, but the logical conclusion of that standpoint is that we remain pacifists—*[Interruption.]* Let me explain. It would mean we could never declare war on any country, whatever the circumstances, because when we do, millions of people inevitably die. The question is, therefore: how do we prevent war? We do it by showing someone that they cannot attack us with these weapons without suffering similar retaliation.

Angus Robertson: I like the hon. Gentleman a great deal, but I note that even he, one of the leading supporters of nuclear weapons, could not give an example of circumstances where he would be prepared to see the killing of hundreds of millions of people.

The case is stronger than ever for embracing the non-replacement of Trident, which would offer serious strategic and economic benefits, as outlined in the June 2013 report "The Real Alternative", including,

"improved national security—through budgetary flexibility in the Ministry of Defence and a more effective response to emerging security challenges in the 21st century"

and

"improved global security—through a strengthening of the non-proliferation regime, deterring of nuclear proliferation and de-escalation of international tensions".

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that opposition to Trident is not limited to CND or parties such as ours, but includes many in the military? The former British armed forces head described nuclear weapons as "completely useless" and "virtually irrelevant".

Angus Robertson: The hon. Lady makes a good point. We are hearing ever more—and respected—people from within the defence community understanding the consequences of the replacement of Trident and the displacement effect that would have on conventional defence within the MOD budget.

I will come to that last issue shortly, but first I want to return to the advantages outlined in the 2013 report "The Real Alternative", including

"vast economic savings—of more than £100 billion over the lifetime of a successor nuclear weapons system, releasing resources for effective security spending, as well as a range of public spending priorities"

as well as our

"adherence to legal obligations including responsibilities as a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)",

and—think about this—the

"moral and diplomatic leadership in global multilateral disarmament initiatives such as a global nuclear abolition treaty and the UN's proposed Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone in the Middle East".

All this would be possible if the UK Government were prepared to embrace a new approach to weapons of mass destruction.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): What evidence is there that if we got rid of our nuclear weapons, anybody else would get rid of theirs? Would the French give up their nuclear weapons? Would the Russians?

Angus Robertson: If common sense were to prevail, it would have a positive impact on other countries. In the first instance, we have to be responsible for the decisions we make in this country, but I remember that when President Nelson Mandela announced he was changing the South African Government's position on nuclear weapons, he was lauded for it by Members on both sides of the House. I think the UK would be lauded for making a similar decision.

Mr Spellar: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Angus Robertson: I am going to make some progress now. I have given way generously to Members on both sides of the House.

The benefits that I have outlined from the 2013 report could inform the strategic defence and security review that will follow the general election if we were to recast the UK's approach to nuclear weapons. The reasons for doing so should be obvious to all; they were written about this week in an article, which I would commend to Members, by Paul Mason of "Channel 4 News". He wrote:

"Russia, jihadis or cyberwarfare—which is the most urgent of the new threats we face? The forthcoming strategic review will force the British military establishment to ask difficult questions. It must separate real threats from imagined ones.

It is in this context that Britain's hapless defence establishment has to carry out yet another strategic defence and security review. The last one, in 2010, was a valiant effort to impose philosophical coherence on policies, commitments and projects that had become self-perpetuating, strategically meaningless and financially unsustainable. It did not succeed.

In 2010, the essential problem boiled down to two things: maintaining (and modernising) Britain's capacity to do expeditionary warfare, as in the Falklands, Iraq and Afghanistan; and boosting the strategic end of the armed forces—Trident and the Royal Navy—so that we could still claim to be a world power."

It is worth reflecting on what Paul Mason wrote because of the squeeze to UK conventional defence capabilities in recent years. We have seen significant cuts to personnel, basing, capabilities and, frankly and sadly, too often a substandard approach to the safety of our service personnel.

Members are well aware of the recent difficulties the MOD is in, in terms of cutting regular troop numbers and filling the gaps with reserves. Bases have been closed, including the end of flying operations from two out of three air bases in Scotland. Crucial capability gaps have been exposed, including the absence of a single maritime patrol aircraft since the scrapping of the entire Nimrod fleet. I observe that the Irish Air Corps has more maritime patrol aircraft than the UK at present. In recent weeks in my constituency, one has been able to regularly see maritime patrol aircraft from other countries operating from RAF Lossiemouth, helping to fill a capability that the UK currently has no concrete plans to fill.

Similar shortcomings have been exposed with other capabilities needed to deal with

"violations of national airspace, emergency scrambles, narrowly avoided midair collisions, close encounters at sea, simulated attack runs and other dangerous actions".

As has been officially confirmed, the Royal Navy has on a number of occasions "gapped" the provision of fleet ready escort vessels; that is, there was no availability of the appropriate vessel to patrol and screen in UK waters.

My constituents have on a number of occasions been able to see the Admiral Kuznetsov, the largest vessel in the Russian northern fleet, and it has been widely reported about the MOD initially depending on reports from Scottish fishing boats before Royal Navy vessels interdicted the visiting vessels from Russia after being dispatched from the south coast of England.

In recent years we have also had to go through a variety of issues where service personnel equipment malfunctioned or was not up to the appropriate safety standard. Most recently, and tragically, this was exposed after the death of three of my constituents aboard two RAF Tornados that collided above the Moray firth. The Tornado fleet still does not have collision avoidance systems fully installed, decades after they were recommended, and there are no concrete plans or timetables for that potentially life-saving equipment for Typhoons or F35 jets. The MOD has the wrong priorities, investing billions in nuclear weapons that it can never use but not properly managing the conventional armed forces which are so necessary.

The national security strategy noted in 2010 that, in a period of changing security threats, it would be sensible to consider how ending the Trident replacement programme would release resources that could be spent on more effective security measures. What commitment will the Secretary of State give to the national security strategy informing the strategic defence and security review on the issue of nuclear weapons? In 2010, the NSS downgraded the threat of a nuclear weapon conflict without the SDSR downgrading the role of nuclear weapons in our military capability. That mistake should not be repeated in 2015.

The Defence Committee, in its report "Deterrence in the Twenty-First Century", argued that at some point in the future the core role of nuclear weapons could be achieved by the deployment of advanced conventional weapons. The NSS and SDSR 2015 should model and scenario-plan such situations, and allow MPs to assess the findings, before we commit further billions to the construction of Trident replacement. Ahead of a final decision on the construction of Trident replacement submarines at the 2016 main gate, the role of SDSR 2015 should be to deliver the most open consultation and debate on the role of UK nuclear weapons and whether we should maintain them at all.

Does the Secretary of State recognise that with the national security strategy placing international terrorism, cybercrime and major accidents and natural hazards such as coastal flooding at the top tier of threats to the UK, recent experience suggests that these areas need greater resources, rather than the false priorities of the nuclear deterrent?

On the cost of Trident replacement, we know from studies, including "In the Firing Line"—an investigation into the hidden costs of replacing Trident—that the costs are astronomic and approach £100 billion. It is not just the costs of development and construction. It is also about the in-service running costs over decades. It is worth noting that despite the fact that Parliament has not given main gate approval for Trident replacement, the MOD has already spent between £2 billion and £3 billion on what are called long-lead items.

Most recently, news emerged about the purchase of the “common missile compartment” that is being built in the US at a cost of approximately £37 million. The spec of the common missile compartment has 12 launch tubes and runs contrary to claims by the MOD in the 2010 SDSR that it will

“reduce the number of operational launch tubes on the submarines from 12 to eight”.

Also the UK’s disarmament ambassador, John Duncan, told the UN that the plan was to

“configure the next generation of submarines accordingly with only eight operational missile”

tubes.

The Royal United Services Institute has estimated that the construction cost of Trident replacement will consume 35% of the procurement budget by the early 2020s. The Minister should be concerned that the cost overruns we have seen with other MOD major projects, such as the Astute submarines, Queen Elizabeth aircraft carriers and A400M refuelling aircraft, will be replicated with Trident replacement and will further impact on resources for other equipment and capabilities.

Has the Secretary of State read the recent media reports that the replacement of Britain’s nuclear deterrent means that his Department will be forced to make more significant cuts to troop numbers unless the next Government agree to keep real-terms increases to the defence budget—something that is not being offered to other Departments?

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): The hon. Gentleman is making a strong case. Has he made any estimate of the savings that might be made if the House were to vote for the motion and the Government decided to follow that as a policy, bearing in mind that the Government might still wish to proceed with submarine capability?

Angus Robertson: As I have outlined, there are a number of reports that the through-life costs are nearly £100 billion. There is an issue as to how much one is spending year on year on the existing Trident fleet and then the construction costs, which will peak, I think, between 2019 and 2030.

Sir Nick Harvey (North Devon) (LD) *indicated assent.*

Angus Robertson: The former Armed Forces Minister is, I think, concurring with that. It is billions and billions of pounds every year that could be saved and reprioritised. Given all the debates that we are currently having on austerity, the growth of food banks and many other issues—no doubt there are great supporters of the MOD who would wish to see increased spending within the MOD—there are alternatives. A significant amount of money could be saved were one to vote for the motion or if we were to ensure that, at the general election, as many Members as possible are returned to this place who share the views of those of us who wish to see Trident scrapped.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman has been very generous with his time. Has he calculated the cost to UK manufacturing of not going ahead with the submarine successor programme at this late stage?

Angus Robertson: Occasionally I hear from Members who have a constituency interest, and I understand that they want to stand up for firms in their constituency. What I would say to them—I represent a constituency with a very significant defence footprint—is that there are alternatives to spending £100 billion on Trident, and it cannot be beyond the wit or imagination of the Government to look at alternatives for those people with amazing engineering and design skills. They do not need to produce nuclear weapons to have successful careers or, indeed, for their companies to be successful.

Katy Clark (North Ayrshire and Arran) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his choice of Opposition day motion. He will be aware that the west of Scotland is very dependent on defence jobs. Does he agree that both the Scottish Government and the Westminster Government should be investing heavily in defence diversification, because that is essential if we are going to put our communities in a position where they are not reliant on one particular weapons system?

Angus Robertson: Indeed. The hon. Lady makes a very strong point, and I am pleased that there are Members in other parties who are clearly supporting the direction of the motion before us. Of course, it is not beyond the wit of Government or companies in the defence sector to concentrate their efforts on the conventional areas of defence rather than on nuclear submarines which have to be one of the most expensive ways of creating and maintaining jobs.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): May I take my hon. Friend back to the question of costs and try to put some numbers on this? Is it not the case that according to the last comprehensive assessment, the cost was something in the order of 9% of the MOD budget, around £2.9 billion a year, moving to around £4 billion throughout the 2020s? Does that not give a clear indication of the scale—the quantum—of the money we are wasting on these systems?

Angus Robertson: My hon. Friend makes a good point and it is what I was trying to outline in response to the interventions from those on the Liberal Democrat Benches. This is about many billions of pounds about which we have a choice: do we want to invest in something we can never use, or do we spend the money in an entirely more beneficial way for society as a whole?

Does the Secretary of State recognise the assessment that during the next decade more than £40 billion is due to be spent on submarines—among them, Trident’s replacement submarines—and that this figure is more than is due to be spent on new land equipment and air equipment combined? Does he agree that the waste of £4 billion with the scrapping of the Nimrod patrol aircraft is now being replicated with the expenditure of £4 billion on the Trident replacement submarine programme ahead of the main gate decision?

The scrapping of Nimrod has limited Vanguard’s operational effectiveness and must mean that the scrapping of Trident is now more certain. What cost has been incurred by the MOD in requesting the deployment of maritime patrol aircraft by allied forces since October 2010, now that Vanguard operates without the support of Nimrod? On how many occasions has the MOD

[Angus Robertson]

requested deployment of MPA by allied forces since October 2010, now that Vanguard operates without the support of Nimrod?

The issue of Trident replacement comes at a time when the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons are being taken seriously by the international community. In December the overwhelming majority of countries attended the international conference on the subject hosted by the Austrian Government. After the US Government confirmed their attendance, the UK relented on its intended boycott and attended in an official capacity, which I welcome. A number of Members of the House, including me, attended the conference, which had a huge impact, forcing attendees to confront the calamity of what would actually happen should there be a planned or unintended nuclear explosion. The UK and other countries need to give a commitment that they will take this issue seriously.

Does the Secretary of State agree with the International Committee of the Red Cross's findings that global cooling as a result of nuclear conflict could cut food production for many years and put 1 billion people at risk of starvation worldwide. Is this stark warning not further evidence that we must act on disarmament and scrap Trident? Does he not agree that publishing a UK assessment of the global atmospheric consequences of nuclear war would be a positive contribution to the international discussion on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons? Will the Government ensure that the issues raised at the Vienna conference are discussed at the meeting of the P5 nuclear weapons states in February?

While on the international issues relating to Trident, may I say to the Secretary of State that it is high time the Government stated their support for a new legal instrument prohibiting nuclear weapons that would complement our disarmament commitment under article 6 of the non-proliferation treaty? It is time that the Government recognised that the success of past international bans on weapons of mass destruction such as landmines, cluster munitions and chemical and biological weapons must be applied to nuclear weapons. Does the Secretary of State recognise, as those on the Opposition Benches do, the success of past international bans on weapons of mass destruction such as landmines, cluster munitions and chemical and biological weapons, and that this principle must be extended to nuclear weapons?

Before concluding, may I seek clarification relating to the Trident maingate decision that will follow if this vote is unsuccessful today? Will the maingate decision for Trident replacement be published as a report and discussed as a stand-alone issue, separately from the strategic defence and security review? Will the Secretary of State and the shadow Secretary of State both commit to a binding vote of the House at the maingate decision point for Trident replacement?

In conclusion, today's debate and vote are an important opportunity to show that there is opposition to Trident renewal at Westminster. May I thank all the constituents who have lobbied all of us in past days, sending e-mails and messaging us via Twitter, encouraging us to vote for the motion?

Opposition to Trident is of course particularly strong in Scotland. It is opposed by our faith communities, including the Church of Scotland, the Roman Catholic Church, the Episcopal Church and many others among our faith communities. It is also opposed by the Scottish Trades Union Congress and the Scottish voluntary sector. Opinion opposing Trident is covered fully in today's *The National* newspaper, which splashes on a new opinion poll that shows that, of those with an opinion, 60% of respondents in Scotland do not want Trident. Today, sadly, I fear that the Labour party will not represent the majority of its own supporters: in that poll it is clear that a significant majority of Labour voters agree with the SNP in not wanting Trident in Scotland. In the forthcoming general election, we have a huge opportunity to underline our opposition to Trident by electing MPs who have a policy opposed to Trident—in Scotland, that is the SNP; in Wales, it is Plaid Cymru; and in England, it is the Green party. With polls showing that we may very well hold the balance of power after the next general election, we will do everything we can to ensure that Trident replacement does not go ahead.

1.17 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon): Today's debate is about the primary responsibility of any Government: the security of our nation, our freedoms and our way of life. It is not about short-term politics. Whatever the current threats to this country, we cannot gamble with tomorrow's security. That is why this Government, and all previous Governments for the last six decades, have retained an operationally independent nuclear deterrent, and today this Government are committed to maintain that credible, continuous and effective minimum nuclear deterrent based on Trident and operating in a continuously at-sea posture for as long as we need it.

We also committed in the 2010 strategic defence and security review to renew our deterrent by proceeding with the programme that Parliament approved in March 2007 by a majority of 409 to 161 to build a fleet of new ballistic missile submarines. For 45 years, Britain has kept a ballistic missile submarine at sea, providing the ultimate guarantee of security against nuclear attack or nuclear blackmail 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. In December I saw that deterrent for myself at Faslane, and let me pay tribute to the crews of Vanguard, Vengeance, Victorious and Vigilant, their families and all those whose support has been essential to Operation Relentless, our continuous at-sea deterrent patrols. It is Faslane that is truly Britain's peace camp. Whether we like it or not, there remain approximately 17,000 nuclear weapons globally. We cannot uninvent those weapons.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend recall that during the Scottish referendum a number of people said that somehow, because there was a base in Scotland, the rest of England was getting away without having bases related to our nuclear deterrent? It is worth reminding people that from my bedroom window I can see the towers of Aldermaston, Greenham common and the royal ordnance factory at Burghfield. The defence footprint relating to the support of our nuclear deterrent is as important throughout the United Kingdom as it is in Scotland.

Michael Fallon: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. From Aldermaston and Burghfield to Barrow and Scotland, the United Kingdom together has an interest in the nuclear industry.

Oliver Colville (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend also recognise that Devonport plays a significant part in this matter, because it has the licence for the refitting and refuelling of our nuclear submarines?

Michael Fallon: I certainly recognise the importance of Devonport and all our naval bases in sustaining our naval operations, including the submarine fleet.

In the context of 17,000 nuclear weapons globally, we cannot gamble with our country's national security. We have to plan for a major direct nuclear threat to this country, or to our NATO allies, that might emerge over the 50 years during which the next generation of submarines will be in service. We already know that there are substantial nuclear arsenals and that the number of nuclear states has increased. Russia is modernising its nuclear forces, actively commissioning a new *Dolgoruky* class of eight SSBN vessels, preparing to deploy a variety of land-based ICBM classes, and planning to reintroduce rail-based intercontinental missiles. North Korea has carried out three nuclear tests, threatened a fourth, and carried out ballistic missile tests in defiance of the international community. Iran's nuclear programme remains a real concern: we see a worrying lack of progress from Iran with the international agency on the military dimensions of its nuclear programme.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): The Secretary of State is right to discuss some of the new, emerging external threats, but the major external threat faced by this country is from IS—from jihadists. Would they not be encouraged if we threatened them with nuclear weapons?

Michael Fallon: There are of course current threats to this country from ISIL and the jihadists, as, indeed, there are from Russia's behaviour over the past year or so, but we must also plan for future threats to this country, including nuclear threats. Some may well argue, like the hon. Gentleman, that in the face of terrorism and the other immediate threats that we have seen over the past year, a nuclear deterrent is somehow less relevant. That is an argument, but we have never suggested that those other threats should or can be countered by the nuclear deterrent. We are clear that the nuclear deterrent is the only assured way to deter nuclear threats.

Others have suggested that we should move away from continuous patrols and have a part-time deterrent, as if our enemies did not work the full week, but there is simply no alternative to a continuous at-sea deterrent that can provide the same level of protection and the ability to deter an aggressor. We know that because successive Governments have looked at the different options for delivering a deterrent capability. Most recently, the Trident alternatives review in 2013 demonstrated that no alternative system is as capable or cost-effective as a Trident-based deterrent. It also found:

"None of these alternative systems and postures offers the same degree of resilience as the current posture of Continuous at Sea Deterrence, nor could they guarantee a prompt response in all circumstances."

All the previous studies have also shown that four submarines are required to maintain the continuous posture.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): I wanted to intervene earlier, at the end of my right hon. Friend's arguments about the nature of the gamble that one would be taking with the future security of the United Kingdom by not having a nuclear weapons system. Is not the rather difficult truth that we are making a series of risk assessments and gambles about what we spend on defence and the particular type of defence we buy? While it is funded from the defence budget, Trident comes at the expense of a larger Army, Navy and Air Force, so it is all part of a wider risk assessment, not, as the Secretary of State has suggested, an absolute. If there was no money left for anything except Trident, is that really the decision that we would take?

Michael Fallon: My hon. Friend is of course right that we must assess future risks and the capabilities that we will have to deal with them. All I can say to him is that every successive Government who have looked at the future threat have, in the end, decided to continue to renew our continuous at-sea deterrent. In a world that is becoming more dangerous, there are no alternatives that offer the level of protection and security that this country needs.

Let me be clear, particularly to the Scottish National party, about what we are planning to replace and when. Subject to a maingate decision in 2016, we are planning to replace the current Vanguard submarines—not the Trident missile or the warheads. We are planning to replace the submarines in the late 2020s, by which time our Vanguard submarines will be 35 years old.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The Secretary of State has spoken about the need to take defence and security seriously and the necessity of nuclear weapons to achieving that. Is he saying that nations that do not have nuclear weapons are not taking their defence and security seriously?

Michael Fallon: No, I am not. I am saying that countries such as ours that have nuclear weapons cannot simply uninvent them; a responsibility comes with those nuclear weapons, and I will come on to explain how we should discharge it.

Let me be clear about the decision that we are going to take in 2016. With the approval of Parliament, the previous Government began the design phase of that decision. In May 2011, we announced the assessment phase, and since then we have reported progress to Parliament annually—most recently, as the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) pointed out, just before Christmas. We are now more than halfway through that five-year, £3.3 billion assessment phase, the main purpose of which is to refine the design and mature the costs ahead of the maingate decision. After all, this is the largest British submarine project in a generation and one of the most complex ever undertaken by British industry. Of that £3.3 billion of assessment costs, I can confirm that so far we have invested around £1.2 billion as part of the assessment phase. The Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne), will be giving further details of those costs when he winds up the debate.

[Michael Fallon]

I want to be clear with the House: no submarines are being built before the main gate decision in 2016. However, as with any major programme of this complexity, it is essential and more cost-effective to order now certain items that would delay the programme if we were to wait until the main gate decision. Such items include propulsion components, generators, main engines, condensers and electrical distribution components.

Angus Robertson: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way so generously. Given how much work has been done on this matter in the Ministry of Defence—he is well supported by a large team of civil servants—will he confirm at the Dispatch Box today the total cost of Trident replacement, including its through-life costs? Is it approaching £100 billion or not?

Michael Fallon: I do not recognise the £100 billion figure, and it is not possible to answer that question until the main gate decision is made which will be put before this House next year.

Let me turn directly to the issue that the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) quite rightly and fairly put to me—the issue of affordability.

Mr Jenkin: If we are going to talk about through-life costs, is it not important to point out that the amortised costs of our nuclear deterrent will be only some 6% of the overall defence budget or 0.3% of gross domestic product? The idea that cancellation of this programme will pay for all the goodies outlined by the Scottish National party—one presumes that the SNP will want to carry on building different types of submarine at the these yards in any case—is just moonshine.

Michael Fallon: My hon. Friend who, having served as shadow Defence Secretary, knows a great deal about this issue, is absolutely right. These are replacement submarines that are going to last us until 2060, so it is very important to look at the cost of the project over the next 45 years.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Michael Fallon: I want to make some progress. Given the £38 billion hole in the defence budget that we inherited from the shower opposite, this Government have scrutinised the procurement programme to ensure value for money. We have identified savings and we will continue to submit the programme to rigorous scrutiny. Let me assure the House that no part of that programme will be exempt. As I have just said to my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin), we are talking about maintaining a capability in service until 2060—for the next 45 years.

We told the House in the 2011 parliamentary report that the cost of the four submarines was estimated to be around £25 billion at out-turn prices. Those costs, of course, will be spread over 25 years. Indeed, if the costs were spread evenly, it would represent an annual insurance premium of around 0.13% of total Government spending. Let me put it another way. Crossrail is costing us around £14.8 billion. Replacing four 16,000-tonne submarines will cost around £25 billion; Crossrail 2 will cost around £27 billion. I hope that provides some context.

Let me now turn to the position of the various parties. The SNP has set out very clearly its opposition to the renewal of Trident. I believe and suggest to the House that that is a highly irresponsible position. It would sacrifice the security of the United Kingdom on the wrong-headed notion that opposes nuclear in all its forms and on the basis of cost savings that would be minuscule compared with the impact on our national security and the damage to our economy, to jobs and to the submarine building industry.

HM Naval Base Clyde is, by the way, the largest single employment site in Scotland, and it is set to increase to 8,200 jobs by 2020 when all of the Royal Navy's submarines will be based at Faslane. It is the SNP that would put all those jobs at risk. Indeed, the SNP spokesman, the hon. Member for Moray, who has regularly raised the issue of maritime patrol aircraft and foreign submarines, does not seem to see anything odd about wanting the capability to spot other countries' submarines without making the case for retaining our deterrent in the first place. It is pretty hard to deter our enemies when we do not have the means to do so.

We should also note the nonsense of somehow promising a nuclear-free Scotland. In 2013, the percentage of electricity generated in Scotland from nuclear power increased to nearly 35%—nearly double that of England. Indeed, an independent Scotland would rank seventh in the nuclear league table of EU member states. I do not think, of course, that we should expect consistency from an SNP that wants to dispense with nuclear weapons, but wants also, as the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) pointed out, to join NATO—a nuclear alliance. Indeed, according to the document of November 2013, "Scotland's Future", the SNP would allow nuclear-armed vessels to use Scottish ports. Perhaps the hon. Member for Moray could explain some of those inconsistencies.

Angus Robertson: The Secretary of State was unable to tell us earlier what the through-life costs of Trident replacement would be, so let me ask him a second question: when are the UK armed forces going to have a maritime patrol aircraft in service? When will that be?

Michael Fallon: On his first question—I notice that the hon. Gentleman has not addressed any of the inconsistencies I pointed out—I have already made it clear that we cannot be final about the full-length costs of the renewal until we come to take that main gate decision next year. That will be explained to Parliament. So far as maritime patrol aircraft are concerned, we inherited a situation in which some 21 Nimrod aircraft were supposed to be available by 2003, yet when we came to office seven years later, none was available. As part of the painful decisions we had to take to regularise the defence budget and sort out the £38 billion black hole, it was necessary to cancel a programme that had not in any case delivered. The hon. Gentleman asked me when we were going to examine this matter again, and the answer is very clear: we will, of course, look at that particular capability, along with other capabilities, as part of the strategic defence review, which will be initiated immediately after the general election.

Mr Brian Binley (Northampton South) (Con): On the issue of security, I have been arguing for some two or three years that Iran had no intention of giving up its ability to make weapons-grade fissionable material and

that it is intent on building a nuclear weapon, which is the only reason why it is pursuing its particular plan. Does my right hon. Friend recognise that that is now the case, and that Iran simply wanted to ease the sanctions for a short time? Should we not now be really frightened of that threat from the middle east?

Michael Fallon: Indeed, we should certainly be concerned about the lack of progress in the talks that have been dragging on for months now, and we should be particularly concerned about the military dimension to Iran's nuclear programme.

Let me deal now with the position of the official Opposition. On 14 November, the shadow Defence Secretary and the shadow Foreign Secretary wrote to the Prime Minister declaring that Britain should maintain "a minimum credible independent, nuclear deterrent, delivered through a Continuous At-Sea Deterrent".

However, on 5 January this year, the Leader of the Opposition told Andrew Marr that

"we have got to have the least-cost deterrent that we can have, and that's my philosophy."

How, then, can we explain this apparent shift away from the continuous at-sea deterrent? Perhaps it has something to do with the comments of the leader of the SNP who, in talking about coalition, said that Labour would

"have to think again about putting a new generation of Trident nuclear weapons on the River Clyde."

The public and those whose jobs depend on this programme have a right to know whether the Labour party would be prepared to trade our security if that were the price of power, and I offer the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) the opportunity to make that clear.

John Woodcock: I think that the Defence Secretary used wise words when, at the beginning of his speech, he said that we should not use this issue to play short-term politics. Let me gently warn him. We—he and I, and his party and mine—have worked constructively on this issue during difficult times in recent years. I hope that when the shadow Defence Secretary speaks, the right hon. Gentleman will take it from him—if he will not take it from me—that we remain absolutely committed to the statement that he read out. We remain absolutely committed to an independent minimum credible strategic deterrent delivered by means of the submarine programme that we started in government and will finish. A least-cost deterrent is, to our mind, exactly the same as a minimum deterrent. If the Defence Secretary wants to spend more than least costs, he should say so now.

Michael Fallon: What I am seeking, and what I have still not heard, is a recommitment to a continuous at-sea deterrent, but those words seem to have slipped out of Labour's position. I hope that, when we hear from the hon. Member for Gedling—

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab) rose—

Michael Fallon: Ah! We are going to hear from the hon. Gentleman.

Vernon Coaker: The Defence Secretary read out our policy, and my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) reiterated it. Our policy is quite clear: we want a minimum independent credible

deterrent based on continuous at-sea deterrence, and of course we want to provide it in the most cost-effective way possible. Indeed, when he reads *Hansard* tomorrow, the Defence Secretary will find that that is exactly what he said a few moments ago.

Michael Fallon: I think that the House will be grateful to the hon. Gentleman for clarifying that he is still committed to a continuous at-sea deterrent. I hope that he will send a copy of those words to the Leader of the Opposition, so that there can no longer be any lingering doubt in Scotland about whether or not this is a continuous at-sea deterrent.

Mr Spellar: The right hon. Gentleman is putting up a sterling smokescreen for the Government's position, as many of his Back-Bench colleagues know. He talks of coalitions. He is not getting on with this because he is in an unholy coalition with the Liberal Democrats, who are preventing him from taking action. He is making a good show of it, but, as he says that he is being clear, let him now be clear to the House.

Michael Fallon: The right hon. Gentleman anticipates me, because I now want to turn—indeed, I think we all now want to turn—to the position of the Liberal Democrats. On one hand, the Liberal Democrats have said that they want to spend billions to "replace some of the submarines",

and to make our deterrent part time. They have also committed themselves—at their most recent conference—to allowing our submarines to go to sea with unarmed missiles. Those would be pointless patrols, and that is a pointless nuclear deterrent policy. There are no Liberal Democrats in the Ministry of Defence, and the fact that they have adopted such a reckless and, frankly, dangerous approach explains why.

This country faces the threat of nuclear blackmail from rogue states. It is therefore contemptible for the Scottish nationalists or the Liberal Democrats to suggest that they might use the ultimate guarantor of our freedom and independence as some kind of bargaining chip in some grubby coalition deal. To put it more simply, it is only the Conservative party that will not gamble with the security of the British people.

Dr Julian Lewis: While the Secretary of State is dealing with the Liberal Democrats—only two of whom I see in the Chamber today—will he confirm that a policy of sending unarmed submarines to sea and waiting for a crisis to arise, then sending them back to port to be rearmed while the enemy stands idly by, is actually more dangerous than a policy of keeping them in port all along? Will he also confirm that there will never again be a deal between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats to delay the maitgate decision, as there was in 2010? That is something with which he had nothing to do, but which should never have been allowed to happen.

Michael Fallon: Let me assure my hon. Friend, in response to his first point, that we are not planning to make future deals of any kind with the Liberal Democrats. On the contrary, we hope to be returned in May with an absolute majority that will restore defence policy to the hands of a Conservative Government. As for my hon.

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Friend's first point, he is entirely right to draw attention to the absurdity of an unarmed submarine, perhaps several hundred miles from its base, asking our enemies to hold off for a time while it returns to be kitted out with missiles before heading off on patrol again. That is an absurd policy, and we rather look forward to hearing the Liberal Democrat spokesman try to justify it.

Caroline Lucas: Will the Secretary of State return to the point that was raised by the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil), and pursue the logic of his argument? If he believes that nuclear weapons are so essential to our security, will he tell us whether he agrees that it is legitimate and logical for every country in the world to seek to apply them? Yes or no?

Michael Fallon: I do not think that that logic follows at all, but I am about to turn to the issue of disarmament—which has been quite fairly raised—and our obligations under the non-proliferation treaty.

Let me be clear: we hope never to use nuclear weapons, but to go on delivering a deterrent effect. However, we also share the vision of a world that is without nuclear weapons, achieved through multilateral disarmament. Retaining a nuclear deterrent and seeking to create the conditions for a world free of nuclear weapons are not mutually exclusive options. Indeed, I am happy to announce that the Government have now met their 2010 strategic defence review commitment to reduce the number of deployed warheads on each submarine from 48 to 40, and that the total number of operationally available warheads has therefore been reduced to 120. Unfortunately, those reductions have not encouraged other states seeking a nuclear weapons capability to forgo their attempts; nor have they encouraged some other states that already possess nuclear weapons to follow our example. It is our conclusion that it would be rash further to disarm unilaterally while the capability to threaten us remains.

We ascribe the utmost importance to avoiding any use of nuclear weapons, to preventing the spread of nuclear weapons and nuclear weapon technology, and to keeping nuclear weapons safe and secure. We are working hard to ensure that the forthcoming review conference on the nuclear non-proliferation treaty—which is the cornerstone of global efforts to prevent the spread of those weapons—is successful, and next month we will host a conference in London for the five nuclear non-proliferation treaty states.

As I have said from the outset, the first duty of any Government is to ensure the security of the nation, its people and our vital interests. Defending the nation has always been challenging, and never more so than in a nuclear age. It was complex in the first nuclear age of cold war certainties, and it has become even more complex in this second nuclear age, when the problems of proliferation have become sharper and the emergence of new nuclear states has become a reality. We are now in an age of uncertainty and confrontation. History teaches us that the defence of this country means being ready for the unexpected, and that means a full-time nuclear deterrent—not one that clocks off for weeks or months at a time, or one that patrols pointlessly. The need for the nuclear deterrent is no less now than it has ever been, and I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote against the motion.

1.49 pm

Dame Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): May I apologise at the outset, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the fact that I have a long-standing constituency engagement and I will not be here for the wind-ups? However, I am confident that both Front Benchers will say only good things about me.

There is a well-known saying in the peace movement that a unilateralist is a multilateralist who means it, and I am one of those. Whatever I have to say today about nuclear weapons goes for all nuclear weapons, and when the British Government, of whatever persuasion, say they want to rid the world of nuclear weapons and when they signed the non-proliferation treaty committing themselves to do just that, I also expect that they mean it. As one of only nine nuclear-armed states, the UK cannot escape its duty to progress disarmament talks. So why would we seek to upgrade Trident for another 50 years without exploring what might be done to bring forward multilateral nuclear disarmament? Why do we not ask ourselves whether spending up to £100 billion on weapons of mass destruction is actually the best way to defend the people of this country, when we cannot raise millions out of poverty or fund our precious national health service? Why do we not ask? It is because too many politicians in this country—we just heard such a speech—remain locked in cold war thinking when much of the world has moved on.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): The right hon. Lady says that most of the world has moved on. Has she had any intimation from President Putin that the Russians have any intention of engaging in discussions with her about nuclear disarmament? Has she heard from the North Koreans that they intend to abandon their nuclear capability? How does she respond to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's comment that we have reduced our capability and it has made not one jot of difference to those other nations with nuclear weapons?

Dame Joan Ruddock: The hon. Gentleman is citing countries that are of course the minority—the nuclear-armed states. They all have the same attitude as him: they all have cold war thinking. Many of them have reduced their nuclear arsenals, but they remain more dangerous today.

Dr Julian Lewis: I will try to deal with this in the same theoretical terms as the right hon. Lady is trying to do. If her argument is that we have moved on from the cold war—it must be noted that at the height of the cold war she, as the head of CND, wanted us unilaterally to disarm—the point is that there can be no guarantee that we will not move back into a cold war or face some other threat. We cannot know what threats will arise over the next 30 to 50 years, which is why we need an array of deterrent weapons.

Dame Joan Ruddock: The hon. Gentleman says we cannot know what will happen in the future, but we have a pretty good idea. The threats that were part of the cold war scenario are very different from those we face today.

Dr Lewis: Tomorrow?

Dame Joan Ruddock: As I go on in my speech, I hope to indicate that I am talking about today and tomorrow.

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): The right hon. Lady is making an important speech about the way we think about these issues. Does she agree that the threats emerging in the world at a geopolitical level relate to terrorism? Does she agree that a nuclear bomb is no use at all against terrorists?

Dame Joan Ruddock: I agree with the hon. Lady, but, interestingly, the Government do not, and I will address that point, too.

So what do the true believers say Trident renewal is for? Three threat scenarios are usually advanced: the re-emergence of a major nuclear threat, which is code for Russia; new states acquiring nuclear capability, which is code for Iran; and state-sponsored nuclear terrorism. Russia is behaving badly, it is modernising its nuclear arsenals and it is threatening Ukraine, but why would Russia specifically target Britain for a nuclear attack? We have to ask the same question of Iran, surrounded as it is by nuclear-armed Pakistan on one side and nuclear-armed Israel on the other: what would be the motivation for an attack on the UK? Is it not clear that, however unpalatable, painstaking diplomatic negotiation with this regime aimed at preventing its acquisition of nuclear weapons is more likely to succeed than military threats?

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): On the Ukraine example, the nuclear deterrent is going to ensure, as it has done for many years, that any war—God forbid we have one—is conventional, not nuclear. Ukraine could turn nasty, as Mr Gorbachev was warning only the other day, so we need the ultimate deterrent to fight a war—if we ever need to—at a conventional level, not a nuclear one.

Dame Joan Ruddock: All the hon. Gentleman is advocating, of course, is conventional war, which can kill hundreds of thousands of people, as we see in Iraq. He is not making an argument. We need to look at where the real threats are and where real security lies. I will argue that real security lies in nuclear disarmament.

It is on the third scenario, state-sponsored nuclear terrorism, where nuclear deterrence is least credible. The UK has promised—this is official policy—a proportionate response to a state that sponsored a nuclear attack, and a mechanism is in place to trace the perpetrators. The nuclear material will be sent to the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston for analysis before a retaliatory attack is ordered. Can anyone imagine what might happen in those hours or days when analysis was under way? When that is concluded, would the Secretary of State, in the cold light of day, give the order to fire even a single Trident missile? Of course, if he did so, he would immediately be charged with a crime against humanity, but he does not even have that power. He conveniently forgets, as he did throughout his speech today, that Trident is not independent and is assigned to NATO; it is the United States that would call the shots. So why is it, when 47 out of 50 sovereign European states feel more secure without nuclear weapons than with them, that this country remains so blinkered?

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend also recognise that those other members of NATO are part of the nuclear umbrella of NATO and agree to NATO nuclear policy?

Dame Joan Ruddock: My hon. Friend needs to go back and look at his geography. There are not 47 sovereign states in Europe which belong to NATO—

Mr Jones: NATO ones do.

Dame Joan Ruddock: The NATO ones do, but if my hon. Friend listened, he would know that I referred to 47 sovereign states, and they are not all members of NATO by any means.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does she appreciate that almost all my constituents and millions of Labour supporters up and down the country cannot understand why, when we are seeing massive cuts in our public sector and welfare state, we are going to spend upwards of £20 billion on a weapons system that will not make us safe and is not genuinely independent?

Dame Joan Ruddock: My hon. Friend makes a very good point.

Mr MacNeil: The right hon. Lady mentioned that 47 Governments of the 50 in Europe do not have nuclear weapons. On the UK Government's logic, their description of countries not taking their defence and security "seriously" would apply to those countries. Does she think that is an appalling position for the UK Government to hold on our allies and friends in Europe?

Dame Joan Ruddock: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. Nuclear weapons have no utility. They cannot be used to advance any cause or secure any territory without the most devastating effects. The true believers present them as benign, silently gliding under the oceans or quietly snoozing in bunkers doing no harm, but it is not so. Some 18 months ago, a book called "Command and Control" was published detailing more than 1,000 nuclear accidents in the United States. Its author, Eric Schlosser, spent six years researching and submitting freedom of information requests. The results are terrifying and would be unbelievable if they had not come directly from official military sources. Historic accidents range from the proverbial spanner being dropped, causing a fuel leak, leading to a missile explosion, and a warhead being blown off, to a nut being left off a bomber, resulting in the engine catching fire and the fire only failing to reach the bomb bay due to the prevailing wind. Today, there is far more dependence on computer technology than on the mechanical, but there is no consolation in that. In 2008, an engineer went to a Minuteman silo, realised that there had been a fire and that the fire alarm had failed. Luckily, the fire burned itself out before it got to the missile. In 2010 at the same base, online contact was lost for an hour with 50 Minuteman missiles—a computer chip had come loose, but it could have been a cyber-attack.

Even more terrifying is the true story of Stanislav Petrov, now portrayed in a film called "The Man Who Saved The World." Petrov was a colonel in charge of a

[*Dame Joan Ruddock*]

Soviet nuclear early warning centre when an alarm went off signifying that five American nuclear missiles were heading towards the USSR. Petrov took it on himself to refuse to follow protocol and did not send the signal for a retaliatory strike. He believed that the alarm had to be a malfunction, and he was right, but just suppose somebody else had been on duty. Had a nuclear exchange occurred at that time, we know that the world's eco-system would have been destroyed. Today we are told that nuclear arsenals are smaller, which is true, and that the world is a safer place, which is not true.

In 2007-08, several groups of scientists published new and peer-reviewed research on the effects of a regional exchange of nuclear weapons, such as might occur between India and Pakistan. The firepower used for modelling purposes was 50 Hiroshima-sized bombs on each side, which represents just 0.03% of the explosive power of the current global arsenal.

We have known since 1945 of the immediate effects of nuclear weapons—blast, firestorms and radioactivity that would kill millions, but only those who are near the targets. This is what the scientists say of the indirect effects: about five megatons of black smoke would be produced and, as the smoke lifts into the stratosphere, it would be transported around the world. The climatic effects of this high layer of smoke would be unprecedented, plunging the planet into temperatures colder than the little ice age that began in the 17th century. Worldwide agriculture would be severely affected. A larger nuclear exchange, including that involving UK weapons, would result in a true nuclear winter, making agriculture impossible. Both scenarios show climate effects lasting more than a decade and up to 2 billion people dying of starvation.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): The right hon. Lady speaks with great passion and great authority on these matters. The question is whether or not she thinks that the awful scenario that she describes would be more or less likely if we did away with nuclear deterrents.

Dame Joan Ruddock: I will come on to suggest what the world community thinks about that. It is of course my opinion that we would be safer without nuclear weapons. If the hon. Gentleman were both to read the research on nuclear winters and the report of the accidents that have been recently published, he would realise that there is no safety in the possession of nuclear weapons, even if they are not used in anger.

It is instructive to look at how we view the world. We need to reflect on the deaths of those 17 people in Paris at the hands of terrorists. We were rightly outraged and right to mourn them, so how can it be that we are willing to contemplate the deaths of millions? Why do we have such moral certitude over the banning of chemical and biological weapons, land mines and cluster bombs but not nuclear weapons? It is also instructive to inquire how other countries and institutions view the nuclear weapon states such as Britain.

Dr Julian Lewis: As always, the right hon. Lady is enormously courteous in giving way. It was discovered after the event that the Russians had been massively cheating on the 1972 biological weapons treaty. Therefore,

it is the assurance of the underlying deterrent against other weapons of mass destruction that we have to worry about and be concerned with.

Dame Joan Ruddock: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman does not make a coherent case. Chemical weapons have certainly been used in recent times—we do not know whether biological weapons have been used—which means that nuclear weapons did not act as a deterrent, so his argument is not sound.

Mr Jenkin: The right hon. Lady makes a necessary contribution to this debate and she asks a very interesting question about the banning of other unacceptable weapons systems while we continue to possess nuclear weapons. But is it not the case that nuclear weapons represent, in the psychology of our global civilisation, an unacceptable threshold of use? Therefore, they have a deterrent effect because the release of one weapon could release many. I ask her this question: why, since the end of the second world war when nuclear weapons were first deployed, did war between the great powers end? Why was that the last world war? Could the possession of nuclear weapons have something to do with it?

Dame Joan Ruddock: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman does not know his history. There have been hundreds of wars since that time and hundreds of thousands of people have died. Many of the wars were proxy wars between the superpowers, so his argument is completely invalid. If he argues that deterrence is so wonderful because the weapons are never used, then he has to ask: why have them at all? Let us get rid of them rather than posture and spend vast fortunes and create a situation in which, at the very least, accidents and misjudgments could happen. The point about luck is that eventually it runs out, and that could happen.

It is instructive to inquire how other countries and institutions view the nuclear weapon states. I had an opportunity to find that out last December when I attended a conference organised by the Austrian Government on the humanitarian effects of the use of nuclear weapons, to which the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) has already referred. Building on two previous meetings hosted by Norway and Mexico, this conference was attended by representatives of no fewer than 157 Governments. Most telling were the contributions of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent, the bodies on which the whole world depends, regardless of politics, in cases of natural disaster. Let me quote from their statement:

“Even though only a few states currently possess nuclear weapons, they are a concern to all states... They can only bring us to a catastrophic and irreversible scenario that no one wishes and to which no one can respond in any meaningful way.”

Their statement continues:

“All other weapons of mass destruction, namely chemical and biological weapons, have been banned. Nuclear weapons—which have far worse consequences than those weapons—must now be specifically prohibited and eliminated as a matter of urgency.”

I do not think that there is anyone who could not respect a statement from the Red Cross and the Red Crescent.

John Woodcock *rose*—

Dame Joan Ruddock: I am just about to finish.

After the conference, the Austrian Government issued a pledge in which they promised

“to identify and pursue effective measures to fill the legal gap for the prohibition...of nuclear weapons”.

About 40 countries have already signified their support for progressing towards an international treaty that could ban all nuclear weapons.

The renewal of Trident flies in the face of such international action and it must not be allowed to do so. The real threats to this country are cyber-warfare, terrorism, climate change and pandemics. We need all the resources we can muster to confront these threats and we cannot afford to squander billions of pounds on a weapons system that by general consent can never be used.

2.10 pm

Oliver Colville (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): I declare an interest in that I am a trustee of VERTIC—the Verification Research, Training and Information Centre, a charity that carries out the verification of nuclear disarmament. I am also the vice-chairman of the all-party parliamentary group for the armed forces, with special responsibility for the Royal Marines and the Royal Navy. This is an issue about which I feel very strongly.

As you might know, Madam Deputy Speaker, on my election in 2010 I submitted a paper for the 2010 strategic defence and security review. I am preparing my contribution for the next SDSR in 2015, in which I argue that we should spend at least 2% of GDP on the defence of this country. I would also urge those in the Treasury, if they are listening, to take the cost of the nuclear deterrent out of the defence budget. I confirm my commitment to our retaining our nuclear deterrent because, in my opinion, it is the cornerstone of our membership of NATO and of our seat on the UN Security Council.

I represent Devonport, the only UK dockyard with a nuclear licence, so I can speak with some relevance about how my constituency is on the front line of defending our maritime interests. Nobody knows what the outcome of May's general election will be, but the Scottish National party, the Greens and Plaid Cymru have all made it quite clear that they will not enter coalition with the Conservatives. According to *The Independent* on 15 December, the SNP, Plaid Cymru and the Greens, as their price for supporting the Labour party in a hung Parliament, would demand the scrapping of Britain's nuclear weapons programme.

The Liberal Democrats appear still to be opposed to renewing Trident. Earlier today, I checked their website. That is an interesting thing to do and I encourage Members to do it. It clearly states:

“Britain's nuclear deterrent, which consists of four Trident submarines, is out-dated and expensive. It is a relic of the Cold War and not up-to-date in 21st century Britain. Nowadays, most of our threats come from individual terrorist groups, not communist countries with nuclear weapons.

The Liberal Democrats are the only main party willing to face up to those facts.

The UK has four Trident submarines on constant patrol, which are nearing the end of their life. A decision needs to be made about what we do to replace them.

It would be extremely expensive and unnecessary to replace all four submarines, so we propose to replace some of the submarines instead. They would not be on constant patrol but could be deployed if the threat from a nuclear-armed country increased.

This would keep Britain safe while allowing us to move down the nuclear ladder in a realistic and credible way. While we cannot predict the future, making this first move on the road to international nuclear disarmament is the right thing to do.”

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): We either have deterrents or we do not. It is not a grey area, it is not a mishmash: we either have them or we do not. We cannot have a part-time deterrent, as it does not work. It is not part of the strategy.

Oliver Colville: That was what I was coming to. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has repeatedly said, such an approach would mean that we would have only a part-time deterrent. We would depend on a part-time enemy. No doubt we could also go on holiday all the time.

Dr Julian Lewis: May I commend to my hon. Friend and the whole House the lyrics of a song that was prevalent at the Liberal Democrats' last conference, which came from their own side? Sadly, I have not committed all the verses to memory, but they were wonderful, and the chorus was, “We believe in a part-time submarine.” It was sung to the tune of “Yellow Submarine”, made famous by the Beatles.

Oliver Colville: I thank my hon. Friend for that.

Scrapping or even reducing the number of nuclear submarines would have a devastating impact on my constituency and on Plymouth's travel-to-work economy and skills base. No SNP, Green or Plaid Cymru Members have talked about the importance of nuclear submarines to my constituency and I hope that my comments on Plymouth will be in accord with the views of the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Alison Seabeck), who is unable to comment as she sits on the Opposition Front Bench. In the past we have had a similar approach and I am sure that we will continue to do so. I hope that I and my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Mr Streeter), my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr Cox), my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Sheryll Murray) and the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View, all of whom have constituencies in the Plymouth travel-to-work area, speak with one voice on this issue, which involves Devonport's future. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister again for the £2.6 billion of investment in the future of Devonport announced last September. That will secure 3,000 to 4,000 jobs over the next four years.

Retaining Britain's nuclear deterrent, a strategic concept that seeks to prevent war, is a key element of and cornerstone in the defence of our country. It is a vital ingredient of our membership of NATO and of our relationship with the United States, which is our strongest ally, and it ensures our seat on the UN Security Council. It helps to prevent attacks from would-be aggressors and stops other countries from using their nuclear arsenal to try to blackmail us. The United Kingdom is an island nation that is dependent on protecting its trade routes, which means that we need a strong Royal Navy.

Our ownership of this highly successful deterrent came about after the bombing of Hiroshima, which brought about the very dramatic final phase of world war two. I note that there has been no mention in the debate of Hiroshima, the event that ended the second world war. Like a slap in the face, it shocked the world

[*Oliver Colville*]

with its catastrophic implications, which were so dramatic that no one has ever dared to push international conflicts to a point at which any country has used nuclear weapons again.

The nuclear deterrent has been Britain's most effective insurance policy and it continues to play a significant role in maintaining peace throughout the world. Unpredictable countries such as Iran and North Korea, which are threatening to develop nuclear capabilities, make it vital that Britain retains its nuclear deterrent. It continues to act as a pressure point—conventional capabilities cannot and will not have the same deterrent effect as nuclear weapons. To quote the Prime Minister, it is the “ultimate weapon of defence”.

Indeed, the development of nuclear weapons since Hiroshima continues to have a significant impact on those veterans who were dispatched to Christmas Island, Montebello and Malden Island to take part in the tests that made the nuclear deterrent we are discussing today possible. I pay tribute to them and encourage the Government to try to look after those people. We must remember that we owe them a great debt of gratitude and it would be most helpful if my hon. Friend the Minister paid tribute to them when he winds up the debate.

For Plymouth, the deterrent is not just a defence weapon but a key part of our local economy, as well as of the national economy. It helps us retain our skills base, especially in Devonport, which is part of my constituency, and, of course, in Barrow-in-Furness. Devonport dockyard, which is responsible for refuelling and refitting our nuclear submarines, is a vital part of our local economy as more than 25,000 people in the Devonport travel-to-work area depend on defence for their livelihood. The mind-boggling announcement by the Liberal Democrats that the UK should move away from a continuous at-sea deterrent and reduce the number of submarines from four to three would have a devastating impact on my city's economy. Their insistence that the main-gate decision should be delayed until after 2015 has produced real uncertainty in our local economy.

If the ill-minded desire of the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish national party, Plaid Cymru and the Greens were to become reality, it could damage not only the livelihoods of 25,000 people but the skills base in a city with a low-skills and low-wage economy. It would damage the job prospects of those young people who are at the university technical college in Devonport, which is set to give youngsters an education that will eventually deliver a skilled work force who want to be employed in our dockyard. The measure would be most unhelpful.

A reduction in the number of nuclear submarines would mean less refitting work, and our highly skilled work force in the dockyard would have to move elsewhere in the country, which would also be problematic for the local economy. Given the importance of Devonport to the south-west economy and the defence of our nation, I find it extraordinary that the majority of the smaller parties in the House are doing everything they can to delay main gate for the Trident replacement. It is quite apparent that the future security of our country is going to be one of the bargaining tools that they can use in any negotiations that they have with Labour, should the result of the general election be a score draw, as happened in 2010.

Sadly, the leader of the Labour party has not said that the future of four nuclear submarines and a continuous at-sea deterrent is not up for negotiation in any potential coalition or supply and demand agreement. At least we now know that only an outright Conservative victory will ensure that our country will continue to play a significant part in global politics and that we have the necessary tools to defend ourselves. That is why I will continue to use the Royal Navy's truly excellent toast from the Napoleonic wars: confusion to the enemy on this issue so that we can ensure that Drake's drum can be put away for the next five years and we will not hear a drum beat for many a year yet.

2.22 pm

Mr Roger Godsiff (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab): May I say at the outset that I have never been a member of CND, and am never likely to be a member? I have always supported NATO, and I did so at a time when there was great controversy about NATO and its role in the cold war. I have always believed that NATO is the most successful mutual defence pact in history. It kept the peace in Europe for 50 years until the end of the cold war, and it gave rise to the American nuclear umbrella, which I support, because I have no ethical objection to nuclear weapons. Of course, I would prefer a world without them.

Pete Wishart: We have not had the pleasure and privilege of a Labour spokesperson contributing to the debate, and we all very much look forward to that. Will the hon. Gentleman tell me whether the Labour party will oppose the motion, or is it going to abstain? What is his Whip telling him to do?

Mr Godsiff: I have not had the pleasure of being asked to be a Labour spokesperson, so I cannot answer that question. What I can tell the hon. Gentleman is that I will go into the same Lobby as him, and I shall explain why.

I have no ethical objections to nuclear capability or to nuclear weapons. As I said, NATO is the most successful mutual defence pact the world has ever seen. It has never attacked anyone, unlike the Warsaw pact, and it kept the peace in Europe for 50 years. I am one of the people who regret the change in strategy that resulted in NATO becoming the world's policeman. That was dangerous, and it has put enormous strains on NATO, but it is still an effective mutual defence pact. I shall argue that that is how we get our security, rather than with the mythical idea that we have an independent nuclear deterrent. There are two myths.

Bob Stewart: I do not think that it is mythical. We have command and control. The management of some of the systems is based on the east coast of America when we change them, but command and control arrangements are entirely ours, so the deterrent is independent.

Mr Godsiff: I am coming on to that. Let me deal with, in my opinion, myth No. 1. The UK has four nuclear submarines. Each can carry up to eight missiles, and each missile can carry up to five nuclear warheads. That is 40 nuclear weapons of the 17,000 that the Minister said are in existence. The UK does not own the missiles on its submarines. It leases Trident II D5 missiles from

the United States, where they are made, maintained and tested. Our four submarines have to go to the American naval base in Georgia to have those missiles fitted. If Members like to believe that somehow that means that we are an independent nuclear power, so be it, but I would say that we are totally dependent on America. I do not oppose our being dependent in defence on America; I am a strong supporter of the Atlantic alliance, but I am not a supporter of mythology.

Mr Jenkin: If the United States withdrew co-operation for the maintenance of our nuclear deterrent, the fact is that the capabilities with which they provide us have a long lead time, so we would have time to develop our own indigenous capacity to provide those capabilities. There is no point in our doing so while the US is happy to share the costs with us and help us to provide a cheaper, better-value nuclear deterrent.

Mr Godsiff: I take note of what the hon. Gentleman has said, but we are where we are. We acquired these weapons from the USA.

Dr Julian Lewis: The hon. Gentleman, as always, is being very thoughtful on the subject. What he has said is true: the missile bodies are from a common pool that we share with the Americans. What makes a weapon system independent is not who manufactures it, and not who co-owns it—it is who is in a position to launch it if the need arises. There would be an enormous lead time to any withdrawal of the sort of co-operation that we need from America, so if there were any attempt at a surprise attack on the UK, because America does not have its finger on our nuclear trigger, the independent system is exactly that.

Mr Godsiff: The hon. Gentleman is knowledgeable about defence issues, but he will recognise that one of NATO's founding beliefs was, and still is, that an attack on one is an attack on all. The view that the country could be subject to a nuclear attack without the response of the American nuclear umbrella is, in my opinion, inconceivable, and is completely contrary to what NATO is and why it has been successful.

Rory Stewart (Penrith and The Border) (Con): Is there not a paradox? If we reduced the nuclear arsenals so that only the United States and NATO possessed one we would have the problem that an attack on one would be a response by one. The absence of diversity would make the NATO structure much less resilient.

Mr Godsiff: I have consistently said throughout this speech that I believe our security is based on our membership of NATO. I strongly support NATO and always have, and I strongly support the basis on which NATO was set up, which is that an attack on one is an attack on all. The idea that just because one country, America, which provides the nuclear umbrella, has far, far more nuclear capability than our 40 missiles or than the French nuclear capability—

Rory Stewart: I am trying to understand this more broadly, strategically speaking. Is this not in danger of being an argument simply that the whole of NATO should be freeloading on the United States?

Mr Godsiff: The hon. Gentleman says that we are freeloading on the United States. In fact, NATO has taken part, I think wrongly, in actions to be the world's policeman where its component forces, not just Americans but British and other participants, have gone into theatres of operations as part of the collective NATO force. I would argue that we are far better off maintaining and developing our conventional forces. As the hon. Gentleman knows, there have been incidents where British troops have been killed in the middle east because of a lack of body armour and because some of our machinery has not been fit for purpose. If it is a choice between modernising and maintaining good conventional forces, properly equipped to do the job, and the mythology of an independent nuclear deterrent, I would most certainly go for the conventional forces.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): There is at the moment quite a debate across the United States about freeloading, with a high degree of concern that about 70% of the costs of NATO are paid for by the US. Is my hon. Friend seriously suggesting that we should front-load further costs and renege on our own responsibilities in relation to the nuclear deterrent? I honestly do not think we can say that and hold our heads high in the world. In relation to the body armour, that was an issue of slow procurement, not cost.

Mr Godsiff: My hon. Friend is suggesting that if, all of a sudden, we gave up our 40 missiles, America would rush in to create 40 extra missiles to compensate for those that we are not going to have. The Americans have expressed regret to us about cuts that we have made in our conventional forces; they would like us to do more in that regard. I would strongly argue that that is a much greater priority than the myth of our so-called independent nuclear deterrent.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Jenkin *rose*—

Mr Godsiff: May I make some progress, as I have been generous in giving way?

The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile) said that it is absolutely vital that we maintain our nuclear capability because otherwise our position as a member of the United Nations Security Council could be endangered. When the UN was set up in 1947 or 1948 there was only one nuclear power, and that was America. The other five countries that ended up on the Security Council were not nuclear countries; they were the victors of the second world war. If, as he suggests, a country has to have a nuclear capability in order to become a member of the Security Council, that does not say much for our championing, quite rightly, the aspirations of Japan, as a non-nuclear power, to become a member, or Germany's desire to become a member. If that were a criterion, the two obvious applicants would be Israel and North Korea.

Sir Gerald Howarth: The hon. Gentleman refers to the Americans developing their nuclear capability. Does he not accept that the Americans did that, in very large measure, in consultation and in conjunction with the research carried out here in the United Kingdom?

Mr Godsiff: The hon. Gentleman has made his point, and we are where we are. I can only say again that I believe that committing £100 billion to renewing our nuclear capability is not money well spent. I have sat here with my hon. Friends watching Defence Ministers come to the Dispatch Box to announce the cutting of this regiment, the cutting of that regiment, the abolition of the other regiment. Those are massive cuts in a defence capability that should have far greater priority than our so-called independent nuclear deterrent.

The need for our security is of course absolute. We have to ensure that we are protected from attack from without or within. I believe that our security is best achieved through collective action through NATO with other countries, and I believe very strongly in our membership. I also believe that the greatest threat to this country comes not from other countries but from groups, some of which operate outside this country but some of which operate within this country. In a choice between spending money on conventional weapons and improving our internal security or committing £100 billion to a mythical so-called independent deterrent, I know which I would choose. That is why I will be voting against my party and in favour of the motion.

2.37 pm

Sir Nick Harvey (North Devon) (LD): The decision to procure the existing Trident nuclear system was taken in 1980. My starting point is that the world has changed a very great deal since then. Back then, we were at the height of the cold war. We had a known nuclear adversary that had the capability to strike us and had stated its willingness, if provoked, to do so. We, in turn, felt that it was absolutely essential that we had the ability to respond at a moment's notice. Thus it was that we concluded that we needed an inter-continental ballistic missile capable of being launched at a moment's notice, and that because we did not know when our adversary would attack, we would sustain a patrol 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. There was logic in that position.

But, as I say, the world has changed. The cold war is over. The iron curtain has come down. The Soviet Union, which was our known adversary, no longer exists. In 1994, Britain and Russia de-targeted each other and changed their policy to say that we were not nuclear adversaries of each other. Yet nothing changed: since that time, we have continued with 24/7 patrolling. I join the Secretary of State in saluting those who have been involved in sustaining that for all that time. The Royal Navy and all those at the Faslane base and in the supply and support chains have mounted a gargantuan effort to keep continuous at-sea deterrence going, and they deserve great praise for that. It has been at considerable human cost and very substantial financial cost, but it is very much harder to discern quite what practical utility it is fulfilling in 2015 when we do not have a known nuclear adversary.

Pete Wishart: I am loth to interrupt the hon. Gentleman because he is making a very good case, but does not he agree that Trident is a weapons system designed for the Brezhnev of the world, not the bin Ladens and the current threat?

Sir Nick Harvey: As I have said, it was something that we calibrated to be our need in 1980. If one casts one's mind back to 1980, one will see that our conventional defences were very much greater than they are today. The scale of the nuclear deterrent that we mounted at that time was a relatively small proportion of a large defence, but what we are considering now, as we look forward to the next 30 or 40 years, is a much greater proportion of a much smaller defence because of the succession of cuts that have been made since then.

Dr Julian Lewis: The hon. Gentleman says that we can look forward in anticipation of certain types of dangers but that there is no known nuclear threat. May I remind him of how suddenly the crisis in Ukraine blew up; if it were to develop, as it could, into all-out war that then spilled over into Lithuania or Poland, which are NATO members, nuclear deterrents might become very relevant indeed, very quickly.

Sir Nick Harvey: I will come on to talk about the implications and the consequences of using nuclear weapons, but—although the hon. Gentleman is right to say that the security situation in and around Ukraine deteriorated rapidly—I do not accept for one moment that anything that has happened there makes the prospect of nuclear conflict between ourselves and Russia any more likely than it was before all that started.

Mr Jenkin: I remind the hon. Gentleman of the following words:

“I admit to some miscalculations about Russia. I did not calculate how the collective mood of Russia was so ready to respond to a dominant and ruthless leadership...Nor did I expect that the perestroika and glasnost that we welcomed so enthusiastically in this country and elsewhere would become so despised at home in Russia.”—[*Official Report*, 18 March 2014; Vol. 577, c. 670.]

Those were the words of his colleague, the right hon. and learned Member for North East Fife (Sir Menzies Campbell). Why is the right hon. Gentleman so confident that he can predict the future when the right hon. and learned Gentleman has admitted that he was wrong?

Sir Nick Harvey: I am making absolutely no attempt to predict the future; I am talking about the threat that I believe we face now at this point in time. For another nation sate to be taken seriously as a nuclear adversary, it needs a combination of capability and intent. Although it is certainly the case that the Russians and many others have the capability to strike us with a nuclear weapon, I do not believe for one moment that they have the intent to do so. If things should deteriorate in the future, that is a different position, but I do not believe that we face such a threat.

Bob Stewart *rose*—

Sir Nick Harvey: I am going to make some progress and I will take another intervention in a little while.

Our defences have seen round after round of cuts as the financial situation has deteriorated, and later this year we face the gloomy prospect of the whole thing happening all over again. Whatever the outcome of the election, there will be a strategic defence and security review this summer and a comprehensive spending review this autumn.

The Secretary of State dismissed the cost figures offered by the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), who opened the debate for the SNP, but I readily recognise those figures. It is a fact that if we go ahead and build four submarines, they will cost us between £25 billion and £30 billion. It is a fact that running the nuclear deterrent currently costs us £2.9 billion a year, and if we do that for another 30 or 40 years the cost will multiply. Whatever the outcome, at some point we will have to decommission it all at the end, so I would have thought that £100 billion is the very least it would cost. I would take a private guess that the quantum would in fact be well in excess of that figure, but I certainly recognise it as a starting point.

John Woodcock: On the basic maths, if the figure of £2.9 billion is right and, as CND's own estimates say, the £100 billion figure is stretched over the whole lifetime of 50-plus years, could the hon. Gentleman tell me what is £2.9 billion times 50?

Sir Nick Harvey: I was taking the lifetime of the submarines as being more like 25 to 30 years. If we operate them for 25 years at almost £3 billion, that would take us into the realms of £75 billion plus the building and decommissioning costs, which would certainly take us over £100 billion very quickly indeed. I would have thought that, in reality, it will cost a great deal more than that.

We know that the national deficit remains a serious problem and we do not hear from any of the political parties—mine or anybody else's—that defence will be insulated or protected from a tough comprehensive spending review later this year. If defence were to face another cut comparable to that which it took in 2010, which seems entirely possible, the proportion of our gross domestic product that we spend on defence, which is already destined to go below 2% next year, will make rapid headway down towards 1.5%.

We know, however, that on the table for discussion in this summer's SDSR is a whole series of big procurement projects. The two new aircraft carriers are due to have joint strike fighter craft flying off them—we do not know how much their unit cost will be or how many of them we will be able to afford. The Type 26 frigate is due to be built in the next few years, but it is very difficult to know how much that will cost. We need more helicopters and more intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance assets. We need another generation of remotely piloted aircraft. The existing amphibious shipping is due to become redundant in the latter part of this decade and will need replacing if we are going to sustain that capability. The Army's vehicle crisis remains unresolved after the collapse of most of the future rapid effect system programme.

All of those things will be on the table and wrestled over in agony this summer. In addition, paper exercises are already being done looking at what an Army of just 60,000 would look like, because of the financial crunch that the Department will face. Yet, for some reason, keeping a nuclear deterrent going at the level we thought necessary at the height of the cold war in 1980 gets an automatic bye and is assumed to be beyond debate. Nobody even wants to put it on the table and debate it alongside those other things that are there to mitigate the dangers that our own security assessment said in 2010 are first-league threats that we face here and now.

Rory Stewart: The hon. Gentleman has spoken fluently about the kit, but I still do not understand the strategic vision. What threats does he think we face? Why does he think that the frigates are important and that nuclear weapons are not for deterring that threat? What kind of intent does he think Russia has? What kind of obligations does he believe we have for NATO, and why are nuclear weapons irrelevant to that obligation?

Sir Nick Harvey: The 2010 national security strategy identified the primary threats faced by the United Kingdom. Personally, I think it was correct in identifying the threat from international terrorism, cyber-attack, international crime, the security consequences of the sudden mass migrations of peoples, and pandemics as a result of climate change. All of those are very real threats that we face, and they are probably greater than the threat we face from direct state-on-state warfare. We see every day that our armed forces—through, for example, the work they perform off the African coast countering piracy and in the Caribbean countering narcotics—are very flexible and capable of dealing with this wide and diverse range of threats. It is actually maintaining a broad spectrum of capabilities to deal with such diverse situations and the willingness to use them that secures us our place at the United Nations Security Council, not the fact that we happen to be a nuclear state. In any case, we can change the composition of the United Nations Security Council only by unanimity, and there is no reason why the UK should agree to give up its seat.

Paul Flynn: Does the hon. Gentleman recall that representatives from NATO came to my constituency last year? I was very happy to welcome them. Of the 28 countries, 25 are non-nuclear states, and they found no difficulty walking with their heads held high.

Sir Nick Harvey: It is certainly true that very few NATO states possess nuclear weapons, although a few have them on their soil. Other Members have spoken about the nuclear umbrella, but none of us knows how real it is, and let us hope that it is never pushed to the test.

We are asked to focus our minds on whether we should proceed with a replacement programme in 2016. It is not of course the Trident missile that needs replacing, but, as other hon. Members have said, the submarines. I believe that we should be willing to build some more submarines at this time, but I shall add some riders in a moment.

Oliver Colville: The hon. Gentleman is being very good speaking his mind, but I am somewhat confused. Will he vote for or against the motion?

Sir Nick Harvey: If the hon. Gentleman bears with me, I shall do my best to explain my position and where I am coming from.

I profoundly agree that we should not allow the Barrow submarine-building capability to fall apart—if we do not place such orders at that shipyard in the next few years, it will be necessary to give it other contracts—but I do not support the construction of submarines whose sole purpose and capability is to carry a nuclear weapon, thus committing us to a £30 billion investment programme with but one purpose and forcing us to be a nuclear

[*Sir Nick Harvey*]

power for the next 30 and 40 years unless we are prepared to write off a capital investment of that scale.

The United States has used some of its Ohio class submarines for quite different purposes. The US has developed a means of firing conventional weapons through their missile tubes, and it has used those submarines in a tactical role and in support of special forces operations. To my mind, it is certainly the case that if we are to build new submarines—I think we should, for the reasons I have given—we must ensure that they are capable of performing other functions, as the United States has done with its large submarines.

Dr Julian Lewis: The hon. Gentleman is being terribly generous in giving way. The fact is that his party's policy, strange though it is, is to build another two Trident submarines, however they are deployed. Does it not follow logically, given the terms of the motion, that the hon. Gentleman and his party should vote with us against it?

Sir Nick Harvey: No, because that would imply that we were in favour of a full-scale, like-for-like replacement of the Trident programme. [*Interruption.*] If one is going to be pedantic, the motion refers to a missile system that is not due for replacement for some years. In fact, what needs to be decided in the next year or so is whether we shall build new submarines. I think we should, but if we make such an investment, it is essential that the submarines are capable of performing other functions. I do not believe that it makes any sense whatever for us to sail the high seas 24/7, waving weapons of mass destruction at the rest of the world, because we thought it was necessary in 1980 or because we would be left looking embarrassed if we did not make that £30 billion investment.

The Defence Secretary seemed to suggest that to adopt any deployment posture other than continuous at-sea deterrence was somehow risible and laughable, but many sensible studies by serious people have looked at a ladder of different postures for the UK to take. My belief is that we should for the time being retain the components of a nuclear deterrent—the warhead, and the ability to look after it; the missile, and the arrangement with the Americans; and the submarines capable of firing a nuclear weapon—and maintain a highly skilled work force that is regularly exercised in how to put back together the deterrent's components. NATO air-based nuclear systems in eastern Europe operate on the same basis of a well exercised drill to put the pieces of the deterrent together if it is thought necessary.

Bob Stewart: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Nick Harvey: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment, as I said I would.

In this day and age, it does not make sense for us to go out to sea armed with nuclear weapons and on patrol when we do not believe, on our own assessment, that we face a primary threat. I do not believe that we have a nuclear adversary at this time, but in future we might reach a different conclusion and believe that the international security situation had so deteriorated that we faced a nuclear adversary. For that purpose, it seems

to me to make sense to keep the component parts of the nuclear deterrent and the ability to put them together again should we ever need it.

I do not at all accept that that would be a part-time deterrent. I do not believe that the Royal Air Force—or the Army or the Navy for that matter—represents a deterrent to a potential enemy only when on patrol. The fact that it is known to have the capabilities it has is in itself a deterrent. If one wanted to be pedantic and to cling to the belief that it has a deterrent effect only when on patrol, let me make it perfectly clear that I am proposing patrols not for part of the time but for none of the time. I propose that we simply retain nuclear capability as a contingency against a future situation where we made an assessment that we needed to operate a patrol.

Bob Stewart: When I studied the strategy of deterrence, it was predicated on the fact that a country deters by being ready to strike back, and that deterrence therefore works. We cannot deter by saying, "Well, in a couple of weeks' time, we might actually fire something at you," or whatever. The whole point of deterrence is that we do not want anything to happen, and it works because everyone is frightened to do anything.

Sir Nick Harvey: I do not think that I have made my point quite clear to the hon. Gentleman. I do not believe that we have a nuclear adversary, but I am saying that we should keep the component parts of the deterrent for the time being so that if in future we concluded that we did have such an adversary, we could resume patrols. I am absolutely with him in saying that for something to have a deterrent effect, it needs to be mobilised and deployed in a timely matter, but I simply do not accept his proposition that—out of the blue, out of nowhere—an adversary will pop up who wishes to do us irreparable harm and to take the global consequences of doing so.

Mrs Moon: The hon. Gentleman is very kind to give way. He was a Minister at the time of the strategic defence and security review, and he signed up to it. I did not agree with many parts of that review, but it made it very plain that this country has nuclear opponents and that there is a nuclear threat. Has his opinion therefore changed not just since the 1980s but since 2010, because that is what he is saying?

Sir Nick Harvey: I remind the hon. Lady that the national security strategy identified such a nuclear attack as a second level threat. I believe that we have potential nuclear adversaries, but I do not believe that we have actual nuclear adversaries at the moment. To be an actual adversary requires a combination of capability and intent. I can see plenty of countries with the capability but none with the intent, and countries that may have an intent to launch a nuclear weapon at us in future are still a considerable way away from having such a capability. If any of that should change, and if any future Government should arrive at a different calculation and believe there was an enemy with both capability and intent, they would need to revisit our posture.

Trident should be retained on a flexible basis that can be ramped up or down according to our reading of the security situation, which is exactly how we approach all our other military capability. The rest of our military

capability is not kept on constant patrol on the basis that that is the only point at which it has any deterrent effect; it is kept at different levels of readiness, according to our assessment of the particular threat that it is designed to mitigate.

Dame Joan Ruddock: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the one scenario in which there could be an instant attack, without the build-up and norms of international discussions or whatever, would be a terrorist nuclear attack, not state sponsored but by something like ISIS? In those circumstances, does he agree that our nuclear weapons system is completely useless and does not deter?

Sir Nick Harvey: The right hon. Lady makes a good point. If a threat emerges from nowhere, it will be either at the hands of terrorists or a by rogue state sponsored by terrorists, against which a conventional state-on-state nuclear deterrent of the sort that we have would have absolutely no value or purpose. It is important to remember that we have moral and legal obligations to try to bring about global nuclear disarmament, and with one notable exception I hope that all Members of the House believe that that is a desirable objective.

In 1968 the non-proliferation treaty was in effect a pact between the nuclear states that were going to use their best endeavours to negotiate away their weapons and the rest of the world that agreed not to develop nuclear programmes. In terms of non-proliferation the treaty has been moderately successful, but it has made astonishingly little progress on disarmament. Very few signatories to that treaty can have imagined that by 2015 so little progress would have been made. Things are stirring and changing, and the British Government need to wake up to that. More than 150 nation states have attended international conferences and considered in detail and depth the humanitarian consequences of using nuclear weapons.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Philip Dunne): The hon. Gentleman is being very generous with his time, but his remarks are taking Liberal Democrat policy into a new out-of-body, out-of-mind, out-of-space dimension. Some points are unclear from his remarks, and I would be grateful if he would be clear about them before he concludes his speech. I think he said that his party's policy now is to have all the components and capability delivery of a nuclear system but with none of them joined up, and therefore with none capable of being trained and exercised in a way that—as he will know from his time as Minister for the armed forces—takes months if not years to deliver. There would therefore be no deterrent capability at all: not a part-time deterrent, but no deterrent. How will he vote tonight?

Sir Nick Harvey: I invite the Minister to look at how the NATO air-based nuclear capability in eastern Europe operates, because what I am describing is a precise replica of what goes on there. That capability is not on constant patrol or constantly armed; it exists in its component parts, and there is a well-rehearsed exercise for mobilising it and putting it together. Does that have a deterrent impact? I believe it does. If anybody intends to strike faster than that capability can be put together again perhaps it would not, but who is going to do that?

This brings us to the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, which I think are singularly under-perceived in this country and many others, although that is changing fast. The participation of many Governments at conferences—the first in Oslo, the second in Mexico, and the most recent in Vienna—is bringing a far greater degree of awareness around the globe of the impact of using nuclear weapons. I do not believe that the public that has come of age since 1983—the last time we had a meaningful national debate about our nuclear deterrent—understand what the consequences of unleashing the payload of one of our Vanguard submarines, armed with Trident missiles, would constitute.

If one of our submarines were to unleash its payload against, for instance, Moscow—those were the traditional criteria on which we based our capability—I think that some people in this country, possibly even in the House, labour under the misapprehension that the consequences would be pretty grim for people in Moscow and perhaps not very clever for those a few hundred miles around. In reality, if we were to unleash the payload of one of our submarines, the consequences would be global and felt for at least a decade, and at least a billion people would be at risk of dying. The more widely that is understood, the more inconceivable it is that any sane person could ever push the button, and the more widely that is understood, the less deterrent effect the possession of this great paraphernalia comes to have.

Dr Julian Lewis: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that although the British deterrent is used all the time to deter, the only scenario in which it is conceivable that it would be fired would be in retaliation for someone having fired a nuclear salvo against us? Therefore, all the consequences that he mentions would already have happened, and the only question would be whether it would be worthwhile replying under those terrible circumstances. The purpose is to prevent anyone firing the weapons in the first place, and that is how we avoid the environmental consequences.

Sir Nick Harvey: I am surprised to hear the hon. Gentleman make that case, because I believe he is right. After such a volley had been unleashed against us, no earthly good could possibly be done by firing one back in retaliation, and the more we think our way through that, the more pointless the whole exercise becomes. Indeed, it is not simply pointless, but the rest of the world is becoming increasingly irate about the complacency of those who continue to have these weapons while saying to everybody else, “You’ve got not right to them, but we’re all right, Jack. We’re going to have them.” That situation is not sustainable for much longer, and it was regrettable that the P5 boycotted the first two conferences. It is much to be welcomed that there was British, American and even Chinese attendance at the most recent conference, because I predict an increasing clamour from other countries around the globe for the nuclear states to begin taking steps down the nuclear ladder. Traditionally that has been done by reducing the stockpile of warheads, but today I have attempted to explain that there are other ways of doing that, and the posture we strike and the way we use our capabilities has an important part to play. It is not 1980 and we do not face the threats we thought we faced then; it is a very different world and there is a way for us to begin climbing down the nuclear ladder. We have the opportunity to do that, and we should take that opportunity and get on with it.

3.8 pm

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): It is a treat to follow the hon. Member for North Devon (Sir Nick Harvey), and the House should take a moment to appreciate his tenacity. This is a man who at the last election spearheaded his party's drive not to have deterrent successor submarines at all, but to have an entirely new form—a mini-deterrent, with adapted Astute submarines and nuclear-tipped cruise missiles. The Liberal Democrats were so sure of that policy that they put it before the electorate. It was not successful, but they retained it. As Minister, the hon. Gentleman was so determined that he persuaded the Government to fund the Trident alternatives review. That review took 18 months or two years to examine that option exhaustively, finally to conclude what we had been saying all along, which is that the policy was complete nonsense and would cost even more than the current system and be far less efficient.

The hon. Gentleman is not deterred by that. In the manner of a child jumping from sandcastle to sandcastle as the tide comes in, he seeks to find new ways to differentiate himself from the Opposition while never saying the words, after his exhaustive speech, that he is a unilateralist and his party is a unilateralist party. There is an absurdity—I think I have it right—to having not a part-time deterrent, but a no-time, or IKEA, deterrent that he could put together at some point. IKEA furniture can be difficult to assemble, but it does not take the months or years that his proposal would take. In the meantime, would we put glass in the submarines so they can become public viewing vessels? Could they carry grain, so that they could become underwater famine relief vessels, which is one of the more famous suggestions from the unilateralist CND members in my constituency? What is it? Tell the House, or is he going to leave this policy until the election to reveal it?

Mr MacNeil: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that famine relief vessels are a crazy idea?

John Woodcock: Goodness! If the hon. Gentleman wants to tell me that firing grain out of the torpedo tubes of the successor to Vanguard-class submarines is an effective use of public money, then he should go ahead. I will come on to his policy in a little while, if he does not mind.

Dr Julian Lewis: I am greatly enjoying the hon. Gentleman's speech. Coming back to the real world, is it not the case that the need to have a continuous at-sea deterrent follows directly from the fact that we have a minimum strategic deterrent? We only have four submarines. At any one time only one or two of them can use or fire their missiles—they use them all the time to deter—but the fact is that if we did not have one continuously at sea, a surprise attack would wipe out the whole capacity.

John Woodcock: That is exactly right, which is why a part-time deterrent is no real deterrent at all. The point of having submarines that are continuously at sea means that they are, in effect, completely invulnerable. If, in a future nightmare scenario, the UK was seriously threatened by a nuclear attack, any potential nuclear adversary would know that they could not fire without being fired on. Even if they flattened the UK, they would always face the counter-strike. That is why it is a genuine deterrent and makes a nuclear attack less likely.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): Was my hon. Friend not surprised to hear the hon. Member for North Devon (Sir Nick Harvey) say that his strategy is to try to acquire a nuclear weapon if it turned out we might need one? If someone fired on us it would be pointless responding by then. Potential adversaries of Britain would know that if they fired at a Liberal Democrat Government our response would be too late.

John Woodcock: Exactly. The fact is that the hon. Gentleman does not believe it. He and his party should come clean that they are unilateralists and stop this charade of ever-new inventive fantastical solutions.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

John Woodcock: I will give way, but then I really want to take up less time than others have done.

Mrs Moon: Does my hon. Friend think that the world is a safer place since 1980? North Korea and Russia have increased their arsenals, Pakistan's arsenal has grown exponentially and Iran is trying to develop a nuclear capability. Are we actually safer since 1980?

John Woodcock: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The global situation is profoundly unstable. Whether or not there is a nuclear adversary precisely at this moment, we simply cannot say what will be the case in the next 20, 30 or 40 years. That is the decision we are making now: what threats we will face while other countries are increasing, rather than decreasing, their arsenals.

Labour is proud of its record on non-proliferation. My right hon. Friend the Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) was the Labour Foreign Secretary who committed the UK to a “global zero”—a world completely free from nuclear weapons. Britain was the first nuclear state in the world to sign up, before President Obama, before Russia—although it has clearly reneged on what it said—and, to the best of my knowledge, before either of the parties who have proposed the motion. They were busy thinking small, as is their wont. They were telling Scots that the answer to this issue was to expel nuclear submarines a couple of hundred miles south of the border—they are not coming to Barrow, by the way. They did that while having the cheek—I am not sure whether this is parliamentary language or not, Madam Deputy Speaker—to have the unbridled hypocrisy to say that nuclear weapons were grotesque and inhuman, but that they wished an independent Scotland to remain part of the specifically nuclear alliance of NATO.

Crispin Blunt: I realise that, as the hon. Gentleman represents Barrow and Furness, he might have a slightly different answer to this question than other hon. Members, but at what point and at what cost does this weapon system cease to be a proper value-for-money decision for the United Kingdom? How much of the defence budget does it need to take before he would say, “Actually, we are better off investing in other weapon systems that are much, much more likely to be used”? What would his number be?

John Woodcock: I will come on to figures later; I will make some progress first.

We will not insult people by saying that Trident is effectively fine as long as it is not coloured tartan. We are a party whose ambition is big. We have acted by reducing stockpiles and reducing to a single nuclear platform the minimum credible independent deterrent that it is responsible to maintain while others hold a threat that one day could be used to blackmail the United Kingdom. We led the world on “global zero” and we will lead again in government. Britain is an outward-looking country that shoulders its responsibilities. It will make genuine progress through multilateral negotiation, not futile unilateral gestures.

Labour is not a unilateralist party. I was at a CND “ban the bomb” demonstration at RAF Molesworth. I think it was in 1984 and I was aged five. If my mum will forgive me, I appreciate the fruit gums she gave me on that day but we are not going back to those days—we have moved on as a party. I listened carefully to my right hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Dame Joan Ruddock), who has had to leave for a constituency engagement, but I was left questioning her opening statement. She called herself a multilateralist, but scrapping the programme to replace the ageing Vanguard-class deterrent submarines is tantamount to unilateral disarmament—not today, but a decade or so hence, once the Vanguard-class submarines are no longer seaworthy. As a result of the delays in bringing their successor into service, they are now projected to be the longest-serving submarines in the history of the Royal Navy, but they cannot go on for ever. At that point, we would lose our nuclear capability for ever, yet we cannot possibly know what threats we will face in decades hence. Not only would it put our security at risk, but for any genuine multilateralist, it would be a missed opportunity to encourage other countries and bind them into a deal that makes genuine progress across the world.

The construction taking place in my constituency, and in all parts of the UK, is among the most highly skilled, cutting-edge engineering in the world. We cannot just put these submarines on hold and then pick them up when they might come in handy some years down the track. While a “global zero” remains beyond the horizon, we will finish the programme of renewal that we started in government but which this Administration have delayed to the point that there is precious little contingency left.

The investment announced is significant, but the £100 billion is highly flimsy at best. We do not accept the figure, but—imagining that we did—let me put it into the context of overall UK Government spending, on current levels, over those 50-plus years, a time period that never makes it on to CND posters. According to my office’s estimate, all things being equal, Government spending over those 50 years will be £35,700 billion, which I am told is £3.7 quadrillion—not a number I have used before. Within that, pensions would account for £7,160 billion, and health for £6,475 billion—I used to work for my right hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown), but not even he would use such figures. Education would account for £4,510 billion, and conventional defence for £2,115 billion. Over that period, the £100 billion figure does not seem quite the show-stopper unilateralists would have us believe.

Crispin Blunt: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

John Woodcock: I will not. I have given way once, and I want others to speak.

With money so tight, my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) understandably ordered his defence team to re-examine the case for renewal and the most cost-effective way of maintaining the minimum credible deterrent, to which we have always been committed, and it concluded that the submarine-based, strategic, continuously at-sea system remained overwhelmingly the most appropriate system for the UK, and that the most cost-effective way to deliver it was to continue with the successor submarine-building programme, which we began in government and will be voted on in the next Parliament.

It is for the nationalists to explain why they are seeking to prioritise unilateral disarmament by making it, as far as I understand it, their one red line in any future coalition talks—they would prioritise it over all the pressing issues of health, jobs, education and the economy that matter to the people of Scotland and Wales. It is also for them to say how their stance fits with their desire to remain a member of NATO. But Labour’s view is settled. The Leader of the Opposition will never accept an irresponsible deal that trades the nuclear security of future generations in a deeply uncertain world for nationalist support to enter Downing street. We will carry on campaigning for a Labour majority. Plaid Cymru and the SNP can dream on.

3.24 pm

Rory Stewart (Penrith and The Border) (Con): It is a great privilege to follow the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), who gave an extremely eloquent, entertaining and serious speech.

I will try to speak briefly. The great challenge here is to try to work out, after nearly 60 or 70 years of this debate, what new there is to say. The huge ethical issues that have been raised by Opposition members and the huge strategic issues that have been raised on this side of the House have been gone through again and again.

The one thing we should perhaps say is that, at the beginning of the 21st century, certain kinds of argument should no longer be relevant. The first argument that I do not believe we should be having is fundamentally an argument about economics. This is a large question. As was pointed out by Opposition Members, it is a question of Armageddon. It is question of deep, deep strategy. This is the fifth-largest economy in the world and we should not be making the decision on whether to keep nuclear weapons on the basis of either the belief that we could save some money by cutting them or alternatively the belief that we should retain them in order to keep some jobs in a marginal constituency. It is much more important than that.

What can we say? The first thing that we notice is that the nature of deterrence and the threats that we face have changed. The threats that we are facing now, particularly posed by Russia in Ukraine, which has been raised again and again, are not exactly the same as the kind of threats raised by the Soviet Union. I say absolutely straight out that I will be voting in favour of the retention of the Trident nuclear deterrent. It is a very important thing for us to do. But I have enormous respect for the people on the Opposition Benches who have anxieties about it, and it is to them that I want to address a few short remarks.

[Rory Stewart]

The history of the last 30 years, unfortunately, has shown that the kind of arguments made by people in favour of nuclear disarmament were, in the end—although well intentioned and frequently led by impressive intellectuals, bishops and scholars—proved wrong. In the end, it turned out that the people who were characterised as Dr Strangelove—the people written off as irrational and macho—had a better understanding of the mentality of Stalin and a better idea of how to protect western Europe. They should be thanked for the work they did, which contributed in no small way to ensuring that, today, we have had 70 years of the greatest and most productive and prosperous period of peace in Europe conceivable. We should also thank the Labour party for its contribution to the setting up of NATO and the commitment it has made to the nuclear deterrent since the second world war. We should continue to work together on this.

But the threat that we now face is a different one. We do not know what Putin is doing and before we decide how to deter him, we need to work out what the threat is. Is he intending to use nuclear weapons? We have noticed, for example, that he has been investing heavily in his tactical nuclear arsenal. He has also committed a great deal of money towards modernising his nuclear arsenal. He has been running exercises recently, including the deployment of a nuclear bomber to Venezuela. At the same time, the activities in which he is engaged, and which have been laid out by his chief of staff Gerasimov, are all arranged around the idea of ambiguous warfare, almost at the very opposite end of the spectrum from nuclear war; the use of special forces, intelligence operatives and cyber warfare to create a situation such as in Donetsk where he continues to be able to try to claim deniability while putting Russian special forces and Russian weapons in on the ground. The question for us in coming up with a deterrent is how we deal with that threat.

What does the United States do to protect NATO? What is the United Kingdom prepared to do to protect NATO? Listening to the debate, I am not clear—I would be interested to hear what the shadow Spokesman says on this—as to what Britain is proposing to do with our nuclear weapons if Russia were to attack a Baltic state. We knew what we were proposing to do in the 1980s. The basic concept of the tripwire was that we had forces on the ground and were the Soviet Union to attack those forces, nuclear weapons would be fired at Moscow. In this debate there now seems to be some ambiguity. Are British nuclear weapons used only to defend British soil, or would they be used to defend the Baltic?

Paul Flynn: Is not the question: what will America do if there is an attack on the Baltic states from Russia? Our involvement in this is peripheral. We do not provide a deterrent; America does. We are clinging to this virility symbol as a gesture of our old national pride when it is not relevant. The whole point of multilateral disarmament is to reduce the number of nations with nuclear weapons down to two. By possessing them we are encouraging other nations to acquire them.

Rory Stewart: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point, but I think the fundamental nature of our disagreement is going to be about our whole relationship

to the NATO structure and the kind of role we wish to play within it. Although the hon. Gentleman is speaking very eloquently about nuclear weapons, I suspect he would also disagree with many Government Members about conventional weapons, and the role we generally play in protecting countries like the Baltic states against attacks from Russia.

Paul Flynn *rose*—

Rory Stewart: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene again, I would be very interested to hear what he proposes Britain should do to defend the Baltic states against such an attack.

Paul Flynn: I know the Baltic states very well: I visited them four times in the '80s and '90s. I am not suggesting that we pretend some fantasy nuclear war is going to take place with us as the main participant. Where we have been successful is in humanitarian interventions in places like East Timor and Sierra Leone. Where we have failed is where we have gone into Iraq and Afghanistan with all guns blazing. We are good at humanitarian intervention and that is where our money should be invested.

Rory Stewart: With respect, as I suspected, the hon. Gentleman is focused on issues like East Timor and humanitarian intervention which have very little to do with the question of NATO. This whole idea of an attack on one being an attack on all is fundamentally predicated on the idea of deterrence. It is fundamentally predicated on the idea that we in the UK, as a major member of NATO, would protect these states if they were attacked, and my suspicion is that the hon. Gentleman has no strategy whatsoever on how to defend them. Giving up on the nuclear weapon is simply a symbol from the hon. Gentleman—a virility symbol, perhaps—of actually giving up in general on our obligations to protect NATO states. If I have misunderstood, I am very happy to take another intervention.

Paul Flynn: The hon. Gentleman is being very generous. If he went to Tallinn or Vilnius and asked the people there who they would look to to defend them if Russia attacked, they would say they look to America, not us.

Rory Stewart: We can, of course, agree with the hon. Gentleman on that. That is true. One of the questions is working out what Britain is going to do, but of course the biggest question for Vladimir Putin is what the United States is going to do. But the reason why these questions, and the uncertainty around them, are relevant is that Vladimir Putin's decisions on whether to use ambiguous warfare, conventional troops or nuclear weapons will be guided by his perception of what we—the United States or Britain—are likely to do in response.

Dr Julian Lewis: Does my hon. Friend agree that the whole point of article 5 of the NATO treaty is not the question of which of the members of NATO an attacked country will look to to get most military help; rather, it is to take any uncertainty out of the question of who will declare war if a NATO country is attacked? Therefore, if a NATO country is attacked, our existing obligations

are to declare war on the attacker. Does that not mean that we must be very careful how widely we extend NATO membership?

Rory Stewart: I agree absolutely, and that is a very important point. This NATO obligation is an unbelievably serious and important obligation. We have stretched it absolutely to its breaking point. If we are going to be serious about it, we have to follow through and that absolutely means we should not be giving guarantees to people we have no intention of protecting. We should not be writing cheques we are not prepared to have cashed.

The nub of this issue is, of course, that deterrence depends not on whether Britain would use a nuclear weapon, but on whether the other side believes that we would use it. Therefore, the most important support for our nuclear warheads lies not in the Trident missiles or even the submarines; it lies in the character of our nation, which is why there is absolutely no point in our having a discussion about a nuclear deterrent without looking at our defence strategy and posture in general. Deterrence cannot make sense if we get ourselves into a situation, which I sometimes worry my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Sir Nick Harvey) is getting himself into, where we believe that simply investing in fancy bits of kit is going to keep us safe. If people do not believe we are going to use them—that we are serious about using them—they will be entirely meaningless.

We can see the problems already, so let us just run through the various justifications that have been laid out here for nuclear weapons. The first was P5 membership. The big question for Britain on P5 membership is whether we are serious about our role in the United Nations at all. Why are we not contributing more to UN peacekeeping?

The subject of Iraq has been raised. The big question on Iraq is not our posturing about caring about terrorism or saying it is a tier 1 threat, but what we are actually doing? At present on the ground outside Kurdistan, while Australia has 300 soldiers, and Italy and Spain are deploying 300, we have exactly three. That means that Britain is not displaying and consistently demonstrating seriousness. This is not about combat troops; it is about being able to analyse the mission, have an intelligent conversation with the Iraqi Government, engage with our coalition allies and play the global role that our enormous defence budget is supposed to provide us with.

On Ukraine and Russia, again, we cannot simply rely on kit; we need to be doing things. The big question for us in Britain is how are we responding to the ambiguous warfare that we can see being propagated in Ukraine? What kind of investments are we making in military intelligence? What kind of investments are we making in cyber and in special forces? How much do we understand the situation on the ground in Ukraine and Russia?

On NATO, it is fine to talk about how important it is for us to be in NATO and to have nuclear weapons, and indeed it is. But it is meaningless if we are not going to stick to the commitments that we made in Wales of 2% of GDP. The most important thing we can do to deter Russia now is to ensure that Russia believes that NATO is serious about defending itself. If we say in a Wales summit that we will spend 2% of GDP, and if we go around telling other countries to spend 2% of GDP—and we should be telling other countries to spend 2% of GDP—we must retain our own promise and commitment, otherwise the nuclear deterrent will not be taken seriously.

Putin will look at us and ultimately conclude that there is a minimal chance of our doing anything if he were to intervene in the Baltic, because in respect of the rapid reaction force commitments, the framework nations—Germany, France and Britain—appear to be struggling to commit in 2016 to maintaining a deployable brigade. It seems to be very difficult to get the countries to work out how that will be funded in 2016. Whereas Russia can deploy 40,000 troops at 72 hours' notice, the NATO deployment rates are running at about six months.

If we do not reach out to the public, which is why this debate is important, if we do not talk about why Britain is a global power, why we care about the Baltic, why we care about the global order, why we set up NATO, why we have nuclear weapons in the first place, all this will be lost.

To conclude, the fundamental rationale for all this depends on something on which the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) and I disagree. This is the nub of the disagreement: do we believe in a world order? Do we believe in NATO? Do we believe Britain is a global power? Do we wish to play a role in the world? If we do, I will vote in favour of those weapons, but the deterrent will not make sense unless the character of the nation is in place, otherwise what we will be doing is creating something a little like the gold inkstand on the Table—a golden pinnacle on top of a cathedral, when the foundations and the structure of that cathedral are lacking and the faith of the nation has been lost.

3.38 pm

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart). There was a time when we paddled together down the Thames in a canoe, I recall, but this afternoon we are certainly not paddling in the same direction at all.

I have been struck by the many themes of this debate. Two themes come to the fore—security and the avoidance of the real issue in its many forms. On security, it seems to be the view of the UK Government—perhaps this is an emerging view—that any Government not holding nuclear weapons are not taking defence and security seriously. That was the view of the Defence Secretary.

The logical upshot of this Pyongyang policy, which may now be the London Tory policy, is that everybody should have nuclear weapons. It is the global equivalent of the USA handgun policy, and we know what trouble that has created in the society of the United States of America and the deaths and destruction caused by widespread armaments, whether they be personal in one society or global across many countries that have weapons of mass destruction.

Under scrutiny, the Defence Secretary's position melted. When I asked him about other Governments not having nukes, he dodged the question, unable to defend his logic. After being pressed further by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), he still could not support his assertions. Despite the assertions and bluster that those who do not have nukes do not take defence and security seriously, the reality is to the contrary. As my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) pointed out earlier, the current NATO Secretary-General and his predecessor are from Norway and Denmark respectively. Are the UK Government

[Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil]

saying that people such as Jens Stoltenberg and Anders Fogh Rasmussen do not take defence and security seriously? I think not.

The Secretary of State went on to say that political parties that do not approve of a deterrent are irresponsible. I challenge him, or members of his Government, to tell me whether it is now the view of the UK Government that any political party in Europe that is opposed to nuclear weapons is irresponsible. Is it the UK Government view that any political party on the globe that is opposed to nuclear weapons is irresponsible? That certainly seems to be what they are saying. My argument is to the contrary: they are being very responsible indeed.

Jim Sheridan (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman will be aware that there are powerful arguments on both sides of the Trident debate, particularly in Scotland, which generates certain strains. Nowhere is that more true than in the hon. Gentleman's party, which recently voted on whether or not an independent Scotland would join NATO. Some members of his party who are genuinely opposed to nuclear weapons voted against joining, and so left the SNP; others voted for an independent Scotland to join NATO as long as the nuclear weapons were somewhere else—the nimby proposals. How did the hon. Gentleman vote on that issue?

Mr MacNeil *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I am not singling out the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Jim Sheridan), but interventions have been far too long, which is making speeches so long that soon we may have to set a time limit. That should not be necessary in a good debate such as this, in which interventions are to be encouraged because they make for a better debate. I simply make a plea for short interventions—I am not singling out the hon. Gentleman—so that everyone can contribute with long speeches and short interventions.

Mr MacNeil: Thank you very much for that guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sure that it will be listened to by all Members present.

In answer to the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North, my hon. Friend the Member for Moray and I led the SNP debate on NATO. The policy seems to have been quite popular. Indeed, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is well aware that the SNP is up in the mid-40s in the polls. Who knows? I may have played my part in securing that. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is very pleased with the SNP's current polling, which could have us winning as many as 50 seats at the general election. Who knows? It is certainly change for the SNP and, by definition, it is change for Labour in Scotland.

Mr Kevan Jones: The hon. Gentleman says that it is SNP policy to join NATO. Does he therefore accept NATO's nuclear umbrella? Would Ministers and armed forces personnel in an independent Scotland sit on the NATO planning group that controls its nuclear deterrent?

Mr MacNeil: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that three of the 25 or 26 members of NATO have nuclear weapons. If we joined NATO, we would of course join other nations that have nuclear weapons, as well as nations that have maritime patrol aircraft, which the UK does not have. That would be an improvement. Scotland would certainly have maritime patrol aircraft.

Mr Jones *rose*—

Mr MacNeil: I have given way enough; I want to make some progress. I have commitments, but if time allows, I will come back to the hon. Gentleman.

I was discussing the Government's use of the term "irresponsible". Why do they use such terms when they know that mainstream opinion is not behind them? It is because they want to create a phoney debate on a phoney choice. They want to give the public a very narrow view on what is actually a very broad mainstream consensus. The SNP, the Greens and Plaid Cymru are in the international mainstream of common sense, not blighted by the hangover of imperial lustre and the narrow thinking that controls too much of the UK debate on this subject.

This week on this issue and last week on austerity, we have seen two dividing lines in Westminster politics: austerity, supported by Labour and the Tories, and nuclear weapons, supported by Labour and the Tories—I am not quite sure where the Liberal Democrats are, but I am sure they will clarify their position. These are the new dividing lines in politics, and these are the choices that people face. This is a tectonic shift in politics.

There are people in the corridors of Westminster who are even talking about the prospect of a Labour-Tory coalition, and even if that is tongue in cheek, it throws up a huge challenge on nuclear weapons and austerity—a challenge squarely laid at the feet of the broadcasters. Do they have a debate based on a false pretence, with Labour and Tory agreeing on nuclear weapons and austerity, or do they do a real public service and show that there are real choices to be made? Any free society should show that and should freely challenge these assertions; otherwise, the impression will be given by the broadcasters that anybody opposed to nuclear weapons is not taking defence and security seriously, and these matters will not be challenged.

Mr Kevan Jones: I challenge the hon. Gentleman again. He says that he wants to be part of NATO, which is SNP policy. Does he therefore agree that he will be joining a nuclear alliance, and that if we had an independent Scotland, members of that Government would sit on the NATO joint nuclear planning policy group? Is it not a fact that the SNP will, by joining NATO, be joining a nuclear alliance, so the hon. Gentleman cannot claim that an SNP Government will be completely non-nuclear?

Mr MacNeil: It seems that the hon. Gentleman did not hear me the first time. By joining NATO, Scotland would be joining a club, 90% of whose members do not have nuclear weapons. Scotland would be one of those nations. The hon. Gentleman seems to be having some difficulty comprehending that—[*Interruption.*] No, he has had his answer, even if he cannot comprehend it. We will fulfil our obligations in NATO. The hon. Gentleman can ask again and again, and he will find the same difficulty in understanding it.

Bob Stewart: But the hon. Gentleman misses the point. Scotland would be a member of the nuclear planning group, even though it did not have nuclear weapons on its soil. If the SNP were to rule Scotland, would it be a member of the NPG or not? Everyone else is!

Mr MacNeil: The hon. Gentleman tempts me on the rule of Scotland, but my final word on this is that we will fulfil our full NATO obligations as a non-nuclear member of NATO. About 90% of its members have no difficulty with that. My goodness, there is all this excitement about Norway and Denmark as well as Scotland—Members should get over all this!

I listened intently to the speech by the right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Dame Joan Ruddock). She mentioned the 1980s—a time I clearly remember as a teenager, when nuclear annihilation was seriously talked about and people did seem to comprehend the awful, frightening and terrifying possibility of the use of nuclear weapons. Over time, people have perhaps become more blasé and this has crept into our discourse, so there is a not as much understanding of the insanity of nuclear weapons as there used to be. That may be to protect our own sanity personally from day to day, because if we were to comprehend it, it would blight our lives. We have a feeling of powerlessness about it, so why worry about it day to day—if it is going to happen, it is going to happen. I say as a crofter from the highlands, however, that this is akin to the happy lambs who play in a meadow unaware of the autumn slaughter—the mass slaughter—to come.

The right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford reminded us of the wisdom and courage of Colonel Petrov, who had the data and information available to his senses from the best technology available at that time—that the west had fired five nuclear weapons at the USSR. What would have happened if he had acted in the way he was meant to act or in the way we were told he would act, or if he had acted logically on the basis of MAD—mutually assured destruction? If my memory serves me correctly, this comes from the theories of John Nash, the Nobel prize winner in economics. If Colonel Petrov had responded in that way, I would not have seen my 16th birthday. I have thus had 28 bonus years as a result.

If Colonel Petrov is still alive, I say that if ever there were a man deserving of the Nobel peace prize, it is certainly he. We were saved by our alleged enemies—perhaps by their humanity. We were saved again by a Soviet submarine commander during the Bay of Pigs incidents in Cuba in the early 1960s. The actions of those two men disproved the MAD theories, which were the foundation of the nuclear club to which the UK had itself belonging. They behaved in a way in a way that was outside MAD. They did not do mutually assured destruction, although they thought they would be destroyed themselves.

As the right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford said, our luck will eventually run out. Nuclear weapons have been in the hands of human beings for only 70 years. Given the two near misses that I have cited—and there have been more—I invite Members to engage in a thought experiment. Had nuclear weapons existed since Roman times, how much would history have progressed before nuclear annihilation? If we extend our 70 years to 140, or 210, or 300, how long will it be before it all goes wrong and our luck runs out? If our luck does run

out, it will run out big style. I have to say, with respect to my friends in the Green party, that it is not gradual global warming that should be worrying us, but immediate global frying and the destruction of all creation—a sin like no other, which may result from omission or commission.

There will be more years of this possibility if mankind continues to possess nuclear weapons. The statistical chance of their use keeps increasing. If we had had them in Roman times, many events in history might not have happened. The world could have ended in 300 AD. If nuclear weapons had fallen into the hands of a Hitler, a Genghis Khan or even Jihadi John, or any similar despot or madman, he would have used them and the planet would have been destroyed. MAD—mutually assured destruction—could well have been framed for such people.

Nuclear weapons seem, bizarrely, to be subject to the law of triviality, which was summed up well by C. Northcote Parkinson in his 1959 book, “Parkinson’s Law, or the Pursuit of Progress”. If you will indulge me, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall quote from it. Parkinson said:

“The Law of Triviality...briefly stated, it means that the time spent on any item of the agenda will be in inverse proportion to the sum involved.”

I would add “or to the danger of the position.” I believe that the £100 billion cost of the renewal of Trident will go through on an extremely small nod. Indeed, the issue is so trivial that Labour in Scotland has described tonight’s vote as meaningless, and its newly elected leader has described his party’s former policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament as a “flirtation with surrealism”. As was pointed out by the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), Labour has indeed moved, and that is why the polls are showing what they are showing in Scotland. It seems that Labour policy is not to engage properly in this debate, at a time when food banks are on the rise and Labour is supporting austerity.

Perhaps there is some movement in a graveyard in Cumnock where lie the remains of Keir Hardie, because it is a disgrace, and a significant example of the law of triviality, that Labour is ignoring this issue and is not taking it seriously. Parkinson’s law of triviality actually refers to something that deserves greater engagement and understanding.

Mr Brian H. Donohoe (Central Ayrshire) (Lab): I cannot believe what the hon. Gentleman has just said. At a time when submarines from Russia are going up the Clyde and tankers from the same place are at the top of Scotland, he is trying to tell us that we should not have a deterrent. That is absolutely unreal. The idea that we should find ourselves defenceless in those circumstances is a crazy notion.

Mr MacNeil: This is not the first time that the hon. Gentleman has struggled to comprehend or believe things, but it is very alarming that he has told us that Russian submarines are going up the Clyde. My goodness! I thought that we had a deterrent. It is clear that his nuclear policies are failing, because by the sound of things, those submarines will be docking in Greenock or Port Glasgow any minute now.

This is not a trivial matter, and it is perhaps due to the difficulty of comprehending it that it is subject to the law of triviality. If ever there was an issue that required

[Mr MacNeil]

engagement for the safeguarding of our future and that of the planet, it is the awfulness, the ghastliness, the death and the destruction that nuclear weapons could cause—and perhaps, sadly, will cause one day.

3.55 pm

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I begin by saying a word in defence of the Labour party. Scottish National party Members seem to regard anyone who disagrees with them as trivialising the subject and anyone who agrees with them as taking it seriously. I personally greatly value the bipartisan approach taken by successive Labour and Conservative Governments to the maintenance of the nuclear deterrent. It is true that for a few years in the 1980s, the Labour party was captured by its left wing and went down the unilateralist road, but after two massive election defeats in 1983 and 1987, when the nuclear deterrent issue was central to the campaigns, the Labour party changed back to its bipartisan policy of nuclear deterrence.

We saw that reflected the last time we had a vote on this subject, as far as I can recall, which was on 14 March 2007. Tony Blair was still Prime Minister and he was proposing the approval of the renewal of the nuclear deterrent—the first stages of the process which should have got to maingate during this Parliament but are now due to get there in the next one. In that debate, we saw something interesting: almost all the Conservative MPs voted in favour of renewing the nuclear deterrent and keeping it in existence for the next generation; a considerable majority of Labour MPs were also in favour, but a sizeable minority of about 90 were opposed—they were the CND supporters who have been consistent in their principled opposition to nuclear weapons throughout their political lifetime; and also in the “against” camp were the Liberal Democrats and the nationalists. The result of that vote came about because of an agreement between the Front-Bench teams, with the motion being carried by 409 votes to 161.

That vote represented something more than a decision taken in this House; it also represented, quite fairly, the general spread of opinion consistently in this country throughout the cold war and in the years afterwards. When the fundamental question is asked in poll after poll, “Do you think that Britain should continue to have nuclear weapons as long as other countries have them?”, almost exactly two thirds of the population say yes and almost exactly one quarter say no, with single figures or thereabouts, if my arithmetic is correct, for the undecided. It is indeed a very divisive issue and it is one on which it is difficult to have a foot in both camps, although, as we have seen today, our friends the Liberal Democrats are doing their best to do that.

Mr MacNeil: The hon. Gentleman will probably know that the last time this was debated was in 2007—and there was a vote—the majority of Scottish MPs voted against—we had an example of English votes for Scottish bombs.

Dr Lewis: I was generous in giving way to the hon. Gentleman so soon after he has made his own contribution. All I would say is that I know there was a vote on that day—that is what I just said—and if he tells me that a

majority of Scottish MPs may have voted the other way, I accept that; but Scotland is, by choice, part of the United Kingdom and decisions on issues such as this are decisions for the United Kingdom as a whole. I do not believe even the SNP thinks that devo-max ought to include defence policy. If it does, we are in an even worse situation than I anticipated.

We heard from the hon. Member for North Devon (Sir Nick Harvey), who is a friend of mine, about moving away from the cold war. What one moves away from, one can move back to, and more quickly than one anticipates—particularly if, as the Chairman of the Defence Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), said in his excellent speech, one’s enemies or potential enemies have good reason to doubt one’s will and determination to stand up for the agreements one has made and to use the deterrent power one has to prevent war from breaking out in the first place. I was very surprised that the hon. Member for North Devon did not think that the events in Ukraine had any bearing on our discussions today. I think the events in Ukraine are highly relevant, particularly as NATO has a rather strange open-door policy to membership, which it should not have. It should not grant membership to any country that we are not prepared to go to war for if it is invaded.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman also accept that the importance of Ukraine and Kiev is that this is the first time that we have had a unilateral breach of international borders since world war two? It is the kind of thing that we thought would not happen again, and it has, so the context remains the same.

Dr Lewis: It does indeed, and what really worries me is that because the intensity of the fighting has been so great, it is easy to imagine that it could spill over into a nearby country that is a member of NATO. If that happens, we would be at war with Russia. It is frightening to think what our summer would have been like if we had previously gone down the route of admitting Ukraine to NATO membership, sympathetic though we are. I remember that we stood by during the uprisings in central and eastern Europe that occurred when half the continent was under Russian control. We were very sympathetic to the Hungarians, and I remember with total clarity that we were terribly sympathetic to the Czechoslovakians, but nobody seriously suggested that we could go to war for those countries because of the geo-political realities at that time.

Bob Stewart: I seem to recall in December 1994 that four nations—three nations and Ukraine—guaranteed the sovereign integrity of Ukraine in return for it getting rid of its nuclear weapons. It has got rid of its nuclear weapons, but we have not guaranteed its security.

Dr Lewis: Yes, and that should serve as a warning to us not to enter lightly into agreements that we have no intention of defending—I mean defending in the military sense.

It is just over 100 years since the outbreak of the first world war. I remember looking back in the archives of the inter-war period when a great debate was raging over whether or not it was safe to continue with the

10-year rule. I have mentioned it in the House before. It is highly relevant, so I will mention it again. The idea of the 10-year rule was that the Government would look ahead for a decade and see whether they thought there was any danger of a major war breaking out. If they did not see any such danger, they would cut the defence budget. That was rolled forward from 1919 right through to the early 1930s when it was eventually scrapped when Hitler came to power. It had a very damaging effect on our level of preparedness.

Lord Hankey, as he later became, was the Military Secretary of the Cabinet. In 1931, as an argument for scrapping the 10-year rule, he looked back to that summer of 1914 and said that far from having 10 years' warning of the outbreak of the first world war, we had barely 10 days because of the rapidity with which the various alliances triggered each other into action. Suddenly, from nowhere, we have found ourselves drawn into a conflict with practically no notice whatever.

Rory Stewart: My hon. Friend pointed out in an essay that Maurice Hankey had said that we had failed to predict the 1870 Franco-Prussian war. Most recently, we failed to predict Russia going into Ukraine and Daesh taking over western Iraq, so I agree very wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend.

Dr Lewis: I am flattered to know that my hon. Friend the Chairman of the Committee reads my writings, and even quotes them back to me. I am very grateful to him.

I want to stress that I believe that the SNP has chosen this debate today—I congratulate the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), who I am pleased to see back in his place to hear my contribution, on securing it—with a particular political scenario in mind. SNP Members know that the majority of Labour Members and their supporters across the country agree with the concept of nuclear deterrence. They know that an overwhelming majority of Conservatives agree with nuclear deterrence. They are hoping to obtain something that they can use in the event of a future hung Parliament, in precisely the way that the Liberal Democrats were able to use their bargaining power to secure the postponement of the passing of the maingate decision from this Parliament to the next one. I think that was a terrible decision and it set a terrible precedent, but I am greatly reassured by the strength of the speech made by my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary today.

When my hon. Friend the Minister winds up, I wish to hear that something will be done about the future of Trident and the holding of the maingate vote on time, as scheduled, in 2016 similar to what we have said about other areas of policy. We have seen authoritative statements in the press that no coalition will be entered into by the Conservatives unless it provides for an in/out referendum on the EU; similarly we have seen that no coalition will be entered into by the Conservatives unless it provides for passage of the draft Communications Data Bill. Those are two very important issues, but I submit that the future of the British minimum strategic nuclear deterrent is just as important as those two issues, if not more so. Until that vote is held, and held successfully, I shall continue to press those on my Front Bench for a commitment that we will never again allow the future of the strategic nuclear deterrent to be used in the way that it was in 2010 by a minority party in coalition negotiations.

Sir Nick Harvey: I feel I must correct the historical record. In the summer of 2010, a value-for-money study on the successor programme concluded that savings could be made by slipping the time scale slightly. This was not something the Liberal Democrats demanded, although it was something we welcomed. It had the happy consequence of moving maingate into the next Parliament, but it was not something we sought, demanded or—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. The hon. Gentleman spoke for 31 minutes, and very long interventions will not help those Members who want to speak.

Dr Lewis: I shall also try to be more concise in the remainder of my speech, Mr Deputy Speaker.

All I can say to the hon. Member for North Devon, whom I greatly respect and admire, is that he ought to have a word with the then president of the Liberal Democrats, who proudly proclaimed on the Liberal Democrats' official website that it was entirely as a result of the Liberal Democrats that we had not taken the decisive step of signing the maingate contract in this Parliament. I can only leave them to decide the issue between themselves.

Let me return to some of the purely military arguments in favour of the continuation of the strategic deterrent, mercifully leaving the politics to one side. The most important argument, as I have stated in previous debates in this House, is the recognition that future military threats and conflicts will be no more predictable than those that engulfed us throughout the 20th century. That is the overriding justification for preserving armed forces in peace time as a national insurance policy. No one knows which enemies might confront us during the next 50 years, for that is the period we are discussing by the time everything is designed, constructed and deployed, and has served out its operational lifetime. It is highly probable that at least some of those potential enemies will be armed with weapons of mass destruction.

Secondly, it is not the weapons themselves that we have to fear but the nature of the regimes that possess them. While democracies are usually reluctant to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear dictatorships, although they did so against Japan in 1945 as has been pointed out, the reverse is not true.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): There is consensus in the international community about the Iranian nuclear programme and efforts to reduce it. Significant nuclear proliferation in the middle east is likely in the next 20 or 30 years, which feeds into my hon. Friend's argument about the 50-year time span that we should consider in this debate.

Dr Lewis: It does indeed. I cannot think of an existing nuclear power that has done more than the United Kingdom to slim down and reduce the firepower of its independent nuclear deterrent. The response, as has been repeatedly pointed out by Government Members and by some Opposition Members, to those unilateral reductions on our part has been absolutely zero. There is not the slightest shred of evidence that if we were to abandon our nuclear deterrent completely any other country would follow suit. All that would happen would be that those near-misses, which have been discussed so

[Dr Julian Lewis]

eloquently today—the risks of nuclear Armageddon by accident—would continue between the superpowers if they are tangible risks, but we would add another risk: the risk that someone hostile to us with a nuclear armament could blackmail us into concessions, surrender or absolute annihilation. The risk of the deliberate firing of nuclear weapons against us is something that we would be crazy to accept voluntarily and unnecessarily.

Returning to the reluctance of democracies to launch nuclear weapons against countries that do not have them—although we use them, as I have said, continuously as deterrents—we should consider the alternative. If a dictatorship such as that in Argentina had had an arsenal of even a few small atomic weapons and the means to deliver them, no matter how many conventional forces we had had, we would not have dared to retake the Falkland Islands, because we must not project on to other countries that do not share our political principle and freedoms the sense of self-restraint that we apply to ourselves.

The third argument that I always outline is that the United Kingdom has traditionally played a more important and decisive role in preserving freedom than other medium-sized democracies have been able or willing to do. Democratic countries that do not have a nuclear deterrent have little choice but to declare themselves neutral and hope for the best or to rely on the nuclear umbrella of more powerful allies. The United Kingdom, for historical reasons, is a nuclear power, and it is much harder to defeat it than many other democracies by conventional means because of our physical separation from the continent.

The next argument is that our prominence as the principal ally of the United States, our strategic geographical position, to which I have just referred, and the fact that we are the junior partner might tempt an aggressor to risk attacking us separately. Given the difficulties of overrunning the UK with conventional forces, compared with our more vulnerable allies, an aggressor might be tempted to use one or more mass-destruction weapons against us on the assumption that the United States would not respond on our behalf. Even if that assumption were false, the attacker would find out his mistake only when it was too late for all concerned. An independently controlled British nuclear deterrent massively reduces the prospect of such a fatal miscalculation.

The fifth military argument, which was mentioned earlier, is that no amount of conventional force can compensate for the military disadvantage that faces a non-nuclear country in a conflict against a nuclear-armed enemy. The atomic bombing of Japan is especially instructive not only because the emperor was forced to surrender but because of what might have happened in the reverse scenario. If Japan had developed atomic bombs in the summer of 1945 and the allies had not, a conventional allied invasion to end the war would have been out of the question.

I tend to find that people wish to try to sweep aside the patent logic of nuclear deterrence by projecting on to historical figures events that did not happen and could never possibly be tested. The hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil), who has now left his place, asserted that Hitler would not have been constrained by a nuclear deterrent held by the allies if

he had had nuclear weapons. In 1943, Hitler proposed to use the nerve gas, tabun, which was far, far more deadly than the gases that the allies then possessed. When he consulted his chief scientists, they said that it was most unlikely that the allies had not discovered tabun too, and he therefore decided not to employ it, even though it would have had a devastating effect. That is an example of even Hitler being deterred by the mistaken belief that his enemies had a weapon when in fact they did not.

The hon. Member for Moray made his points with clarity and calmness, as always. He said that he did not think that deterrence had worked. Of course, when something does not happen—that is, world war three—it is difficult to show that it would have happened if one had done something different. However, I always apply the test of the proxy war. The right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Dame Joan Ruddock) observed that throughout the cold war period many proxy wars went on around the globe. In fact, that is an argument in favour of the case that nuclear deterrence had something to do with the fact that the superpowers did not fight each other in Europe. If no other conflicts had been going on among proxies of the superpowers, one could have argued that they would not be likely to have been at each others' throats if they did not have a nuclear deterrent. The fact that they were fighting each other by every means possible other than open war—state to state—on the European continent strongly suggests that the possession of the nuclear deterrent, and the balance of terror, had something to do with that stability.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman will no doubt agree that in the preceding period, which is the only thing we can base our evidence on, there was a whole series of European wars with the major powers fighting each other.

Dr Lewis: Exactly. That leads us back to the heart of what the concept of deterrence requires in order to work. Deterrence means that a potential aggressor must not only face a degree of retaliation that is unacceptable if inflicted, but be convinced that that retaliation is unavoidable.

The key point about nuclear deterrence was made in a 1945 study by the leading defence scientist when nuclear weapons were first being considered as a concept. I love quoting the example—I have done so on previous occasions—given by Professor Sir Henry Tizard, who was one of the chief scientific advisers to the wartime Government, when he first considered what the atomic bomb would mean if it worked. He said that he could see no way of preventing an atomic bomb from being used except by the fear of retaliation, and he illustrated that by saying:

“A knowledge that we were prepared, in the last resort”—

our deterrent has always been the final resort, if the future existence of the nation is at stake—

“might well deter an aggressive nation. Duelling was a recognised method of settling quarrels between men of high social standing so long as the duellists stood twenty paces apart and faced each other with pistols of a primitive type. If the rule had been that they should stand a yard apart with pistols at each other's hearts, we doubt whether it would long have remained a recognised method of settling affairs of honour.”

The hon. Member for Moray referred to a number of things that I will touch on briefly. He talked about our obligations under article VI of the non-proliferation treaty, which states:

“Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.”

The only thing that is time-limited in that commitment is the cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date. We are not engaged in a nuclear arms race with anyone. We never have been and we have successively, as I said earlier, been reducing our capacity with little or no response from the other nuclear powers.

The other two, open-ended commitments are to achieve nuclear disarmament and to achieve general and complete disarmament. The article wisely recognises the link between the two, because one thing we do not wish to do by removing the balance of terror and by achieving even multilateral nuclear disarmament is to make the world safe again for conventional conflict between the major powers.

Angus Robertson: Will the hon. Gentleman update the House on the initiatives led by his Government to fulfil their obligations? He will forgive me, but I have not caught up with the discussions his Government have had with other nuclear powers to fulfil those obligations.

Dr Lewis: I do not think the hon. Gentleman has understood the three obligations I have listed. The first is to work for the cessation of the nuclear arms race—we are not a part of the nuclear arms race—at an early date. The second is to achieve world nuclear disarmament, and the third is to achieve general and complete conventional disarmament. I believe that those are, frankly, utopian visions that we work towards but which suffer setbacks according to the state of the world at any time, and the state of the world at the moment is one of grave disturbance and serious potential threats.

Mr Jenkin: I am sorry that I missed the earlier part of my hon. Friend's speech. Surely the point is that there is no obligation at all to disarm unilaterally in any shape or form, yet that seems to be the policy favoured by the supporters of this motion.

Dr Lewis: I entirely agree.

I must bring my remarks to a close for the sake of other Members, but I would simply say that, although much has been said about the cost of the deterrent, so far as I know our deterrent has never amounted to more than 10% of the overall defence budget. Arguments about the deterrent must be made on the basis either that people believe it is necessary to have one to prevent this country from facing nuclear blackmail, or they do not. If people believe that a deterrent is necessary for such a role, 10%, 20% or even 30% of the defence budget is not too much to pay. Fortunately, we will not have to pay anything like that sum. It is comparable with the cost of the High Speed 2 rail system that we propose to build. In my opinion, our priorities should lie in a slightly different direction, given the cuts that defence has taken.

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): My hon. Friend is an expert on these matters and is making a compelling case. Does he agree that it would be completely naive to accept the SNP's position as set out in the motion, particularly in thinking that if we disarm in this sense, others will follow?

Dr Lewis: Yes, indeed. As I said, the evidence points in the opposite direction.

I have covered the point about gaps in conventional capability. If the nuclear deterrent were scrapped, there is no guarantee that the money saved—all of it, or even any of it—would be put towards conventional forces. Even if it were, no amount of conventional forces can compensate for the absence of the ability to deter nuclear blackmail.

We have heard in graphic terms the consequences of the explosion of a nuclear weapon. All I can say is that everybody agrees it would be a disaster if nuclear weapons were fired and exploded. The question is: what is the best way of preventing that from happening? Time after time, when asked the key question about keeping a nuclear deterrent as long as other countries have one, people have shown in overwhelming numbers that they subscribe to the route of peace through deterrence. I subscribe to that, as do most Labour Members, but the smaller parties do not. It would be an outrageous betrayal of the first duty of government—namely, defence—if either of the two main parties, if there were a hung Parliament after the next election, allowed this matter to become a negotiating issue in forming a coalition. The issues at stake are far too important for that.

4.27 pm

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) for the contribution he has made, and often makes, in his speeches on this issue in the House of Commons. I do not mean to question the other parts of his speech, but may I tell him that its last couple of minutes encapsulated what the debate is about in a nutshell?

I do not believe that anybody in the House would not prefer a world without nuclear weapons or would not wish to see the end of nuclear weapons as soon as possible. No matter what party we belong to or how big or small it is, we are all united in trying to secure a world that is safe and secure, and rid of nuclear weapons. As hon. Members have said, this debate is about how we go about achieving that. I congratulate the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) on holding this debate. We disagree with each other, but I do not doubt that we all want to achieve the same end.

Mr John Leech (Manchester, Withington) (LD): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Vernon Coaker: I will make some progress first. I have only just started my speech, so let me have a minute or two.

I am grateful for the opportunity to outline clearly our position on nuclear deterrence and multilateral disarmament. The Labour party is an internationalist, multilateralist party, and proud to be so. We are firmly committed to working with our allies and partners

[Vernon Coaker]

around the world to advance our ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons, and we are proud of our strong record in office on multilateral nuclear disarmament.

The previous Labour Government abolished the UK's free-fall bombs, reduced the number of deployed warheads from 96 to 48, and almost halved the UK's nuclear warhead stockpile to 160. Today, a written statement in response to the hon. Member for Moray, states that the current Government have continued that policy with further reductions from 48 to 40 warheads, and that available operational warheads have reduced from 160 to 120—something we all commend. However, we believe that the Government could be doing more to advance that agenda. That is why, as the Defence Secretary said, the shadow Foreign Secretary and I wrote to the Prime Minister in November, urging the Government to ensure UK representation at the recent Vienna conference on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons—a conference they did attend in the end.

Multilateralism is making progress and the UK took the lead in achieving global reductions and international bans on landmines, chemical and biological weapons and cluster munitions. A strong and consistent voice for nuclear disarmament on the world stage means that the UK has played its part in reducing the global nuclear stockpile by more than 70% since the end of the cold war.

Angus Robertson: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify an important matter? His Labour colleague, Neil Findlay, is a member of the shadow Cabinet in Scotland and responsible for fair work, skills and training. On the "Andrew Marr show" on 16 November 2014 he said,

"Andrew, it's already Labour party policy in Scotland to oppose the renewal of Trident. Has been for some time."

Is that correct?

Vernon Coaker: All I can say is that I am espousing the UK position, and what I am saying is consistent with the leader of the Scottish Labour party. Clearly, there is much more to do. The non-proliferation treaty conference later this year will be a key moment for a future Labour Government—or indeed any Government—to achieve concrete progress on global disarmament and anti-proliferation measures, and it would be wrong to jeopardise the significant progressive steps in multilateral nuclear disarmament made in recent years. To abandon unilaterally our nuclear deterrent at this stage in the disarmament process would do more harm than good, and in the current climate it would make Britain less secure and send out exactly the wrong signals at a sensitive moment in international relations.

The House will be all too aware of the significant and multifaceted challenges that this country faces from re-emerging and newer threats, as well as those that may emerge in future. Russia has been testing in UK waters and airspace while upgrading its conventional and nuclear capabilities—as the Chair of the Defence Committee mentioned in his thoughtful remarks—and the House will be aware of the serious events in eastern Ukraine and Crimea. We have an increasingly erratic and unstable nuclear armed North Korea, and nuclear negotiations with Iran have reached a key moment. Now is not the time for the UK to act unilaterally.

Pete Wishart: Before the hon. Gentleman moves on from multilateralism may I say that, to me, Trident renewal is unilateral nuclear rearmament that is adding to the stockpile of nuclear weapons. The vote will be on Trident renewal. Will Labour Members oppose the motion, or are they happy to spend £100 billion and vote with the Tories in favour of an extra £30 billion of austerity?

Vernon Coaker: To try to be fair to the hon. Gentleman, this is about replacement and maintenance of our deterrent. He does not believe in us having a nuclear deterrent. Labour's position is the policy I have espoused, which is that we must look at replacing our deterrent. He disagrees and that is fine; that is his point of view and he will articulate it in his own remarks, but Labour does not agree with it.

Pete Wishart: So you'll vote with the Tories?

Vernon Coaker: The hon. Gentleman tempts me to respond. We will vote for the policy we believe in. That is the policy I am laying out before the House, and we will vote accordingly.

Multilateral disarmament works only if all parties feel more secure. Were the UK to abandon its nuclear deterrent on its own, and not in conjunction with other nuclear states, then neither the British people nor our NATO allies would feel safer.

Ms Gisela Stuart: Does my hon. Friend acknowledge that we would be in deep breach of not only the principle of deterrence, but the collective international responsibility we currently have through owning Trident and being a member of P5?

Vernon Coaker: I very much agree on the need for us to recognise our international obligations.

On the subject of NATO, I would like to return to a point that others have made. Is it not time for the Scottish Nationalists to be frank and open with us all? NATO is a nuclear alliance. The Scottish National party wants to be a part of that nuclear alliance. It has to recognise—I say this with respect—that membership of NATO comes with membership of the nuclear umbrella group and the nuclear planning group. Every single nation that the SNP points to as not having nuclear weapons is a member of that nuclear planning group, and is therefore involved in nuclear possession. The SNP position appears to be: no to nuclear weapons unless they belong to NATO. I understand that the motion has been moved not only by the Scottish National party, which is in favour of being in NATO, but by Plaid Cymru and the Green party, which are against being in NATO. Clearly, the smaller parties need to talk to each other.

Labour is clear. Let me say this unequivocally: our position, in an increasingly uncertain and unstable world, is that it is right for the UK to maintain a credible, minimum independent nuclear deterrent based on a continuous at-sea posture. It is right to want to deliver that deterrent in the most capable and cost-effective way, and in a way that best contributes to global security. It is right, therefore, to want to examine all the UK's military capabilities, including nuclear, as part of the next strategic defence and security review, and to state that we would require a clear body of evidence for us to change our view that continuous at-sea deterrence provides the most credible and cost-efficient form of deterrent. That is why, as the hon. Member for New Forest East

mentioned, in 2007 Parliament voted to maintain the deterrent and to authorise spending on the concept phase and initial gate. It is why MPs will be asked again to vote on constructing a new class of Vanguard submarines in 2016. As the Defence Secretary said, no single successor submarine will be built until approval is guaranteed by this sovereign Parliament. We should not forget that this is a programme that would create thousands of high quality jobs and apprenticeships in Scottish docks, Barrow construction yards and throughout a multibillion pound supply chain that will benefit about 850 companies, the overwhelming majority of which are based right here in the UK.

Mr Dunne: The shadow Defence Secretary has just laid out very clearly to the House the current Front Bench position of Her Majesty's Opposition. Will he add to that clarity by confirming that he believes at present the most cost-effective way to deliver continuous at-sea deterrence is with a four boat solution?

Vernon Coaker: As I have said, the evidence before us is that the continuous at-sea deterrent requires the current posture. What we have said is that, as part of the strategic defence and security review, we will consider whether a continuous at-sea deterrent can be delivered in a more cost-effective way. That is exactly what the Defence Secretary said in his remarks earlier today. I suggest to the Minister that the important principle here is that there is continuous at-sea deterrence. It is incumbent on all of us to do that in the most cost-effective way.

Of course, a decision on the UK's future nuclear capabilities must primarily be based on strategic requirements and an assessment of the global proliferation and disarmament agenda. However, does that mean we can afford to ignore the thousands of livelihoods that depend on our building a new class of Vanguard submarine? Neither should we be drawn into a debate between funding vital public services and maintaining the deterrent. A future Labour Government would commit to delivering public services that the British people can be proud of and to maintaining the security of the country.

As well as issues of capability, costs and jobs, it is right to ask serious questions about how the UK can best contribute to multilateral nuclear disarmament efforts, and for that, Britain needs to show leadership on the global stage. It does not need a part-time deterrent of the like proposed by the Liberal Democrats—or whatever the hon. Member for North Devon (Sir Nick Harvey) was talking about. Theirs is a policy that would only add to instability and insecurity and which their own "Trident Alternatives Review" did not even consider worthy of consideration.

Is it not more telling that the review by the British American Security Information Council into Trident—a cross-party, independent assessment of the UK's nuclear capabilities that, unlike the "Trident Alternatives Review", did consider unilateral disarmament as an option—recommended that the UK continue its current Trident system while seeking to further enhance our multilateral disarmament record. For the avoidance of doubt, it is worth quoting a section of the report. On page 6 of the 2014 final document, it says:

"Based upon the two key specific considerations, namely national security concerns and responsibility towards the"

NATO

"Alliance, the Commission has come to the unanimous conclusion that the UK should retain and deploy a nuclear arsenal, with a

number of caveats expressed below. Most notably, it remains crucial that the UK show keen regard for its position within the international community and for the shared responsibility to achieve progress in global nuclear disarmament."

We could not agree more. The UK should maintain the minimum, credible, independent nuclear deterrent through a continuous-at-sea system, delivered in the most cost effective way, while advancing along the path to multilateral disarmament. We have the opportunity to advance the cause of global disarmament for a safer world. Britain can play a leading role in this while ensuring the security of the British people. Let us grasp this opportunity.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Rather than imposing a time limit, I suggest that hon. Members keep their speeches to about 10 minutes.

4.42 pm

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Plato, among other Greek scholars, is reported to have said:

"If you want peace, prepare for war".

That is the fundamental principle behind the theory of deterrence, and why the United Kingdom has to maintain its independent nuclear deterrent. We need one now and in the future. Our independent nuclear deterrent is the ultimate guarantee that a potential aggressor state—possibly possessing nuclear weapons itself—will not attack us. As we have heard, over the past 10 years or so we have watched the Russians greatly enhance their military and strategic weaponry. They most certainly are not scrapping their nuclear weaponry. Indeed their military presence, around our shores, in the air, on the seas and under it, is increasing not decreasing, especially around Scotland. Why are they doing this, and why should we abandon a defence against such a latent threat?

No other nuclear state has given up its nuclear deterrent, with the possible exception of Ukraine, but that is a fairly good case study—is it not?—and a warning too. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, about one third of the Soviet nuclear arsenal remained within an independent Ukraine. Then in December 1994, Ukraine, Russia, the United States and the United Kingdom signed a memorandum to give Ukraine security assurances if it gave up its nuclear arsenal, which it did. Twenty years later—last year—Crimea was seized back from Ukraine by Russia, and then Moscow fomented discontent and military action in eastern Ukraine. Hardly surprisingly, some Ukrainian leaders and outside commentators have argued that if Ukraine had not removed its nuclear weapons, Russia might have been deterred from its aggression in Ukraine. Do they have a point? Is there a lesson there for us?

Once given up, we will never realistically be able to reactivate a nuclear deterrent capability. Our nuclear know-how has been built up since the second world war, with, of course, considerable American support. But once gone, it is gone for ever. I accept that international terrorist groups may well be trying to get their hands on a nuclear device and that they may not act rationally, as is a normal requirement of the strategy of deterrence. However, even international terrorists such as the Daish in Iraq and Syria may—just may—think twice about exploding a nuclear device, assuming they get their hands

[Bob Stewart]

on one and have the specialised knowledge required to use it. After all, the so-called Islamic State may not face its own obliteration with the same enthusiasm with which they murder countless people.

James Morris: Is not the crucial point, which was also made by my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), that the deterrent needs to be sufficiently credible, as in the point about Hitler, to deter even an irrational actor from the thought of using nuclear weapons against us?

Bob Stewart: I agree absolutely. Armageddon is seldom faced by anyone with equanimity.

I was an officer who spent several years in the 1st British Corps in Germany, supposedly preparing to face a Soviet threat from the east. We knew that the group of Soviet forces in eastern Europe had a huge conventional advantage over us and realised that our chances of survival would be very slight if the balloon went up. But we also trained and practised the use of tactical nuclear weapons. The Soviets knew that full well and it gave those of us due to be positioned right up against the inner German border some comfort. We felt that our possession of nuclear weapons was definitely a deterrent that the Soviet Union would have to take seriously. Most of my fellow front line officers agreed with me. Some did not, but the majority did.

Remember: smaller NATO countries such as Denmark also have aeroplanes fitted with bomb racks to pick up tactical nuclear bombs from American stockpiles to fly and to use them. It is not just the nuclear members of NATO.

Most of us in 1st British Corps felt that our possession of nuclear weapons was a very sound insurance policy. Of course the situation is different today, but I use the example to explain how possession of a nuclear capability can help conventional forces.

I hate the idea of war. Who doesn't? All my friends in the military are of the same mind as Winston Churchill, who once said that "jaw-jaw" is better than "war-war". But in truth jaw-jaw often depends on the ability to have war-war. In the 1960s, I remember the US strategic nuclear bombers had a special motto that they painted on the noses of their B52s—"Peace is our profession".

Nuclear weapons are a fact in our world and potential enemies may use them whether we like it or not. So I believe that we as a nation must also possess them. If you want peace, prepare for war—so that you deter it.

4.49 pm

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Many of the founding fathers of my party fought in the first world war. It was their experiences of pointless human destruction that led them to base their political beliefs on the importance of Welsh national political identity, to counteract the imperialism of the great powers of the day. Wales lost more soldiers per head than any other nation in that war, and ever since, our party's foreign policy has been based on building a peaceful role for Wales in the world, very much like our cousins in Ireland, who, of course, gained their independence in the aftermath of that war.

While not strictly a pacifist party, our voting record in this House over nearly half a century clearly shows that we are not supportive of the aggressive foreign policy pursued by successive UK Governments and their allies. Our first MP, Gwynfor Evans, was a vocal critic in this place of the Vietnam war; my predecessor, Adam Price, endeavoured to impeach the former Prime Minister for his conduct in the build-up to the second Gulf war; and in this Parliament we have voted against military action on several occasions.

Fairness and social justice also lie at the heart of what our party stands for. Those principles could never be upheld if we believed that wasting billions of pounds on weapons of mass destruction at a time when public services are being slashed was in any way acceptable. As we have heard several times today, Trident renewal is estimated to cost about £100 billion over the system's lifetime, and the hon. Member for North Devon (Sir Nick Harvey), a former Defence Minister in this Parliament, said earlier that that figure was an underestimate. In my view it is obscene to suggest that this is a justifiable figure when our schools and hospitals are crying out for investment.

Last week, Labour and the Tories voted in favour of billions of pounds of more cuts in the next Parliament, all the while being committed to spending a similar amount on a new generation of nuclear weapons. Given the Westminster parties' warped priorities, it is no wonder that more and more people in Wales are backing Plaid Cymru's progressive alternative—and the Greens in England and the SNP in Scotland.

Due to the sums involved in the Trident renewal programme, it is vital that this House debates whether or not it is a justifiable use of public money—and I must say that this has been a very good debate. It will be the biggest spending decision made by the next Parliament, and with an election in just over three months the electorate deserve to know where those seeking election stand on this issue.

When reports emerged yesterday in the *Glasgow Herald* that Labour was boycotting this debate, I labelled it an insult to the electorate. However, I am glad that a few Labour MPs have broken the boycott, and they have made some very valuable contributions to the debate.

While ahead of the May election Labour will tell people how nasty the Tories are and how it would do things differently, the reality is that it would not do much differently at all, and that it would still press ahead with wasting £100 billion on Trident despite its proclaimed supposed opposition to cuts to public services and the ideological shrinking of the state. No wonder many esteemed commentators, not least Martin Shipton of the *Western Mail*, are beginning to ponder that the most likely coalition after the next election will be between the Conservative party and Labour.

"Living within our means" was the slogan of the Conservative party and the Prime Minister last week. Bizarrely, wasting £100 billion on unnecessary nuclear weapons did not figure in his speech, but it should have. While the UK Government, and the Labour party through its voting in support of the austerity charter, are committed to reducing spending on public services to levels last seen in the 1930s as a share of GDP, and while millions of citizens are struggling to make ends meet and watch the essential public services that they depend on crumble in front of them, it is obscene that

any Government could go ahead and plough £100 billion into an outdated virility symbol, as the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) described it.

Politics is about priorities. Rather than spending £100 billion on a weapons system that nobody in their right mind would want to use, we say invest in schools, hospitals and affordable homes, in skills and education, and in industry to rebalance the economy, all of which would represent better value for money and would be spent on what people need to improve their lives.

Bob Stewart: Of course no one in their right mind would want to use these weapons. That is the whole point. Deterrence is not use; it is deterring someone from using a weapons system. The best deterrence is when nothing happens, as has happened in Europe since the second world war.

Jonathan Edwards: I am grateful to my fellow former Aberystwyth graduate for that intervention, but the reality is that if we are going to spend £100 billion on a weapons system, surely there is an intention to use it if necessary.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister talked of his commitment to full employment, although I strongly suspect that his concept of full employment differs greatly from the one envisaged by William Beveridge, John Maynard Keynes and others. While Trident renewal would arguably create 7,000 jobs—as we have heard from some Members representing constituencies with a direct interest—that £100 billion could instead be used to employ 150,000 nurses across the UK for 30 years—or if just over half of it was used to invest in low-carbon technologies, renewables and energy-efficiency industries, it could create up to 1 million jobs according to RES Compass.

The projected cost breakdown, for which I am most grateful to CND, is as follows: submarine procurement £26 billion, cost of missile extension programme £250 million, replacement warheads from the 2030s onwards £3 billion, in-service costs £57 billion, conventional military forces directly assigned to support Trident £900 million, and, critically, decommissioning costs of £13 billion.

Angus Robertson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for outlining why the costs of Trident replacement are around the £100 billion figure. Does he have any idea why the Secretary of State for Defence was unable to give the Government's own projections of its cost? Is it, perhaps, because it is such an eye-wateringly high figure, possibly significantly higher than the £100 billion outlined by the former Armed Forces Minister, the hon. Member for North Devon (Sir Nick Harvey), and that would be a scandal in the country?

Jonathan Edwards: I am grateful for that intervention. That has been one of the highlights of the debate, and it is why it is so important that Plaid Cymru, the Green party and the SNP have brought this debate to the House. As I say, Trident renewal will be the biggest spending decision made by the next Parliament, yet the UK Government have no idea of the lifetime costs of the project, despite work done by CND and others.

Let me outline further how some of the £100 billion to be spent on Trident renewal could be spent instead. Although the cost of building homes varies throughout the UK, the average cost is around £150,000. That means

that the Government, in partnership with local authorities, housing associations and others, could build up to 650,000 new affordable homes. Of course, home building, where it is needed, would stimulate the economy in ways that simply ploughing £100 billion into nuclear weapons would not. For the money spent investing in housing in that way, the Treasury would benefit from higher-value employment, reducing expenditure on in-work and out-of-work benefits, and the investment would help to ease the UK's acute housing crisis, as the CND so ably demonstrated in its "People not Trident" document.

In terms of education, investing roughly a quarter of the amount earmarked for Trident would result in a fivefold return on investment. In its regular publication, "Education at a Glance", the OECD demonstrated that for every £1 invested in higher education by the UK Government, the return is £5 over the working life of the graduate. This arises from higher tax revenues and lower outlays resulting from reduced unemployment. As the OECD said, investment in education boosts jobs and tax revenues.

The alternatives are there. Plaid Cymru has long supported investment in infrastructure and public services as a means of reducing the deficit over the long term.

Mr Marcus Jones: I understand what the hon. Gentleman says about all the things that he would like the money to be spent on instead of Trident, but is that not all based on the assumption that we are still going to be here and a potential aggressor has not unloaded its nuclear weapons arsenal on to us because we had no deterrent?

Jonathan Edwards: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, which brings me to the next part of my speech—the defence and security justifications for Trident renewal. Again, the arguments do not properly stack up. If the UK did not already possess nuclear weapons and I were to stand here today and argue for us to spend £100 billion on them, I do not believe anyone would support me. Trident is not an independent deterrent. The software, hardware and expertise are all provided by the US. Indeed, the UK could not fire Trident, heaven forbid, without the permission of the US. Supporters of Trident renewal will say that the world is a dangerous place, and that spending £100 billion on nuclear weapons offers peace of mind. "The first duty of Government is the security of its people, and the world is a dangerous and unpredictable place," they will say. "Nuclear weapons are the ultimate insurance policy."

Those are both arguments that we have heard during today's debate. Yet this line of argument ignores the current strategic security challenges that the UK faces, and spending £100 billion on nuclear weapons is a dereliction of duty in the face of those challenges. In addition, to describe nuclear weapons as an insurance policy is an odd turn of phrase, given that insurance policies are designed to pay out after an undesirable event has taken place, not to prevent it from happening in the first place. If nuclear weapons were ever used, the consequences would be catastrophic.

Mr Kevan Jones: I know the hon. Gentleman's party is clear that it does not want to be part of NATO. Is he comfortable, then, with the fact that his partner on the motion, the SNP, is happy to join NATO and to join the nuclear umbrella which that membership gives?

Jonathan Edwards: It is true Plaid Cymru and the SNP come from different political traditions. The SNP looks more towards the Nordic countries, which are members of NATO. Plaid Cymru looks more across the Irish sea towards Ireland, which is not a member of NATO. I do not see the contradiction in working together on a joint motion on Trident renewal. It is a different issue from NATO membership.

In the age of asymmetric warfare, surely it is better to have troops, not Trident, as a means of meeting security challenges. Indeed, the list of generals and top military figures who oppose Trident renewal, viewing it as a waste of money that would not meet security requirements, is for ever growing. The former head of the armed forces, Field Marshal Lord Bramall, the retired Army generals Lord Ramsbotham and Sir Hugh Beach, and Major General Patrick Cordingley signed a letter to *The Times* that stated:

“Nuclear weapons have shown themselves to be completely useless as a deterrent to the threats and scale of violence we currently face or are likely to face, particularly international terrorism...Our independent deterrent has become...irrelevant, except in the context of domestic politics.”

Former NATO commander General Jack Sheehan also called on the UK to ditch Trident.

Improving global security by strengthening the non-proliferation regime would lead to a de-escalation of international tensions, ensuring budgetary flexibility for the Ministry of Defence to allow it to prepare a more effective response to the actual security challenges facing us today, instead of locking it in and chaining it to several decades of nuclear weapons. The UK Government should be adhering to their legal obligations, including their responsibilities as a signatory to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. They should be showing diplomatic leadership and helping to guide multilateral disarmament initiatives, such as paving the way for a global nuclear abolition treaty.

The UK's recent one-sided Trident commission concluded that there would be no lasting gains if the UK were to abandon its nuclear weapons programme. Meanwhile, international experts disagree. Dr Hans Blix, the former United Nations weapons inspector and chair of the weapons of mass destruction commission, recently said that the UK should abandon Trident altogether, and that that would be a “big gain” towards disarmament, pointing out:

“Japan and Germany seem respected...even without nuclear weapons”.

All our European neighbours, except France, consider themselves to be safe and secure without nuclear arsenals.

The only nations that could remotely pose a nuclear threat to the UK in the foreseeable future are Russia and possibly China. However, despite current tensions relating to Ukraine, there has generally been a positive trend in the UK's and the European Union's relationships with both countries since the end of the cold war. Sir Michael Quinlan, a former permanent under-secretary at the Ministry of Defence and an expert on nuclear deterrence, wrote that,

“even if grounds for unease about Russia's internal evolution intensify, it is hard to imagine that country re-emerging as a military threat to the political freedom of the countries of the European Union”.

Not only is the defence and security case for Trident extremely weak, but politicians would do well to listen to the voice of the public on this matter. In a February

2014 ComRes poll, 65% of respondents said they would feel uncomfortable living near a nuclear weapons base and 64% thought there should be an international convention banning nuclear weapons. In June 2010, 63% of the public said that they would back scrapping Trident to reduce the deficit in a BPIX survey for *The Mail on Sunday*. Only 30% of the public would spend money on Trident when offered the alternatives of spending on nurses' salaries or affordable homes, according to a YouGov poll for *The People* in July 2009. A poll by Populus in March 2007 found that 72% of the public did not support the Government's plans to replace Trident.

The forthcoming election represents the opportunity for the electorate to vote on their priorities—weapons of mass destruction or public services. In Wales, there is a long tradition of opposing nuclear weapons, not only from a non-conformist-inspired pacifism with its roots in the Welsh radical tradition; there is also the practical issue of what a small country like Wales would need nuclear weapons for. Where would they be housed or stored? Could we reasonably ask our compatriots to live next to them? The answer is, of course, no. Much as the other smaller countries of Europe—and even the larger ones—seem to get along just fine, we do not need nuclear weapons.

5.3 pm

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): In following the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards), it is worth reflecting on how important it is to have these debates. We do not necessarily hear anything new and startling emerge in the arguments put forward, but it is important that the British public—our voters—see that we are having this discussion. If there was one shortcoming in the decision taken at the end of Tony Blair's reign, it was that it was felt to have been taken in an unseemly rush. It is absolutely right that we should continue to debate this matter until the main-gate decision is taken.

The hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr remarked that the main decision is going to be taken after the next election. To that extent, this debate is rather otiose. It is not a turning-point debate; it is about political positioning. To some extent, it is rather laughable. I would not usually pick holes in a motion, but this one says that this House believes that Trident should not be renewed. We know what the Scottish and Welsh nationalists mean by the motion, but we are not renewing Trident; we are renewing the submarines. We are not renewing the missiles or the warheads, but simply renewing the submarines. For the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), currently sitting in the place of the SNP leader, to say that a vote against this motion is a vote for “stockpiling” nuclear weapons really is an exaggeration. That does not excuse itself from the mouth of a unilateralist.

There are many points to pick up from the debate. The cost needs to be put in context. The extra cost that has occasioned this debate is a mere—I say a mere—£261 million. That is a tiny, minute part of the defence budget. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, it is merely a pull forward of what will be spent later, and spending it now probably saves money in the long term. Even if one accepted this £100 billion lifetime cost of Trident over, say, 50 years, that would be less than our net contribution to the European Union in

each of those years. It would be less than many other costs that we sign away without a breath. I will never forget the day we underwrote all the banks with hundreds of billions of pounds of capital in an extraordinarily under-populated and uncontroversial debate. This is a relatively small decision—less than HS2, as was pointed out.

The right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Dame Joan Ruddock), who used to represent CND and apparently still does, asked why we should waste this money on weapons that we never use. This is another misconception. These weapons are in use every day. They are deployed and they are ready to fire at a few moments' notice. They are not targeted on any particular country or city, but they are ready to be deployed in anger on any day of any year at any hour. I echo the Secretary of State's tribute to the Trident submarine crews and their families and all those who support their operation. It is an immense achievement that we maintain a continuous at-sea deterrent.

The presence of this capability at our disposal in the oceans helps to shape the global security environment. It is not just to keep us safe; it is to keep the world safe. It is to keep all those non-nuclear members of NATO under an umbrella. It is to engage the United States in what happens in Europe. If we gave up our nuclear weapons and France gave up its, which I presume is what is advocated by proponents of the motion, why would the United States be bothered to defend us when we cannot be bothered to defend ourselves? That is what the US would think; in fact, it is what the US already thinks in respect of conventional capability. If we were to take our piece off the board, it would be the final nail in the obligation of the US to defend us in extremis. It is the same question as whether we would pull the trigger to defend a non-NATO country without any nuclear capability, should Russia become aggressive with that country.

Mr MacNeil: What is the difference between the hon. Gentleman's policy and attitude towards this issue and the policy and attitude of people in America who feel that they need to have handguns to protect themselves "for security"?

Mr Jenkin: I do not think there is a parallel. The people who own handguns as individuals are not accountable for their behaviour. We have a licensing system in this country that is vigorous, makes people much more accountable and limits the number of such guns in circulation, particularly when it comes to people who might be less accountable. I can understand the hon. Gentleman's rather trivial point, but it is a rhetorical debating point, so I am not going to spend much time on it.

There is another question that we keep hearing: "Is this really an independent deterrent?" I have spent plenty of time around a deterrent and around people who know about the deterrent, and if the Americans had some secret switch in some bunker in the United States that could disable our deterrent and prevent us from firing it, I think that we would know about it. That switch does not exist. The fact is that once the submarine is at sea, the command and control of the firing of the weapons system is completely autonomous. One of the factors that give us leverage over American policy is

that if this country were in trouble, or if Europe were in trouble, America too would be in trouble, because the possibility of a nuclear exchange would bind it inextricably into the conflict. Europe and the United States have many mutual interests, and there are many reasons why we should support each other's security policies, but, in extremis, we can strengthen that position by means of the capability that we possess.

Another question that we keep being asked is, "Does deterrence work?" There is evidence that it does, and those who argue that deterrence had nothing to do with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war are flying in the face of that evidence. There was an arms race, and the options that were available to the Soviet Union as it sought to solve its internal problems by expanding were contained by deterrence. It lost the arms race because it could not afford to keep up with the cost of the technology that the west could afford.

Mr MacNeil: If deterrence worked and mutually assured destruction worked, why did Colonel Petrov not respond in the 1980s when he thought that five missiles were bound for the USSR? If what the hon. Gentleman is saying were true, the world would have been annihilated in the 1980s.

Mr Jenkin: We do not expect the people who man the nuclear weapons systems in responsible countries such as ours—I even include Russia in that—to act as automatons; we expect them to use their judgment, and Colonel Petrov used his judgment. I would expect anyone in a position of that kind to use his judgment. As for the idea that we are all living on a knife edge because there will be some hideous nuclear accident at any minute, there is absolutely no evidence of that. The book that was referred to by the right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford, speaking for CND, is full of scare stories, none of which has actually led to any disaster. That is because safety is built into the systems, and those postulated disasters are extremely unlikely to occur.

The point that I make to the hon. Gentleman is the point that I would make to the right hon. Lady. Why does he think war between great powers ended at the same time as nuclear weapons were invented? It is because war between great powers possessing nuclear weapons suddenly became unthinkable. Other wars have occurred, but they have been wars in which the participants have not had nuclear weapons. The reason we live in what is perhaps a safer world is that we live in a world with nuclear weapons. I know that the hon. Gentleman will find that very hard to accept.

Mr MacNeil: What has happened since the end of the second world war is that colonial wars have ended. Colonialism has gone and imperialism has gone, and that is why wars between the great powers have gone. There was a change in the mindset of many countries when colonialism went. It had nothing to do with nukes.

Mr Jenkin: I hear the hon. Gentleman's assertion. There was a great competition between two great powers from 1945 until 1990, but it never resulted in an all-out conflict because both sides possessed nuclear weapons. I think that that speaks for itself.

[Mr Jenkin]

Why must the United Kingdom be the country that carries this responsibility? That is another question that we hear. I am afraid that it is an accident of history. We must because we can, and we must because others cannot or will not. Do we want Germany to become a nuclear power instead of us? Do we want France to be the only nuclear power in Europe? Do we want Italy and Spain to become nuclear powers? No. They do not want to, and we do not want them to. It is better for us to have a limit of two nuclear powers in Europe, and to share the responsibility with the United States. That is the way in which the dice of history have fallen, but it has advantages for us. We are one of the most powerful countries in the world. We project our power and status through the possession of nuclear weapons, and we hold our position on the P5 as a nuclear weapons state. We are, even now, one of the great powers in this world, providing global security for us and our allies, and indeed for so many of the countries that might consider themselves our enemies—that is one of the ironies of the situation—and shaping the global strategic environment in all our interests, not least our own.

Let us deal with another myth: the idea that scrapping Trident would allow a spending bonanza on other public programmes or on defence. There is no evidence to suggest that the Treasury would allow the cancellation of Trident and allow the Ministry of Defence to keep that money to spend on conventional weapons. No amount of expenditure on conventional weapons that we could possibly afford would replace the stabilising and security effects of possessing the nuclear deterrent.

The one really laughable bit of this debate is the Liberal Democrats' attempt to revive their now totally discredited "Trident Alternatives Review". Why do we need four submarines? I hear the caveat the Labour party gingerly puts on its commitment to that, but the fourth submarine is so far in the future that it will not affect the spending plans of the next Government or the one after, so the problem is almost academic at this stage. The question is whether or not we build submarines one, two and three—I will settle for that. We have four submarines to ensure the resilience of the system towards the end of its life. If we did not have four, we would by now have suffered an interruption of the continuous at-sea deterrence. If we do not maintain that, we have a part-time deterrent, which is no deterrent; there is no point in a temporary deterrent.

Let us deal with the fantasy that we could create joint-role submarines. The Americans may have them but they have 12 submarines. For them to maintain a continuous at-sea deterrence, they can have some submarines doing completely different tasks while some of their nuclear ballistic missile submarines are carrying out the deterrent role. They have a completely different force concept from us, and it would be improper to import it. They do not understand how we can manage continuous at-sea deterrence with just four submarines and they admire the resilience of our system. We should not fiddle with it, or we will disturb its resilience.

People then ask, "Why not have a cheaper or different system?" That argument has all been disposed of, because there is no cheaper or different system of which to avail ourselves, be it submarine-launched Cruise missiles, land-based missiles or air-launched weapons. We would

require new submarines. There is no submarine that can carry a nuclear-tipped Cruise missile. There is no nuclear Cruise missile. We would have to develop a new warhead and a new missile to have nuclear-launched Cruise missiles. We would need to have a new submarine because the payload of a nuclear Cruise missile is so much bigger than a conventional Cruise missile. We would need to develop a completely new submarine, which is what we are doing for the Trident system in any case—it is actually the cheapest system available. There is no alternative system. If we were to diversify into a completely new weapons system, it could be argued that we would be in breach of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty because we would not be replacing like with like.

Let us deal with the concept of these different proposals, and the idea that we should abandon the continuous at-sea deterrence and keep our submarines on the Clyde until there is an emergency. Let us imagine that halfway through the Ukraine crisis we had decided to deploy our ballistic missile submarine to a continuous patrol. The cameras would have been out and the families would have known. When a submarine sails, people know about it. The submarine deploys down the Clyde on the surface, so people can take pictures of it—it is not difficult—so the world would have known that we were escalating the crisis. To make ourselves safer we have to escalate the crisis—what an absurd position to put ourselves in. Were there a real crisis at that moment of escalation, our deterrent on the surface, visible by satellite, would itself be vulnerable to attack; we would be inviting a pre-emptive attack in order to prevent us from deploying our deterrent capability.

It is strategic nonsense to move to a part-time deterrent, and the same applies in respect of submarine-launched cruise missiles. A cruise missile is a subsonic weapon, whose launch would be detected and tracked long before it arrived on target. It would be vulnerable then to interception. How many cruise missiles would we need, to be able to provide a credible deterrent? Nobody knows—nobody knows the costs of this, but they would be astronomical. In any case, it is likely that our enemy would launch a ballistic missile, which would arrive on target in our own country within minutes and long before our missile had arrived at its target. Therefore, it is not a deterrent. The same goes for land-based missiles: there is no land-based system available. Where would we put it if we were to have a land-based system? [Interruption.] Incidentally, we would need to develop our own warheads to deploy on any different weapons system, and that cost would have to be factored in.

The "Trident Alternatives Review" has been completely trashed and rubbished. The reason that the option appears to be on the table is not that the Liberal Democrats believe it is viable—I do not believe they do—but that they think it is a bargaining chip to use in the negotiations with one of the two major parties at a time of a hung Parliament if that were to emerge after the general election.

The two main parties are quite near to making it clear to the Liberal Democrats that there is simply no deal. Until that stupid policy is taken off the table, there is no conversation to be had about any future coalition with the Liberal Democrats. That is what should have happened in 2010. I am sorry that it did not, but I am very encouraged by the confidence and determination of the Labour party that continuous at-sea deterrents will be maintained after the next election. There is a simple

reason why that should happen: it is entirely probable, indeed almost certain, that there will be a clear majority in this House for continuous at-sea deterrents and the Trident submarine system—there was a majority last year and in 2007. Even if there is a party in coalition with a caveat, the majority of this House wants to maintain this system and that is the obligation. That is something that we can demonstrate for the public good, without party politics, across the Floor of the House. There is consensus and agreement on this. Sometimes we put our national interests ahead of our own party interests and we get on with the job that we are here to do, which is to govern our country and keep it safe.

5.22 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin). I listened very carefully to his words, as I did with all the other Conservative hawks. Indeed, we have heard a few Labour hawks, too. I say to him that there is at least an intellectual consistency running through the heart of the debate. We heard it during the period of high Thatcherism when there was a real and substantial threat and we knew what we were up against with the Soviet Union. We are hearing it again now, but we do not know from where the threat is coming or from what we are trying to protect ourselves. I have no idea at whom these weapons will be targeted. Even if we had a nirvana of world peace, we would still have the Tory hawks arguing for their nuclear weapons. They would be telling us why they were an absolute necessity and why the deterrent would have to be a feature of every community in our country.

I want to get back to what motivates us. I know what motivates the hawks on the Tory Benches. They like their nuclear weapons—of course they do—and they think they are an important feature of this country. But we all come to this matter with a set of principles—a value system—that helps to inform the important decisions that we have to take as public representatives and legislators. That is our political and moral compass, and it helps us to determine our approach to public life and the important decisions that we take in this House.

Nothing is more important to me than my fundamental belief, desire and drive to rid my country of nuclear weapons and to end the absurdity, nonsense and madness of nuclear deterrence. For me, it is an unshakeable imperative and a moral, non-negotiable responsibility. I could never countenance agreeing to have nuclear weapons as an ongoing feature of my nation.

I am appalled that my beautiful country is defiled by the presence of these evil weapons of mass destruction, 40 miles from our largest city. My lovely Scotland—

Mr Kevan Jones *rose*—

Pete Wishart: Yes, I know what the hon. Gentleman is going to say, so let us get it over with.

Mr Jones: The hon. Gentleman said that he had a principled position to rid Scotland of nuclear weapons, but he is prepared to join NATO, which is a nuclear alliance. Would he, as an SNP member in an independent Scotland, join the nuclear planning group and allow nuclear-armed submarines to visit Scotland?

Pete Wishart: That intervention was predictable. The hon. Gentleman is like a stuck record. I have been to Denmark—I actually sold 250,000 records in Denmark with my previous group—and for him to tell the Danes that they are a nuclear power would be a gross—

Mr Jones *rose*—

Pete Wishart: No, I will not give way. I have heard that so many times: Denmark, Norway, Spain, Canada, for goodness' sake, got rid of American nuclear weapons and is still in NATO. The hon. Gentleman does not understand and I am not prepared to take an intervention from him. He is a stuck record, spinning round and round all day, and I think the whole House is sick of it.

My peaceful Scotland is host to the largest silo of weapons of mass destruction in western Europe. Lorries carrying all sorts of parts to service and keep this genocidal arsenal roll happily along the roads of Scotland almost unnoticed and untroubled with their death-maintaining cargo. Weapons of mass destruction such as Trident sit uneasily and angularly with everything I know about the fantastic values of my country. It is a country of social solidarity, trying to promote the common weal and strong community values, yet my country hosts the biggest arsenal of genocidal weapons in western Europe.

Mr Mike Weir (Angus) (SNP): Is not the situation actually worse than that? A previous speaker talked about other nuclear installations around the country, but is it not the case that convoys are bringing these nuclear weapons through the city of Glasgow to get to Faslane?

Pete Wishart: I heard, and I am sure my hon. Friend is aware of these reports, that these cargoes were being shipped through the city centre of Glasgow only last week. That is what we have to put up with in Scotland: these death convoys on our roads.

I am so pleased that nuclear weapons and Trident became a defining iconic feature of the independence referendum. The progressive voices of Scotland got together and ensured that this debate was promoted and taken around the halls of Scotland. I am so proud that I was on the right side of the debate. I would never side with people who believe in nuclear weapons and who continue to support the case for them.

We are not even asking the House to scrap nuclear weapons, or even to reduce their number. We are simply asking the House not to agree to £100 billion of new nuclear weapons. We use the terms multilateralist and unilateralist, but by committing ourselves to Trident renewal we are indulging in a unilateral nuclear rearmament. We are adding to the stock of nuclear weapons worldwide, and that does nothing for the ambition mentioned by those on the Labour Front Bench of ridding the world of nuclear weapons and it does nothing for achieving any multilateral aim.

We are asking the House not to agree to pursue £100 billion of spending on weapons of mass destruction that can never be used. This will be the second time in two weeks that those on the Labour Front Bench and their colleagues will walk through the Lobby with the Tories. Last week, they committed themselves to £30 billion of further austerity, agreeing with the Conservatives.

[Pete Wishart]

Today, they will march through the Lobby with the Tories to support them on the subject of £100 billion of spending on nuclear weapons. Last week, Labour said that it was all a gimmick. They have not described our debate today as a gimmick, although I have seen some reports of that, but they are still prepared to support the Conservatives on both issues. People are rightly asking what on earth Labour is for.

We need to hear exactly what people believe will be the biggest spending issue of the next Parliament. Already, £250 million is being spent each year on what is called the assessment phase—the lead-in phase to Trident renewal. Some £1.4 million a day is being spent on preparing for this weapon of mass destruction and an estimated £1.24 billion has been spent on the project so far. That just happens to be the same amount as the Chancellor has pledged to find in new money for the NHS.

We do not know how much this project will cost. We say that it will be £100 billion, but that figure was challenged by the Conservatives. The Secretary of State refused to say how much it would cost, and when he was challenged on the figure, we got nothing from him. We do not know the Government's estimate of the cost of all this. They talk about the main-gate decision in 2016. I suggest to Ministers that they should slam that main gate closed and leave it padlocked. This country does not want Trident renewal.

How can we justify spending so much money on obscene weapons of mass destruction when food banks are a feature of every community in every constituency in Scotland? The Westminster establishment parties have rarely been held in such contempt. The Westminster elite who run those parties can barely get more than 30% support in the polls. The Westminster establishment parties are so out of kilter with what the public want and the everyday experience of people in every community it is no wonder that they are held in such low esteem and that the House is held in contempt.

The motion is signed by members of the SNP, the Green party and Plaid Cymru, which suggests that we are beginning to do something different. It is an absolute challenge to the old failure of the Westminster—Tory/Labour, Labour/Tory, austerity-voting, Trident-supporting—establishment. We offer the people of Britain the opportunity of a different way of doing things: a progressive alliance that is not prepared to accept that we just go along with £30 billion of further austerity spending and the renewal of Trident weapons.

I am pleased about that, because it means that people in England, for example, do not have to vote for a Europhobic, immigrant-loathing, quasi-racist UK Independence party. They and my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) have something substantial to support and vote for. We have already seen the results, with a Green surge. No wonder that the Labour and Tory parties want Nigel Farage, another establishment public school banker, to take part in the election debates. It does not surprise me that they will do everything that they can to keep my hon. Friend and the SNP out of those debates, although the Prime Minister has stood up, rather late, for the inclusion of the Green party.

Let us see what these weapons do, and challenge and test the assumptions of my friends, the Conservative defence hawks who enjoy nuclear weapons so much. There were unashamed in saying that Trident and weapons of mass destruction were necessary as a virility symbol, allowing us to be part of the P5—as if the British people cared the least bit about any of that. The British people care about spending on the NHS and education. They are concerned about food banks. Being able to sit with other nuclear powers to play with their toys? I do not think that that is what the British people want, and we are beginning to see that in opinion polls here.

We are told that deterrence works because of all sorts of external threats. We have heard some really dodgy stuff about the prospect of using nuclear weapons against Ukraine, and including that in any discussion or debate.

Mr Jenkin: If France, Britain and America do not dominate the P5, who does? There is always talk about other powers joining the P5. If India, or perhaps less savoury countries, joined the P5, that would not be good for British security and the democratic world. We are there for a purpose, which is to serve the democratic world, and we do it very well.

Pete Wishart: That is the difference between the hon. Gentleman and me. He believes that that is important, but I could not care less about that sort of thing. I believe that it is increasingly the case that the British people could not care less about that. We are struggling—there is real need and deprivation—with Tory obscenities like the bedroom tax. Does he honestly believe that people in the constituency of the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Jim Sheridan) care whether they can sit around the table with the big boys and their weapons of mass destruction? No, I do not believe that that is the case, and the British people have begun to wake up to that.

The Government say that nuclear weapons defend us against threats. The biggest threat we face is from IS and jihadists, who would be almost delighted if we threatened them with weapons of mass destruction. They would celebrate and punch the air, because Britain would be turning it on—they would appreciate and enjoy it. This is a weapons system designed to deal with the Brezhnevs of this world, not the bin Ladens. It is a cold war response to a cold war situation, and it is ill equipped to deal with the very serious external threats that we face. North Korea is a cartoon caricature of a totalitarian state. Are we seriously suggesting that we contain these nonsensical states with nuclear weapons?

I do not even know whether we are an ally of Iran this week or an enemy, such is the state of continuing flux with all the former enemies who are now new friends. We cannot keep pace with identifying who these external threats are, but the only thing we must consistently have is nuclear weapons to threaten them. If there was ever a logic to nuclear weapons—it would be a perverted logic if so—it was the idea of mutually assured destruction during the cold war: “We could kill all you guys because you could kill all our guys.” It is utter madness to think that that is an applicable argument in this modern age with this new variety of threats.

We are going to spend £100 billion on these weapons of mass destruction that we will never use just so that the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin)

and his friends in the Conservative Government can sit at the top table. This is on top of the £30 billion of extra austerity promised to us by both the Conservative party and the Labour party. People are increasingly talking about a new alliance with the 30 per centers, as we could call them—the Conservative and Labour parties, which cannot get above that figure. That is a realistic prospect, because this will be the second time in a week that they have voted together on such issues. There is a new way of doing things in this country and a new alliance is beginning.

Mr Marcus Jones: The hon. Gentleman is expressing the view that nuclear disarmament is very popular. When was the last time that a Government in this country were elected on the basis of nuclear disarmament?

Pete Wishart: Let me tell the hon. Gentleman about the front page of a national newspaper in Scotland today showing that 60% of the Scottish people are now opposed to nuclear weapons. That is people in the constituency of the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North, in my constituency, and in the constituency of the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Gemma Doyle). This is now a popular movement that is beginning to gain traction.

Gemma Doyle (West Dunbartonshire) (Lab/Co-op): Let me clarify this for the record. I have seen the figures that the hon. Gentleman mentions, and he excluded the “don’t knows” in that poll. In fact, fewer than half, not 60%, of people hold the position that he describes.

Pete Wishart: The hon. Lady and I have been through lots of opinion polls in the past year. If she is so confident about her position, she should go out on the hustings and explain why Scottish Labour is a nuclear party that is prepared to spend £100 billion on Trident renewal. That is what she will have to do, and I wish her all the best in trying to get re-elected on that basis, because there is now an alternative.

There is a new way of doing things. The Westminster establishment and the Westminster elite that run this place are beginning to experience real electoral difficulties. People across the country are recognising that the old ways of doing things are not good enough. Cold war weapons for an austerity future: that is what both parties are promising, and that is what will be rejected at the next election.

5.38 pm

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the part-polemic by the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart). He was unable to answer a question put to him when he was challenged by Opposition Front Benchers about the extent to which his party, as the head of an independent Scotland, would be prepared to shelter under the American nuclear alliance. That is an important question that his party has to answer.

I say that from the perspective of someone who intends to vote with the hon. Gentleman this evening. It is right that there should be a proper debate about this, and I therefore welcome the debate that his party colleagues have introduced. We should have a cool, calm consideration of the merits of the Trident weapons system. Over the

course of a decade, I have been increasingly uncomfortable about the prospect of renewing this weapons system. It is a system, and we are renewing the submarines that make up part of it. Some people have said that the motion is therefore technically in error, but without the submarines the system is pointless and without the missiles it is pointless. That is what the motion means and it is on that basis that I support it. Let me explain why.

The clinching argument for me—although I also want to refer to lots of other issues—is the opportunity cost of spending, let us say, £100 billion on renewing the weapons system over its lifetime. I am wearing the regimental tie of the Light Dragoons and want to make it clear that I spent a long time in defence, professionally and then subsequently as a special adviser in the Ministry of Defence and then in the Foreign Office. I remember trying to plan a scenario, in a political sense, for the circumstances in which the United Kingdom would decide to use nuclear weapons or weapons of similar destructive power, but, frankly, I found it impossible to find such a scenario. I think that that is still the case, and the deterrent effect of that uncertainty has been discussed.

Thirty years on from the decision taken in the 1980s to acquire the Trident system, things have changed significantly and, given the opportunity cost of acquiring the system, I believe that the decision to spend £100 billion should be altered. This weapons system is of much less practical utility than it used to be in deterrence terms and, given the cost-benefit analysis, the time has come to say that this is a business that the United Kingdom should probably get out of. As a nation, given the other potential demands on our defence budget, we can no longer justify the expense.

I listened carefully to the arguments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin)—he made an extremely good speech—and they need to be addressed. First, if we buy this system, will it come at the expense of other parts of the defence budget? My view is that it will. My hon. Friend maintained that if the system is not bought, the Treasury will not give the Ministry of Defence the money. However, we have just made a significant political commitment to maintain defence expenditure at 2% of GDP.

Mr Jenkin: Have we?

Crispin Blunt: It was a political commitment made by the leaders of NATO at a summit hosted by the United Kingdom, so I believe we have made that commitment. The Government have not made it explicit and the Prime Minister will not do so before the general election, because we have to address serious budget issues and he is, rightly, giving himself room for manoeuvre. Everyone present knows that defence expenditure is already at historically low levels in terms of its share of national wealth. We are making economies in defence and in my view our defence posture is, frankly, incoherent, because we can no longer afford a coherent defence policy for the United Kingdom due to the amount of resources we are devoting to it.

That is an issue for another debate, but it illustrates the point about the cost of acquiring this system. In the 1980s it cost between 2.5% and 3% of the total defence budget. The cost of renewing the system will be at about

[Crispin Blunt]

the same level of real expenditure, which means that it will cost about 6% of the defence budget. In private conversations with colleagues who share the same back-ground as me, when I ask them whether they would rather have that money spent on the field army or on acquiring this weapons system, their answer is clear: they would rather have it spent on actual deployable defence—soldiers, sailors, airmen and the equipment deployed with them on operations—or even on the deterrence that a decent set of conventional armed forces provides. The names of some of the distinguished former Chiefs of the Defence Staff or those in other roles who have questioned the value for money of taking such a sum out of the defence budget have already been paraded.

I would argue very strongly to the Defence Secretary that if we are committed to this system, we should understand that it is a political weapons system, and that it is of very doubtful military utility. I do not entirely buy the deterrence argument, but that is a qualified position, because all these things are matters of judgment. If we do buy the argument, however, that should not come at the expense of a coherent defence programme. If we need 2% of GDP to provide a coherent conventional defence programme, we should buy this political weapons system not out of that budget, but from a separate source of funding.

In an intervention on the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), I asked just how much he would spend on acquiring this weapons system. He represents Barrow, where the submarines will be made, so I understand that his view of their value is rather different from that of other Members. However, we must answer this question, which we have not properly addressed: at what point does the expense become unaffordable for the United Kingdom?

I am perfectly content to continue to shelter under the American nuclear umbrella. I accept that the decision matrix would be profoundly different if the United States of America was not a rock-solid ally, the Atlantic alliance was not extremely important to the Americans or we could not place the same degree of reliability on their support as we now do. If we had good reason to believe that the United States was not going to be intimately tied into the defence of ourselves and Europe, the decision would be different. I happen to believe, however, that our interests are so closely intertwined, as they have been in all sorts of ways, that we can continue to rely on that alliance.

Frankly, I am not sure that the Americans place very much value on a separate source of nuclear deterrence decision making in London. I think that they would prefer us to bring such resources to the table in the form of deployable conventional forces. The United States Government will not of course take a public view that embarrasses the UK Government, but if we scratched them, we would find that they would rather we had more effective conventional forces.

I do not buy the argument of my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex that we would lose the money from the defence budget altogether and not be able to spend it on anything else. However, even if the money was lost, it would have value: £100 billion off the debt or spent on other parts of the public service would be valuable.

I therefore ask: what are we buying with the system? There should be a debate about whether we are buying security or, given the laws of unintended consequences, insecurity. The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire said that he thought we were buying status for our leaders so that they can parade themselves appropriately at conferences. I do not buy that argument—our leaders are perfectly capable of thinking in hard terms about what hard security is affordable—but I am concerned about the political background to this discussion, and about whether we can have a sensible debate on the cost-benefit analysis of acquiring this system.

The problem is the inheritance of the politics of the 1980s. When the decision was made to acquire the Vanguard and Trident system, the then Labour Opposition came out against it in 1983 as part of the “longest suicide note in history” that they presented to the United Kingdom electorate. I think that that policy was wrong and that at the time, because of the cold war, it was right to renew the deterrent. The people of the United Kingdom took the same view in the general election, as they did about the rest of the basket of promises that Michael Foot and his colleagues presented to the country, and they gave that policy, very properly, an extremely large raspberry and possibly the biggest Conservative majority in the history of Parliament—I am sure I will be corrected if that is wrong.

The scarring effect of that event, and the fact that there might be some proper debate, particularly on the Opposition Benches, means that dissent is suppressed. I am proud to stand here as a Conservative and question the efficacy of the decision under discussion, particularly in terms of its opportunity cost. It may be that I have discounted my future career prospects to such an extent that I feel free to make these points, but for the benefit of the Government Whip who is making a note, I say that this is where my judgment lies currently, but it would not prevent me from exercising collective responsibility to support the decision as part of any future Administration. [Laughter.] We should be able to have this debate and ask questions. How much money would we be prepared to spend on this system if its cost was not going to be 6% of the defence budget? What about if it was 10% or 20% of the defence budget? At what point does it cease to be sensible to invest in this system?

Many Members support deterrence in principle, or at least are not against the possession of weapons of this destructive power in principle—that is a perfectly proper position to take, although I do not share it because to a degree I buy the arguments that I grew up with in the 1970s and 1980s about the principle of a defence. I agree that during the cold war these weapons ensured that the world did not elide into direct hot war engagements that had the ability to escalate into catastrophe. The potential for catastrophe at the root of deterrence in a cold war, bipolar world kept us safe, but we are now in a different world and different calculations must be made.

My view is that for the United Kingdom, 6% of the defence budget is not justifiable, and that also relates to my view of Britain's place in the world. Unlike most of my colleagues, I would be prepared to put our permanent seat on the Security Council up for negotiation and debate in a reform of the UN Security Council, to try to make that institution more effective. I think it is difficult to justify a British veto on the UN Security Council, and because it is so difficult to justify, the veto is hardly

ever used by the United Kingdom. We must also think about Britain's role in the world, and I do not think that we have properly had the debate about exactly what we can bring to the councils of the world, and what Britain's position in the world should be.

We will be much better equipped to defend our interests if we are a wealthy, successful, entrepreneurial and trading nation that looks out to the entire world, and I am not sure that landing us with a weapons system that we are never going to use is a sensible use of resources, and it therefore might become a burden—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am loth to interrupt the hon. Gentleman. He is making an extremely interesting speech, which is being listened to with respect. He said that the debate needed to happen and I just want, very politely, to make the point that six other hon. Members, who will have a lot less time than the hon. Gentleman, are waiting to speak. Therefore, I feel confident in predicting that his last sentence is coming.

Crispin Blunt: I am very grateful, Mr Speaker. I looked around to see who was standing and got to a different number, so I am immensely grateful and will conclude my arguments.

I had taken the view of the hon. Member for North Devon (Sir Nick Harvey) that there should be an alternative way of buying this kind of deterrence, or at least some kind of deterrence, in a cheaper way. I now accept that the alternatives review has answered that question, and has at least made the decision matrix around this much clearer. I do not think it is now possible, on the basis of that work, for us to buy a deterrent in a different way.

However, I gently point out to those who think that by renewing these weapons we are buying an invulnerable system, that I do not think we are. I think the nature of surveillance under the sea will make the future generation of submarines much more discoverable than present science suggests, and the question of Scottish independence will come around again in the lifetime of this weapons system. Had we had to move this weapons system from an independent Scotland, the cost of making a base for it in Plymouth or elsewhere would have been eye-watering. All of those uncertainties need to be factored in. On that basis, and on the opportunity cost, I will with deep regret be voting against most of my colleagues this evening.

5.56 pm

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): It is an old adage in Parliament that there are no votes in defence. Perhaps today has blown that out of the water. As I sat here, I was wondering whether the party political stuff should enter into this debate on a crucial defence and security issue. I have come to the view that it is helpful. I think the public need to know where the parties stand and the consequences of the votes they will be casting in May.

I was disappointed that the Secretary of State chose to refer to the Labour party as “the shower opposite”. Personally, I found that offensive and it was beneath the dignity of his office. I therefore feel free to point out that he was wrong to suggest that the Labour party is in any way lacking a total commitment to

“a minimum credible independent, nuclear deterrent, delivered through a Continuous At-Sea Deterrent”.

I will point out to the Conservative party that the one thing on which I have agreed with the Scottish National party is that its decision—in front of the Defence Committee, the Secretary of State seemed not to understand or know about it—to remove the capability offered by the Nimrod maritime reconnaissance and attack aircraft, the MRA4, would, as the National Audit Office has said, have an adverse effect on the protection of the strategic nuclear deterrent.

The Secretary of State told the Committee that the planes were not available and had never flown. Later in the evidence session, however, we were told by a senior officer in the RAF that he had actually flown the MRA4. Let us get our act together. Let us get our facts accurate. The Labour party is for a continuous at-sea deterrent and is committed to the defence and security of the United Kingdom.

I am pleased that we have a red line regarding some of the coalitions being talked about. The public need to understand that it will be impossible for Labour to enter a coalition with the Scottish nationalists, the Green party and Plaid Cymru, because of their red line on removing the nuclear deterrent. That is fine; at least we know where we stand. The public also know where the Liberal Democrats stand: they want to buy nuclear submarines but park them somewhere. It is like saying, “We’ll have a burglar alarm on our house but we’ll never turn it on, because we don’t believe there are any burglars out there.” The party political thing has gone too far but it has been helpful, in that at least the public now know where the parties stand.

Those opposed to the nuclear deterrent like to take the moral high ground, as if opposition to mass slaughter and a desire to protect this green and pleasant land were more in their blood than in the blood of we who believe that a nuclear deterrent is essential to the protection of the UK. I used to be a paid-up member of CND. When I was first elected to the House 10 years ago—new Members arrive with nothing, no office, no computer, no staff—the first letter that came across my desk was from a Mrs Hopkins in Bridgend, asking where I stood on the nuclear deterrent. I thought I knew where I stood, but I wanted to be the best MP that Bridgend could have, and I was not just going to tell her what my opinion was. I did my research and I spent a lot of time in the Library, and she was shocked by the letter she got back, because it was not what she had expected, and neither was it what I had expected to write. Having done the research and looked at all the risks and arguments, I realised that the nuclear deterrent was critical to Britain's defence and security.

There has been lots of talk about finances and how much of the defence budget we should be comfortable with spending. We are told it is 5% or 6% at the moment, but some ask, “What if it rose to 10%?” Quite honestly, I would be worried about what the Government were spending the money on, and whether they were spending across the board and taking the security of the UK seriously, if the majority of our defence budget was going on the nuclear deterrent. It is part of a package. It is not the only thing; it is part of the thing. Yes, there are new risks and threats to this country—there always are—but just because there are new ones coming does not mean that the old ones have disappeared, because they have not; they are still there, and they are serious.

[Mrs Madeleine Moon]

I am a member of the Defence Committee and of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, so I talk a lot with other Governments about defence issues and where Britain stands in the world of defence. I have been to the Pentagon and the State Department, and I have asked them how critical is Britain's nuclear deterrent. They see it not as an add-on, a joke, an irrelevance, but as essential to NATO. How do they think the American people would feel if we said, "We can't afford to spend this, so you fess up. You pay for Britain and the rest of NATO's nuclear capability"? That is not going to happen—let's be real. America should not and cannot pay for the whole of the defence of NATO. It already pays too much, which is why Britain, at the NATO conference, was urging NATO allies to step up to the 2%. It is why we were so vociferous about it.

I have not just talked to the Americans; I have talked to countries in eastern Europe who face the nuclear threat and know the reality of Russia. They are terrified of that nuclear threat from Russia. It is something we need to take seriously. I have talked to the Afghans and the Pakistanis. I have repeatedly asked questions and the thing that comes out clearly is that nobody in the world would feel safer if we stepped back from our responsibilities to maintain our nuclear deterrence.

This debate is timely and important. I am aware, Mr Speaker, that you want others to speak, but may I briefly say that if Members still have any doubts, they should look at the Trident commission, which was cross-party and reported in July 2014? It said:

"If there is more than a negligible chance that the possession of nuclear weapons might play a decisive future role in the defence of the United Kingdom and its allies in preventing nuclear blackmail or in affecting the wider security context with which the UK sits, then they should be retained."

They were cross-party speakers—key individuals in the history of this House. That was their finding; it should be ours too.

Mr Speaker: There is just under seven minutes for remaining speakers, so I would appeal to colleagues to help each other.

6.7 pm

Mr Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute) (LD): This has been a very interesting debate. I very much want to see a world free of nuclear weapons and we should put every effort into the nuclear non-proliferation treaty talks to try to achieve that. Nuclear weapons are an appalling invention but the reality is that they have been invented. If Britain were to give up our nuclear deterrent unilaterally, as the movers of the motion propose, that would not persuade one single other country to follow suit. It is not our nuclear deterrent that worries me, but that those who wish us harm might obtain a nuclear deterrent themselves.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): I, like my hon. Friend, believe in multilateral disarmament. He has studied the issue carefully. Does he believe that there is any realistic alternative to Trident as the UK's independent nuclear deterrent?

Mr Reid: No, there is no realistic alternative. The Government were right to have the review, which showed clearly that Trident was the minimal-cost credible nuclear deterrent.

We have no idea what nuclear threats might emerge over the next 50 years. A nuclear deterrent is like an insurance policy; the intention is never to use it, so it may appear to some to be a waste of money. But if it succeeds in its aim of deterring possible adversaries, it has done its job and is worth the money.

The Vanguard submarines are nearing the end of their life and next year we must take a decision on whether or not to replace them. It was right to put off a decision for as long as we could so that we have the most up-to-date information available to us before taking that decision, but next year is definitely the final possible date for taking that decision. Barring some dramatic and unexpected breakthrough on multilateral nuclear disarmament, the right decision next year has to be to build the replacement submarines for the Vanguards.

Since the end of the cold war, Britain has contributed greatly to nuclear disarmament. We have given up our tactical maritime and airborne nuclear capabilities, as well as our nuclear-capable Lance missiles and artillery. Britain possesses the smallest nuclear capability of any of the five nuclear weapons states recognised by the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and we have only one delivery platform.

It is very important to note that there are no proposals to upgrade the capability of the Trident system or to acquire additional nuclear warheads. The motion is incoherent. It talks about not replacing Trident, but Trident refers to the missiles. It is not the missiles that need replacement; it is the submarines. Next year's decision is purely about building new submarines to replace those that will soon go out of service. The SNP in its motion wants us not to renew Trident, yet it wants to join NATO, a nuclear weapons alliance, and it wants to be protected by French and American nuclear weapons. That policy is just incoherent.

A submarine system with ballistic missiles remains the most effective and least vulnerable form of deterrent. Aircraft can be shot down. Land-based silos are vulnerable to attack. In contrast, a submarine can hide in the depths of the ocean. The submarine base at Faslane is in my constituency, and, like other speakers, I pay tribute to all those who serve in our submarines and their families. Our submariners are very committed to serving their country and are away from their families for months on end. I also pay tribute to those who work at Faslane and the armaments depot at Coulport. They carry out very highly skilled jobs with an extremely high level of professionalism.

We should be doing our utmost to work to rid the world of nuclear weapons, and I was pleased to hear the Defence Secretary say that Britain will be hosting a non-proliferation treaty conference next month, but it would be wrong for Britain, as the movers of the motion want, to give up our nuclear deterrent unilaterally. That would not remove anyone else's and would not make the world any safer.

6.11 pm

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): I apologise for missing part of this debate, but I had duties to perform on the Serious Crime Bill this afternoon.

When I was 20 years old Mrs Thatcher had just been elected for the first time, and it was the height of the cold war. Like any idealistic 20-year-old, I wanted to live in a peaceful world free of nuclear weapons and the threat of nuclear annihilation. I did not think it was too much to ask. I was young and had the rest of my life ahead of me, so I joined CND.

CND wanted to get rid of nuclear weapons unilaterally —“just like that,” as if they could be magicked away. Although CND’s approach to nuclear disarmament was well-meaning, the organisation elevated unilateral nuclear disarmament from a tactic to a principle. CND implied at the time that “If you’re a unilateralist, you’re a peace lover. If you’re a multilateralist, you’re a warmonger.” I doubt very much that the British people are warmongers and they taught me a valuable lesson in 1983 when they let the Labour party know in no uncertain terms at the ballot box what they thought of our position on unilateral nuclear disarmament. Shortly after that, I left CND.

I relay that story because I believe those who are unilateralists hold strongly held convictions, but so do multilateralists. Both unilateralism and multilateralism are tactics—they are a means to an end—and are not principles. A world of peace and a world free of nuclear weapons and of the threat of nuclear annihilation are the principles and the goals we should be pursuing. To hold up unilateralism as anything more than a tactic and to try and portray it as a superior and moral principle is a lamentable fallacy and could turn, like this motion before us today, into something wholly disingenuous and hypocritical. For example, I do not understand how the SNP can promote unilateral nuclear disarmament and want to see the removal of nuclear bases from the Clyde, but want to stay part of NATO, which is a nuclear alliance. I now understand, however, that the SNP wants to remain part of NATO only if NATO takes all possible steps to bring about nuclear disarmament. I think we can all agree with that objective whether we are unilateralists or multilateralists, and we already know that nuclear stockpiles have been significantly reduced by NATO members through multilateral action. The SNP would have the deterrent move south of the border, because if there were, God forbid, a nuclear catastrophe, any nuclear fallout would stop drifting north once it reached Hadrian’s wall.

But what is the principle at stake? For the SNP it is a belief in a narrow-minded and short-sighted nationalism, where its contribution to a nuclear weapon-free world is the removal of such weapons from Scottish soil while leaving the deterrent itself intact because, after all, the SNP wants to be protected by NATO’s nuclear umbrella. That is what I mean about its being disingenuous. For the rest of us, the principle at stake is a secure world where prosperity is shared and people live as best they can together. For me that is a laudable ambition and it is one that the SNP will say it adheres to, but how do we achieve that ambition—by withdrawing from the world and making our country smaller, or by embracing the world with all its faults? Surely it is the latter approach that offers the best chance of success.

However, I believe that the supporters of the motion want to retreat from the world and renege on their responsibilities by giving up on the tools already at their disposal to do the job. What do I mean by this? The nationalist parties may seem bigger than they are because

they are taking on more than what they are. In this case, they are taking on the rest of the United Kingdom, but their stated ambition of breaking up the United Kingdom will diminish not only Scotland but the opportunity to achieve what the SNP sees as the most important goal of all—a world free of nuclear weapons, which we all want to see. The irony is that the SNP and Plaid Cymru will never achieve any of this without remaining part of the UK. That is why the motion is disingenuous. The proposers of the motion know that; and if they do not, at least the Scottish people do.

The SNP’s stance will diminish what it wants to achieve. If the United Kingdom were no longer united, and if the SNP’s sister party, UKIP, had its way and we left Europe, the UK’s permanent seat on the UN Security Council would rightly be jeopardised. That would be a disaster because—I know this is not popular with the SNP and Plaid Cymru—Britain is a force for good in the world. I do not believe in a little England; I believe in a Great Britain. Britain is a force for good which should not be diminished by impotent nationalism which believes that the best way of solving the problems of the world is withdrawing from the world.

If the SNP has its way, it may see the removal of a nuclear deterrent from Scotland to another part of these islands that it shares with the rest of us, but it will further diminish the prospect of achieving its stated aim of a nuclear weapon-free world. Like nuclear fall-out, my aspirations for a world free of nuclear weapons do not end at Hadrian’s wall. Until agreement can be reached on further reductions in nuclear weapons, Britain should be at the table shaping the future, not succumbing to it. Let us not forget that it is not just England that is represented on the UN Security Council as a permanent member, but Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Why the SNP wants to relegate Scotland from such a seat, I do not know.

If we do not take ourselves seriously, no one else will. In a globalised world the trick is not to be small and make ourselves even smaller, but to walk tall and be part of, not against, something greater than ourselves. As a consequence, Trident or its equivalent continually at-sea as a deterrent is the burden that we need to carry until multilateral disarmament opportunities arise. As I learned in the early 1980s, wishful thinking gets us nowhere.

6.18 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I apologise to the House for not being here at the start of the debate. As I explained to you in a letter, Mr Speaker, I was attending the funeral of a friend of mine, Mike Marqusee, a great writer who passed away last week. He had an enormous funeral this afternoon. My hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) was there, too. When I informed the massive audience that we were leaving to come to vote against Trident, they burst into rapturous applause.

Mike Marqusee wrote a great deal and thought a great deal. He started by opposing the Vietnam war and spent his life campaigning for peace and a nuclear-free world. During the funeral we received a message from another good friend of mine, Achin Vanaik, who is an anti-nuclear campaigner in India. He does not want India to have nuclear weapons or to be a nuclear power,

[*Jeremy Corbyn*]

and he does not want Britain to be a nuclear power. He wants to see a nuclear-free world. He is not alone. There are millions around the world who do not see nuclear weapons as their peace and their security. They see such weapons, first, as an enormous expenditure and, secondly, as an enormous threat to this world.

I attended the Vienna conference on the humanitarian effects of nuclear weapons, along with other colleagues from the House. I was very pleased that, at the last moment, the British Government decided to attend, as did the United States Government. That was a good step forward, because they had not attended previous conferences in Oslo and Mexico. I hope that all the delegates took in the reality of what a nuclear explosion is. When Members talk glibly about the deterrent or the threat—the possibility of deterring people through the use of nuclear weapons—they should pause and think for a moment. If someone says that they have a deterrent and it is a threat, they must be prepared to use it. If anyone anywhere in the world uses a nuclear weapon of any size, millions die and there is an environmental catastrophe, a global recession, a food shortage and a nuclear winter. It would mean the destruction of an awful lot of things that we hold very dear. We talk glibly about the security that these weapons give us, but that security is one of destroying everything that we hold dear. Perhaps we should be a little less glib and a little more sanguine about the real humanitarian effects of nuclear weapons.

Next month, the Government will host a meeting of the P5, the permanent members of the UN Security Council that also happen to be the five declared nuclear weapons states, but please let no one tell me that if a country gives up nuclear weapons it can no longer be a permanent member of the Security Council, because that is simply not the case. Presumably, the meeting was designed to work out the line to take ahead of the five-yearly review conference on nuclear weapons, which will take place in New York in May.

The non-proliferation treaty was the product of good work by the Wilson Labour Government, and others, in 1970, and contains two key demands. The first is that the five declared nuclear weapons states—Britain, France, China, Russia and the USA—take steps towards disarmament. The second is that all other signatories agreed not to develop nuclear weapons, and the declared nuclear weapons states agreed not to export nuclear technology. Is the development of a new submarine and nuclear weapons systems by Britain part of taking steps towards disarmament? Or is it the very opposite—taking steps towards re-armament? Perhaps we could have more credibility by going to the P5 meeting in February with a proposal for the non-replacement of Trident and the start of a process of disarmament by all five P5 members. We could report back to the conference in May.

We have been discussing morality and credibility. At the conference on the humanitarian effects of war, the British representative, the ambassador to Vienna, delivered a speech on behalf of the Foreign Office in which he outlined the British Government's case for nuclear weapons, which was that they believe them to bring security—we have heard many of the same arguments today. It was

met with silence, sadness, disappointment and incredulity, particularly after we had heard from people who had witnessed nuclear explosions and seen their effects.

That speech was followed by one from the representative of the South African Government, who explained how South Africa had nuclear technology but had specifically given it up in order to make the continent of Africa a nuclear weapons-free zone. How did the conference receive that speech? There was amazing sympathy, support and optimism. We offered pessimism, threats and insecurity; the South Africans offered hope and some kind of justice around the world. I hope that the House will understand that many of us will never give up on the idea that we can and will live in a nuclear-free world, and that our existence as a country does not depend on being able to destroy the rest of the planet.

When 2016 comes, we will presumably be invited to vote on the replacement of the Trident nuclear missile system and expenditure on it of about £100 billion over the next 25 years. That is an utterly incredible sum of money. I obviously hope that we do not undertake the renewal, and that if we do we never use the weapons. An enormous amount of resources is taken up in creating a weapon of mass destruction when we could be setting our engineering industry, which is highly skilled, highly motivated and able to produce many things, to producing things of social and economic good rather than the drain involved in the cost of nuclear weapons. That, in turn, would help our economic development, whereas the development of nuclear weapons will not.

To those who say that it is all for our security and that our security is enhanced by nuclear weapons, let me say this. If we follow that argument, any country in the world can say, "We need nuclear weapons." Iceland could say it wants them; Paraguay could say it wants them; Japan could say it must have nuclear weapons—the list goes on, the countries get bigger and the possibilities become more dangerous.

The last review conference reiterated the previous decision that there should be a middle east weapons of mass destruction-free zone conference that would be hosted by the Finnish Government. It did not happen, and because it did not happen, Egypt walked out. Others in the Arab League and in the region warned that if this conference did not take place, there would be a danger to the whole non-proliferation treaty process. I hope that the Government are aware of that danger. Every single country at the last review conference agreed that the conference I mentioned for the middle east should take place, and I hope that it will. It would provide a way of getting Israel and Iran around the same table. We got together on chemical weapons and a load of other things, so we should get together on that. Otherwise, there will be a danger of a nuclear arms race developing across that region, with obvious dangers to the rest of the world.

Others wish to speak, so let me conclude with these thoughts. We were elected to this place to try to improve people's lives; we were elected to represent our constituents and to ensure that they have homes, jobs, schools, hospitals and security. A secure world is not created by an arms race, and it is not created by creating more and more threats. A secure world is created by looking at the issues that divide the world—the racism that divides the world; the poverty that divides the world; the environmental destruction that divides the world. Can we not look in a

different direction and deliver a different foreign policy, rather than hold to the arid idea that all we need to do is to spend phenomenal sums of money in order to threaten to destroy the whole planet?

6.28 pm

Katy Clark (North Ayrshire and Arran) (Lab): It is a huge pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) and to join him in paying tribute to Mike Marqusee—I knew him, too—who was involved in many campaigns, including many anti-war ones.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to put on record my opposition to Trident and to Trident renewal. I believe that continuing the Trident programme would be wrong politically, economically and militarily. At the beginning of the debate, there was a good deal of discussion about the costs of Trident, which have been disputed. What we know, however, is that if we look at the history of nuclear weapons systems, the costs have escalated and the eventual costs have on every occasion been hugely greater than was originally indicated by the Governments in power.

Some £100 billion, or something of that nature, is an absolutely obscene amount to spend in a country where the gap between rich and poor is getting greater, where far too many of our constituents are relying on food banks and where the political debate is dominated by discussion of what cuts should take place. It is interesting to note that some of the strongest advocates of Trident renewal are also the most robust advocates of cuts in other areas of public expenditure, such as public services and welfare. I do not believe that a decision to proceed with Trident, and the Trident renewal at main gate in 2016, will be acceptable to any of our constituents in any part of the country.

Too much of the debate has been dominated by the politics of the 1980s, and Labour Members believe that the politics of those years still dominate much of the thinking on this issue. The hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) made the same point in one of today's most interesting speeches. I think that, over the decades, the arguments of those who believe that the retention of a nuclear capability is not a sensible use of Britain's resources have become stronger and stronger. Nuclear weapons are no defence against the challenges that we face from terrorism; indeed, the more nuclear installations we have, the more vulnerable we become. We need to devote all our energies to nuclear disarmament throughout the world, and to the prevention of nuclear proliferation.

As has been pointed out repeatedly, all the arguments advanced by those who believe that it is essential for Britain to have nuclear weapons are equally valid in respect of every country in the world. We need to act politically in order to put nuclear disarmament at the top of the agenda. We need to turn up at discussions, as the British Government often do not. Deciding not to proceed with Trident, and to use the money in other ways, would be a hugely important step symbolically, and would have a huge impact throughout the world.

Given that a decision will be made in 2016, we need to engage in a full and open debate about whether Britain actually needs nuclear weapons. Certainly they are hugely unpopular in the part of the world that I represent, where we see the weapons and the submarines.

Only last Thursday, a nuclear convoy travelled through the roads of many parts of Scotland. It is clear that what the main political parties are saying is increasingly out of step with public opinion. We should be concentrating on redeveloping our economy by investing in defence diversification and in growth and jobs, rather than spending money on nuclear weapons systems, which are an incredibly ineffective and inefficient method of job creation.

I hope that Members in all parts of the House will make clear this evening that we must have a proper debate, and that we must make a decision that will be in the interests of the people of this country.

6.33 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I am very pleased to follow the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Katy Clark), and, indeed, the hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), who is a fellow member of the council of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. I am also very pleased to speak in support of this important motion. I support it for moral, security, economic and legal reasons.

Let me begin with the legal reasons. I believe that using Trident would be illegal. That is what the International Court of Justice concluded about nuclear weapons in its advisory opinion of 1996, an opinion that reflected international humanitarian law and the principle that states must never use weapons that are incapable of distinguishing between civilian and military targets. Even more specifically, that is the opinion of lawyers from Matrix Chambers who were asked for their judgment on two separate occasions, and who determined in both instances that

“The use of the Trident system would breach customary international law”,

in particular, under article 2(4) of the UN charter. The same lawyers found:

“Renewal or replacement of Trident at the same capability is likely to be inconsistent with Article VI”

of the non-proliferation treaty, to which the UK has been a signatory since 1968.

I wish to spend a moment discussing the NPT, because those in favour of nuclear weapons often cite it when making the case that countries such as Iran should not seek to acquire nuclear weapons. I certainly do not want to see Iran acquire nuclear weapons, but I recognise that the NPT is based on two key clauses. It is based on a bargain, the first part of which is that nations that do not have nuclear weapons should not seek to acquire them. The other part of the bargain—the forgotten part—is that nations with nuclear weapons should seek to negotiate them away in all earnestness. We seem to forget that second part, and we are not seeing much earnestness from Members on either side of the House.

It is useful briefly to consider the claim, often repeated by many Government and Opposition Members, that we need Trident for our security. I argue that nuclear weapons make us less safe. They divert major resources away from tackling our main security threats, and the Government have stated that the security threats we face today are primarily terrorism and cyber-attacks; I would add climate insecurity to that list. It is not difficult to find experienced military and political figures

[Caroline Lucas]

who confirm that nuclear weapons are not strategically useful. I do not often quote Michael Portillo, but when he was Defence Secretary he described Trident as

“completely past its sell-by date”.

As I have said, the former head of the armed forces has described our nuclear weapons as “completely useless” and “virtually irrelevant”.

We need to examine this word “deterrent” in a bit more detail, because it is used far too simply. Calling Trident “the deterrent” as though that were somehow an intrinsic part of its identity is just plain silly—the language does not confer the capability to deter any more than calling a cat “dog” would give a cat the ability to bark. We need a mix of tools for deterrence and security, rather than investing blind faith in voodoo defence based on a cold war weapon that cannot deter but could very well obliterate us. The truth is that the idea of a nuclear deterrent is a public relations euphemism from the early days of the cold war. It was meant to close down debate by making nuclear weapons sound as if they were safe, sensible, useful and necessary—but they are not. Military history is littered with examples of too much reliance being placed on the latest weapon that some leader believed would deter. The consequences were often tragic, in part because those relying on the notion of a deterrent had failed to pay attention to the really important things that would have kept their people safer and more secure.

So it is even more short-sighted and dangerous for Britain to rely on a weapon of mass destruction that, if launched, would put our own survival at risk. If we are going to debate deterrence, we should do so honestly, recognising that it is a complex relationship requiring us to understand the fears, threat perceptions, and needs and values of others, and to communicate carefully and effectively. The best deterrence of all is to work with other nations to address the global threats we face, such as fossil fuel-induced climate disruption, transnational trafficking in weapons, people and drugs, and the poverty and desperation that fuel so many conflicts and so much hunger and violence around the world.

Perhaps even more controversially for some Government Members, Britain needs to have a realistic view of its role in the world. We can be a force for good, and I hope we are, but the truth is that we are a small nation in an interdependent world. Recognising that fact, rather than seeking to grandstand on the world stage, might just be an important step towards making us more secure. The MOD has made clear its knowledge of the fact that climate change plays a big role in the major strategic threats we face. It has put on the record that things such as coastal flooding, climate-driven migration and rising food prices owing to drought and water stress will be some of the most significant impacts of climate change over the next 30 years, and that those pose a far greater security risk than anything a nuclear weapon might help us with. I agree strongly with that view.

I want to reiterate what others have said about the obscene cost of Trident. To be seeking to spend £100 billion on Trident replacement and maintenance at any time would be a massive diversion of funds from more socially useful things, but to do so at a time of economic austerity, when we have 1 million people using food

banks and welfare is being slashed for so many of the most vulnerable in this country, is morally wrong and obscene.

Let me conclude by saying that that £100 billion could pay for 150,000 new nurses, tuition fees for 4 million students, 1.5 million affordable homes, insulation of 15 million homes and 2 million jobs. Those are concrete, tangible things that we could have and yet we are turning them down, not in return for something that will genuinely give us security, but, even worse, in return for something that is likely to make us less safe.

6.39 pm

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): We have had a very good, full and thoughtful debate. I thank everyone who has taken part, even those with whom I fundamentally disagree.

Speaking as I do for Plaid Cymru, I must begin by referring to the largely empty Labour Benches. I understand that Labour MPs are on a one-line Whip, and Welsh Labour MPs on the whole appear to have taken full advantage of that indulgence. Over the past few days, I have seen copies of many messages to Welsh Labour MPs, asking them to be here today. The empty Benches speak eloquently of their response. Some Welsh Labour MPs believe sincerely in the nuclear deterrent. The hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon), who is in her place, is one such MP. I respect her for her position and for explaining her views. I am afraid that, for others, it is a matter of calculation. There is a grim balance between mutually assured destruction and, sadly, what effect a vote either way today will have on Members' majorities in May. There are, however, Labour MPs and one Tory MP who have spoken in favour of our motion, and they are a shining example to others.

Some Welsh Labour MPs have dismissed today's debate as posturing, a gimmick and a stunt. Opposition to aerial bombardment has been central to Plaid Cymru's policy since our very earliest days—opposition that was tragically proved correct by the Nazi bombardment of Guernica and the destruction in the blitz of so much of central London, Coventry, Liverpool, Swansea, Glasgow and some of the great European cities such as Dresden. Then we have Hiroshima and Nagasaki and all the bombing in later years from Korea to Vietnam and Iraq to Afghanistan. We must mention also those women, some of whom were from Plaid Cymru, who marched all the way from Cardiff to Greenham to set up the first peace camp—some posturing, some gimmick, some stunt.

My hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) opened the debate with a long, detailed and very thoughtful speech. He made some hard-headed and practical points that would sit well in the mouths of military people. He looked at alternative ways to spend the money that goes into Trident and at the costs of Trident, and that has been a continual theme today. I was disappointed that the Secretary of State would not or could not answer that particular question on costs.

My hon. Friend posed a particular question about marine patrol aircraft, and again we got no answer. He finished by pointing out that there is determined and national opposition to the matter in Scotland. In reply, the Secretary of State talked about the fearsome nuclear arsenal in the world—17,000 nuclear weapons. He pointed out quite reasonably that the Russians are modernising,

that North Korea is looking for capability, that Iran is dangerous and so on. He pointed out all those dangers. He also talked about the current threat from ISIL and again referred to Russia and Ukraine. He stressed that the nuclear threat is there for the long term.

The Secretary of State was questioned by my hon. Friend about the total cost of Trident. It is interesting because some Members put that cost at £25 billion to £30 billion. Others suggested £130 billion. Whatever way we look at it, that is an enormous amount of money. The point was made that that money could be spent in a much, much better way.

The Secretary of State mentioned the jobs that are dependent on the nuclear industry, such as those at Faslane. Other Members also made that point.

The right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Dame Joan Ruddock) made an excellent speech about how the decision would lock us into nuclear deterrence for a very long time and about how the dangers have changed over the years. She also talked about the dangers of a nuclear winter.

The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile) talked about Trident as the cornerstone of membership of NATO and noted that jobs in his constituency are reliant on its renewal.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr Godsiff) made a careful and thoughtful speech in which he pointed out that security is best achieved collectively with other countries and I welcome his support for our arguments today.

The hon. Member for North Devon (Sir Nick Harvey) outlined the Liberal Democrat position and also pointed out that the world has changed. He questioned the utility in 2015 of a system that was first devised in the '70s and '80s and also pointed out the other choices. Tellingly, he pointed out that there is now discussion about bringing the Army down to 60,000 members, rather than 80,000. He then explained the Liberal Democrat position on retaining capability as a contingency, but I must confess that I did not quite follow his argument. No doubt those arguments will be rehearsed again as we approach the election.

The hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) rehearsed the mutually assured destruction argument for Trident. He said that he was proud of Labour's record, and when he was asked by the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) when Trident would not be affordable, he seemed to say that it was a wonderful bargain. He is the MP for Barrow.

The hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart) talked about Armageddon, not economics, making a good general point, and then went on to the new bogey man, Russia, and a possible attack on the Baltics, a possibility that other Members discussed and roundly dismissed. He finished with an interesting point when he said that it is not just about kit but about a determination to defend ourselves. The character reference reminded me of Mr Tony Blair's reference to the United Kingdom as a war-fighting nation. Wales is not a war-fighting nation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil) argued that if nuclear weapons are so good, why should not everyone have them? He also pointed towards the interesting possibility of a Labour-Tory coalition after the election.

Many hon. Members spoke and I apologise to them for not being able to refer to their speeches. I should mention the hon. Member for Bridgend, about whom I spoke earlier, as a fellow Welsh Member. She welcomed the political debate and we will engage with her in the run-up to the election. I suspect that those are words that she might come to regret. She said that Labour is in favour and that there would be no coalition, so can I tell her from this Bench that we do not want one? She also explained her conversion from CND membership to supporting Trident and I found that very interesting. Other Members, including the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson), have moved from supporting the CND to supporting Trident.

There were eloquent and passionate speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) and for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas). Those will repay close heed. In fact, this entire debate should be read and examined by people well outside this House as the arguments have been rehearsed well and interestingly. I think we can say that a line has been drawn this afternoon. On this side, we have the Green party, Plaid Cymru and the SNP as well some of our friends in other parties, whereas on the other side we have the other parties.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Hywel Williams: I think not, as I have no time at all.

I will in fact finish my speech, saying that peace and peacemaking have been central to the culture of my country for a very long time. I finish with lines from the 19th-century poet, Gwilym Hiraethog, which might be a suitable epitaph for Trident. They are:

“Segurdod yw clod y cledd,

A rwd yw ei anrhydedd.”

Or:

“Idleness is the glory of the sword,

And rust is its distinction.”

6.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Philip Dunne): Today's debate has shown one thing above all, which is that the House takes a strong interest in nuclear deterrence.

I should like to begin by congratulating the minor parties on securing the debate, and all those who have made a contribution. I may not be able to refer to everyone individually in the time available. We are fortunate to be able to rely on the crews of our submarines and their families, and the men and women, both military and civilian, who support the nuclear enterprise. Their support is essential to maintaining our nation's credible and effective minimum nuclear deterrent based on Trident, operating on a continuously at-sea posture, and we thank them for their unwavering dedication.

Ms Gisela Stuart *rose*—

Mr Dunne: I am afraid that I cannot take interventions.

I remind the House that it is the first duty of any Government to ensure the security of the nation, its people and their vital interests. This Government do not, and will not, gamble with the United Kingdom's security. We recognise that people wish to be reassured that money spent on replacing the current Vanguard-class

[Mr Dunne]

submarines will be money well spent. That has been reflected by several hon. Members in the debate. As my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), who chairs the Select Committee on Defence, eloquently pointed out, this is not just about money. It is a big decision, but costs are important too. The Government agree that the strategic deterrent should be subject to the same discipline in bearing down on securing value for money for taxpayers that we are applying across defence procurement.

We will continue to scrutinise and improve the procurement programme for Successor, but we should not forget that capability is a long-term issue. We are talking about maintaining a strategic deterrent in service until 2060, and it is essential that we can protect the UK against future uncertainties during that period. The world has always been an uncertain place, and the task of defending the nation has always been supremely challenging, and never more so than in the nuclear age. Some hon. Members have questioned the threats and the nature of deterrence—Members have very different views on the subject. As the Secretary of State said, we are now in the second nuclear age, with existing nuclear powers commissioning new capabilities. The problems of proliferation have become sharper, and the emergence of new nuclear states is a reality. The need for the nuclear deterrent is no less than it has ever been. Only today there have been reports in the US raising doubts about continuing co-operation by Russia and its working with the United States to protect stockpiles of weapons and materials.

We have heard impassioned speeches by Members on both sides of the debate. I commend the consistency that most speakers have shown on this vital topic. I was reminded by some speakers, notably the right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Dame Joan Ruddock), and the hon. Members for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) and for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), of speeches from the 1980s. My hon. Friends the Members for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin) and for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) argued with equal passion and considerable expertise. My hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) has clearly travelled in one direction in this debate, while at the same time the hon. Members for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) and for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) have travelled in the opposite direction.

The hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), as usual, is trying to have it both ways. During the campaign last year on the referendum, which settled the issue of independence for Scotland, he argued that Scotland's defence would rest on the presumption of NATO membership. To be accepted as a member of NATO requires a nation to accept protection under an umbrella of nuclear compatibility, yet the motion seeks to do precisely the opposite in respect of our own nuclear deterrent. As the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) pointed out, all NATO allies except France, a nuclear-weapons state, participate in NATO's nuclear planning group, so an independent Scotland would either have to participate in NATO's nuclear planning process, which would be odd for a Government with a declared opposition to nuclear weapons, or it would have to persuade the 28 allies that it should hold a unique anti-nuclear position in a nuclear alliance—not a credible position.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex pointed out, the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) showed that he did not understand his own party's motion. We should be clear about this. We are making the main-gate decision next year on replacing four Vanguard-class submarines with four Successor submarines—that is, no increase in proliferation or stockpiling of weapons. In fact, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear, and as set out in today's written statement, this Government have already reduced the number of warheads deployed on each boat from 48 to 40 and the number of operationally available warheads from 160 to 120.

The hon. Member for Moray and several others made much of the cost of the overall programme, particularly the sums being spent or committed ahead of the main-gate investment decision. It might help the House if I clarify the actual rather than the fantasy costs of the programme. Several hon. Members have referred to £100 billion as the cost of replacing Trident. We simply do not recognise this figure. The Government White Paper presented to Parliament in 2006 estimated a cost of £15 billion to £20 billion, at 2006 prices, for the Successor submarine infrastructure and refurbishment of warheads. We remain within these initial estimates, which in 2011 were updated for the capital costs of Successor submarines to £25 billion at outturn prices.

Some hon. Members acknowledged the economic impact of this programme. In addition to the important design and manufacturing facilities for the submarines at Barrow, which the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) mentioned, for the propulsion in Derby, and for the warheads in Berkshire, there are of course those involved in the submarine operating base at Faslane—the largest employer in Scotland. We have identified over 850 businesses in the supply chain across the UK that will potentially be involved in the Successor programme. This is one of the largest capital projects in the UK.

The shadow Defence Secretary, the hon. Member for Gedling, revealed two things. First, we heard the renewed commitment to a minimum credible independent nuclear deterrent delivered through CASD—continuous-at-sea deterrence—in the most cost-effective way. I, and other Government Members, welcome that. It will be interesting to see how many of his colleagues join him and me in the Lobby to reject the motion. I hope that he has the support of his party. I noticed that he claimed the support of the leader of the Scottish Labour party, but not of his own leader.

Secondly, and revealingly, the hon. Gentleman declined to confirm, in answer to my specific question, that the Labour party is committed to a four boat solution. Perhaps this explains the nuances between the hon. Gentleman, who spoke before Christmas of a minimum credible deterrent, and the Leader of the Opposition, who, when challenged, talked of a least-cost CASD.

Vernon Coaker: We should not be playing party politics with an issue like this, but if we are, does the hon. Gentleman agree with the right hon. Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox), who said,

“At the moment the assessment is we need four...So at the moment the technology says four. That's something that can always be kept under review”?

Mr Dunne: Every study that we have looked at so far has said four, so that is where we stand, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman does too.

Finally, I turn to the position advocated by my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Sir Nick Harvey), whom we found dancing on the head of a pin in talking about a bizarre new Lib Dem policy aspiration. Far from a minimum nuclear deterrent capability delivered with a two boat option for dual use, he has developed a new policy on the hoof—not a part-time deterrent but a kit-part deterrent. Apart from the fact that neither of those options was even considered by the alternatives review, this has demonstrated that the Liberal Democrat party is—

Pete Wishart claimed to move the closure (*Standing Order No. 36*).

Question put forthwith, That the Question be now put.

Question agreed to.

Main Question accordingly put.

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr Speaker: I wonder whether in the light of the delay—it has been 17 minutes thus far—the Serjeant at Arms might investigate the delay in both Lobbies.

The House having divided: Ayes 35, Noes 364.

Division No. 133]

[6.59 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Blunt, Crispin
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Clark, Katy
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crockart, Mike
Davidson, Mr Ian
Durkan, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Galloway, George
George, Andrew
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Hancock, Mr Mike
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hosie, Stewart
Huppert, Dr Julian
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Llwyd, rh Mr Elfyn
Long, Naomi

Lucas, Caroline
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
McDonnell, John
Morris, Grahame M.
(*Easington*)
O'Donnell, Fiona
Osborne, Sandra
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robertson, Angus
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Stringer, Graham
Walley, Joan
Weir, Mr Mike
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Mr Mark

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Pete Wishart and
Jonathan Edwards**

NOES

Abrahams, Debbie
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Alexander, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Arbuthnot, rh Mr James
Ashworth, Jonathan
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bain, Mr William
Baker, Steve
Baldry, rh Sir Tony
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen

Barker, rh Gregory
Baron, Mr John
Barron, rh Kevin
Barwell, Gavin
Bayley, Sir Hugh
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Mr Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berger, Luciana
Bingham, Andrew
Binley, Mr Brian
Blackman, Bob
Blenkinsop, Tom
Boles, Nick

Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Bray, Angie
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brown, Mr Russell
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Mr Robert
Burnham, rh Andy
Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Mr Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burt, rh Alistair
Byles, Dan
Cairns, Alun
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carmichael, Neil
Cash, Sir William
Chapman, Jenny
Chishti, Rehman
Clappison, Mr James
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Coaker, Vernon
Colville, Oliver
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crausby, Mr David
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Crouch, Tracey
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Cunningham, Sir Tony
Curran, Margaret
Dakin, Nic
David, Wayne
Davies, David T. C.
(*Monmouth*)
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Philip
de Bois, Nick
De Piero, Gloria
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Thomas
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
Dorrell, rh Mr Stephen
Dorries, Nadine
Doughty, Stephen
Doyle, Gemma
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Dugher, Michael
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Elliott, Julie
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Esterson, Bill

Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Jonathan
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Michael
Field, rh Mr Frank
Field, Mark
Flint, rh Caroline
Fovargue, Yvonne
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Gale, Sir Roger
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, Sir Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Glindon, Mrs Mary
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Hague, rh Mr William
Halfon, Robert
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hands, rh Greg
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harper, Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, rh Mr John
Healey, rh John
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Hendry, Charles
Herbert, rh Nick
Hermon, Lady
Hilling, Julie
Hinds, Damian
Hoban, Mr Mark
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollingbery, George
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hunt, Tristram
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, Diana
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph

Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jowell, rh Dame Tessa
 Kane, Mike
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kelly, Chris
 Kendall, Liz
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Lancaster, Mark
 Lansley, rh Mr Andrew
 Latham, Pauline
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Jessica
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Leslie, Chris
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Brandon
 Lewis, Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lopresti, Jack
 Loughton, Tim
 Lucas, Ian
 Lumley, Karen
 Macleod, Mary
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Malhotra, Seema
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 Maude, rh Mr Francis
 Maynard, Paul
 McCabe, Steve
 McCann, Mr Michael
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McClymont, Gregg
 McCrea, Dr William
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McGuire, rh Dame Anne
 McInnes, Liz
 McIntosh, Miss Anne
 McKenzie, Mr Iain
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, Andrew
 Miller, rh Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, Anne
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Mosley, Stephen
 Mowat, David
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew

Nash, Pamela
 Neill, Robert
 Newmark, Mr Brooks
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Ollerenshaw, Eric
 Onwurah, Chi
 Opperman, Guy
 Ottaway, rh Sir Richard
 Paice, rh Sir James
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perkins, Toby
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pickles, rh Mr Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Powell, Lucy
 Pritchard, Mark
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Randall, rh Sir John
 Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
 Reckless, Mark
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees-Mogg, Jacob
 Reeve, Simon
 Reid, Mr Alan
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rifkind, rh Sir Malcolm
 Robathan, rh Mr Andrew
 Robertson, rh Sir Hugh
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, Amber
 Ruffley, Mr David
 Rutley, David
 Scott, Mr Lee
 Seabeck, Alison
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Alok
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheridan, Jim
 Shuker, Gavin
 Simmonds, rh Mark
 Simpson, Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Slaughter, Mr Andy
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Soubry, Anna
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Spencer, Mr Mark
 Stanley, rh Sir John
 Stephenson, Andrew

Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Ms Gisela
 Stuart, Mr Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Tami, Mark
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Timpson, Mr Edward
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tredinnick, David
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Tyrie, Mr Andrew
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Uppal, Paul
 Vickers, Martin

Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Walter, Mr Robert
 Watkinson, Dame Angela
 Watts, Mr Dave
 Weatherley, Mike
 Wharton, James
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williamson, Gavin
 Wilson, Phil
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Woodcock, John
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr Ben Wallace and
Dr Therèse Coffey

Question accordingly negated.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

BETTING, GAMING AND LOTTERIES

That the draft Olympic Lottery Distribution Fund (Winding Up) Order 2014, which was laid before this House on 17 November 2014, be approved.—(*Damian Hinds.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

MARRIAGE, SCOTLAND

That the draft Referral and Investigation of Proposed Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Scotland) Order 2015, which was laid before this House on 15 December 2014, be approved.—(*Damian Hinds.*)

Question agreed to.

Mr Speaker: With the leave of the House, we shall take motions 5 and 6 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

MARRIAGE

That the draft Referral and Investigation of Proposed Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Northern Ireland and Miscellaneous Provisions) Order 2015, which was laid before this House on 15 December 2014, be approved.

That the draft Proposed Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Conduct of Investigations etc.) Regulations 2015, which were laid before this House on 15 December 2014, be approved.—(*Damian Hinds.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the draft Universal Credit (Work-Related Requirements) In Work Pilot Scheme and Amendment Regulations 2015, which were laid before this House on 1 December 2014, be approved.—*(Damian Hinds.)*

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That at the sitting on Thursday 22 January the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mr William Hague relating to Governance of the House not later than 5.00pm; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; proceedings may continue, though opposed, after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—*(Damian Hinds.)*

PETITION

Inquests into Deaths of Military Personnel

7.19 pm

Mr Michael McCann (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (Lab): I wish to present a petition initiated by my constituents Charles and Susan Fleeting, as well as by other constituents of mine and across the United Kingdom, following the death of their son, Robert, at RAF Benson in September 2011. The related petition has more than 3,700 signatories.

The petition states:

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to enact a legislative requirement for an inquest to be held before a jury when serving military personnel die on a military base in a non-combat role.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The Petition of Susan Fleeting,

Declares that the Ministry of Defence should come under the same rules and regulations as other government departments; further that inquests relating to serving military personnel who die on a military base in a non-combat role should be heard by a jury; further that the investigation of sudden deaths in military service must be subject to the same protection as that which is available for similar investigations into deaths in a prison or police station; and further that an e-petition on this subject has been signed by 3072 individuals.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to enact a legislative requirement for an inquest to be held before a jury when serving military personnel die on a military base in a non-combat role.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.]

[P001420]

Poultry Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*(Damian Hinds.)*

7.21 pm

Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): I am pleased to have been given the opportunity to raise an issue of importance to many of my constituents and to the UK as a whole. I refer to the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership negotiations between the EU and US and the risks they bring for the UK poultry industry.

Britain is and always has been a great trading nation, and the TTIP negotiations represent a significant opportunity to further expand our trade relations with the US. The Government estimate that a successful TTIP treaty could boost the UK economy by as much as £10 billion a year. Some £1.5 billion in goods and services is already exchanged between the US and Europe every day, and 13 million jobs rely on that trade. A major point of discussion in TTIP is the trade in food and food products—the biggest manufacturing sector in the UK. TTIP could bring huge opportunities for the food sector, but I hope the whole House will agree with me in urging caution before we get carried away, as these opportunities should not come at the expense of the great efforts that UK food businesses, particularly poultry meat producers, have made in the improvement of the sustainability, quality and standards of production here in the UK.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on obtaining the debate. He is making a compelling point. Does he agree that we need a robust presence in the international negotiations to ensure that the interests of the poultry industry in Britain and Northern Ireland, where Moy Park employs more than 5,000 people, are totally protected, and that export markets are fully opened in places such as China and the US?

Roger Williams: The hon. Lady makes a very good point, and I will set out later how I believe the standards of production in the UK are far in advance of those in the US—a factor which should be taken into account in negotiations. I will also be talking about egg producers.

According to the British Poultry Council, the UK poultry meat industry produced more than 900 million chickens in 2013—up from about 780 million in 2001. Based on sales of £6.1 billion in 2012, the poultry meat industry made a £3.3 billion gross value added contribution to UK GDP. The industry supports 73,000 jobs in the UK—35,000 directly, 25,000 in the supply chain and nearly 13,000 in wage consumption. The industry pays about £1 billion in tax to the Exchequer, and so funds many of our public services.

Virtually half the meat eaten in Britain is poultry meat and it is enjoyed by millions of people every day. The UK is at least 80% self-sufficient in poultry meat and as such it is an important contributor to UK food security. There may be some concerns about the intensive nature of poultry production, but animal welfare is higher in the UK than in the rest of Europe.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this matter to the House for consideration. It is very important for my constituency, and across the whole of Northern Ireland, for jobs. The safety of the general public is very important as well. Does he agree that the British Poultry Council has expressed great concern about TTIP because of the issue of the preparation of poultry, where the US has different conditions from the UK? Does not the Minister need to reassure the general public and the poultry industry that our industry can sell all over the world and create jobs and opportunity?

Roger Williams: The hon. Gentleman makes a strong point and I hope to touch on those issues later.

I am sure the House will join me in recognising the importance of this sector to rural constituencies such as mine, but also the national contribution that the poultry industry makes. It is consequently of concern that as the TTIP negotiations progress, a number of serious risks to the UK poultry meat sector are emerging. Those risks are rooted in the different standards of poultry production on the two sides of the Atlantic. Let us be clear: the standards in areas such as sustainability, food hygiene and antibiotic usage differ greatly between the UK and US.

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): Will my hon. Friend add to that list the issue of animal traceability and the difference between standards in the US and Europe? There has been a lot of concern about that in this country in recent years. I fear that that will be exacerbated by the discussions on this agreement.

Roger Williams: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Traceability, although good in the United Kingdom, is challenged by things such as the horsemeat scandal. I am sure that traceability in the US is not up to the standards that we enjoy here.

Let me give the House some examples of the difference between the UK and the US. UK poultry producers have made very significant strides in the reduction of environmental pollution from both farms and food processing plants. The reduction of ammonia emissions is a key priority, and British poultry producers have worked closely with the Environment Agency to develop techniques that lead to meaningful reductions in discharges.

In the UK, as across the whole of Europe, the poultry industry takes a “farm to fork” approach to food hygiene. Producers meticulously introduce improvements all along the chain to biosecurity, transport and processing, and do not rely on chemicals at the end of the process to do the same job. The UK poultry industry takes very seriously its responsibilities for antibiotic stewardship. The British Poultry Council is an active member of the Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture Alliance and is pro-actively seeking to minimise antibiotic use.

For example, the British poultry meat industry has voluntarily stopped the use in the breeding pyramid of certain categories of antibiotics, such as cephalosporins, that are considered to be crucial to human medicine. The British poultry industry does not support the habitual use of antibiotics where the underlying issue can be resolved through better husbandry.

Finally, the British poultry sector is committed to training and developing its work force, with an active programme of apprenticeships, qualifications and academic scholarships to improve the skills base of the industry.

All of these factors, and others that I have not mentioned, add up to a very substantial difference in how the UK and US produce poultry meat, to the extent that the two systems have very little in common, and therefore the bird for the table at the end of the process should not be considered comparable. That has become very important, given the prospect of free trade in poultry meat across the Atlantic.

One of the principles of the TTIP negotiations is that of equivalence. In short, the agreement allows the US and the EU to agree that different practices are, for the purposes of trade, deemed to be equivalent. I hope the House will support me in concluding that poultry meat production methods in the US are by no means equivalent to those in the UK, and that the prospect of potential equivalence under TTIP for poultry meat production causes tremendous concern.

Furthermore, it is clear from its public statements that the US chicken industry is intent on using the TTIP process to lever open EU, including UK, markets for its products. The risk to the UK poultry industry is therefore clear. The US industry wishes to export its products, produced to standards that are not equivalent to ours, into the UK market. TTIP risks providing it with the vehicle to do so. Any such exports will threaten the continued volume of production of poultry in the UK, with a knock-on impact on jobs, receipts for the Treasury and UK food security.

Egg producers are also very concerned about competition from US producers. UK producers have followed the improvements in animal welfare introduced by European regulations, which they estimate have added 15% to their costs. Those include a change from a conventional battery cage industry to now using enriched cages. Stocking rates in the US are between 350 and 400 sq cm per bird, while in the UK the rate is 750 sq cm per bird, and there has been a great move to free-range egg production in the UK. Added costs from environmental, food safety and animal welfare improvements have cost the industry dear. Egg producers are very concerned about egg products—such as egg powder, which is used in confectionery and other products—being exported to this country below the cost of production. Egg producers wish their products to be considered as sensitive in the negotiations, and it is important not to export our egg sector to other countries because we need to look after our food security in the UK.

So, what do I want the Government to do about it? I believe there are three areas where the Government can play a crucial role in ensuring that the TTIP negotiations have a workable outcome for the UK poultry meat sector and egg industry. In the first instance, the Government should send a clear message to the European Commission and the US that we do not regard the current US poultry meat production practices as being equivalent to those in the UK. If the US wishes to export to the EU, it will have to show willing in modifying its processes to meet the needs of EU Governments and consumers. Secondly, the Government should be reinforcing to the Commission the importance of negotiating on poultry meat on its merits, and standing up for this important UK and EU industry. The US side wants to export to

the EU, and it is up to the US to convince us of how that can work and meet our needs, rather than its being up to the EU negotiators to make it easy for the US.

Finally, I hope that the Government will make it clear to the US that free trade is a two-way street. This is not just about the export of chicken from the US to the EU; it must also be about the real opportunities for UK poultry producers to export in significant volumes to the US.

Ultimately, TTIP represents a huge potential opportunity for both the EU and the UK, but just as with other sectors of the economy, we should be very wary and make sure that the drive to grow trade does not come at the expense of the huge strides that both the EU and the UK have made in their standards of food production. The UK poultry industry is a big contributor to the economy, especially in vulnerable rural areas, and it would be a tragedy if TTIP caused damage to it.

May I thank the House for listening to me on this important issue for my constituents and the UK as a whole? I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

7.34 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Roger Williams) on his continued interest in this subject, and on securing this important debate on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and the impact that it might have on the poultry industry.

As the hon. Gentleman says, our poultry industry is vital to the UK economy and is one of the most successful across Europe, supporting around 73,000 jobs in the UK and contributing £3.3 billion annually to the UK GDP. I am aware that, as the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for South Down (Ms Ritchie) pointed out, there is a very strong poultry industry in Northern Ireland as well, so securing and building export markets is particularly important for sales of dark poultry meat and so-called fifth quarter products. This provides added value markets for poultry meat products not generally consumed domestically, and therefore increases the value of each bird.

We have continued to seek access to foreign markets for our poultry products. The hon. Member for South Down highlighted the potential in China. Just last week the Secretary of State was in China. One of the things she was doing was progressing negotiations to open the potentially lucrative market there for chicken feet. One of the interesting things one learns in this job is that although there is not a large market for chicken feet in this country, they are regarded as a delicacy in China and therefore fetch a value that cannot be achieved here.

International exports of UK poultry meat increased by 31% over the first half of last year. This growth has been supported by new markets opened in, for instance, Madagascar and Mozambique. Exports of live poultry increased by 9% in this period, with particularly strong growth in Africa. This growth has continued despite some of the challenges that the industry has faced, and is a strong indication of both the innovation of the industry and the strong partnership that the industry has with Government.

As the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire pointed out, there are wider benefits for other sectors in the food industry from increasing access to foreign markets. For instance, in 2013 UK producers exported almost £2 billion-worth of food, feed and drink to the US. A comprehensive trade agreement between the EU and the US could add as much as £10 billion annually to UK GDP. One independent study estimates that total UK food and drink exports could increase by around 4.5% as a result of TTIP, so securing an ambitious deal in TTIP is a priority for the Government and we are prepared to take the necessary steps to ensure that we achieve a deal that provides the best possible outcome for the UK.

I know that there are some concerns, specifically in the poultry industry, about the potential impact of TTIP. I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that I had a meeting with the British Poultry Council last year to discuss its concerns in some detail. We should know that one consequence of freer trade with the US is a potential increase in the level of competition for UK producers. We need to consider the implications of the trade deal for different sectors within the farming industry.

Jim Shannon: Although we have made concessions in deals with the United States, we sometimes find the United States very reluctant to do likewise. Has the Minister any experience of that in relation to food imports and exports?

George Eustice: It is widely anticipated that the US will make concessions, but the hon. Gentleman makes a good point. The opening offer from the EU was deemed to be somewhat more generous than the opening offer that came from the US. That was recognised. At a session that I had with Tom Vilsack, who was representing the US, and other EU leaders, that was one of the points that was raised.

I appreciate the concerns about the implications of the different approaches taken to food safety and animal welfare as between the US and the EU and, in particular, whether this could place UK producers at a competitive disadvantage. I shall return to this point later in my remarks. First, we need to recognise that any free trade agreement is about setting the foundations for a better, more effective trading environment for our producers. This includes outlining specific areas for deeper collaboration to ensure that we are maximising trade opportunities. For agriculture, this includes establishing a better transatlantic relationship with regard to animal and plant health—or, to use the jargon, the sanitary and phytosanitary measures.

The aim of TTIP will be to formalise how the EU and US work together in this area to facilitate trade, while protecting human, animal and plant health. I should point out that that is not something new. For example, the EU has negotiated deals with a number of countries, including with Canada and Korea—both of those deals include dedicated sections on animal and plant health measures. Each agreement sets out some specific details in a tailored way, but ultimately outlines a template for future co-operation in a given field. If we can achieve that with Canada and Korea, I see no reason why it should not in principle be possible to achieve the same with the US.

[George Eustice]

We should bear in mind the fact that a free trade agreement is just the beginning of the process, not the end. Once agreed, TTIP would form the basis from which to negotiate specific market access issues, product by product. For example, the detail of specific sanitary requirements for poultry exports to the USA would be set out in an export health certificate, which would be negotiated only once discussions on equivalence had been concluded. The UK would be fully engaged in all stages of these European-led negotiations to ensure that UK exporters get the most favourable conditions possible in order to facilitate our exports. We should remember that exports are as important for our industry as they are for the US.

We should recognise that it is inevitable that different countries will take a different approach to ensuring food safety and animal welfare. The UK and wider EU farm industry takes a farm-to-fork approach to food safety, as the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire pointed out, whereas the US approach has historically focused on the safety of the end product and taking safety measures closer to the point that food is consumed. Although such differences in approach are definitely relevant, they should not present an insurmountable obstacle to trade, which is why the principle of equivalence is important.

Ms Ritchie: Will the Minister indicate how the British Government intend to reconcile our much higher standards for poultry meat with the lower standards in the United States? That is the basic fear that we are expressing on behalf of Moy Park in Northern Ireland, the second largest poultry producer in the UK.

George Eustice: That is precisely what is going on in the detailed discussions to which I have referred. Many of the points the hon. Lady asks about would be resolved when export health certificates were agreed, and those certificates sometimes include a recognition of animal welfare considerations. Such details will be teased out in the negotiations, but I would say to the hon. Lady that we already import quite a lot of food from the US—from confectionary to cereals—and it is already required to meet EU standards. Such food is not necessarily produced directly in compliance with EU regulations, but through negotiation it has been deemed to meet EU standards. TTIP would apply a similar principle.

We certainly do not want a trade deal that undermines the current good farming practices in the UK sector, which are a hallmark of our poultry industry. I can reassure the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire that EU negotiators have consistently stated that we will uphold the EU's food safety standards throughout the TTIP discussions.

Roger Williams: I thank the Minister for that assurance, but one criticism of the TTIP negotiations is that they are rather opaque. Would it not be better if the assurance that he has given could be made more openly, thereby giving the industry more confidence?

George Eustice: I will come on to the EU negotiating mandate in a moment.

Although our approaches differ from those of the US, there are also opportunities, particularly when it comes to welfare. TTIP presents an opportunity for us to work with the US to improve co-operation on animal welfare and promote international standards. If we take an optimistic approach, there is the possibility of leading calls for an improvement in animal welfare practices in the US, perhaps as the *quid pro quo* for access to the EU market. We should not lose sight of that opportunity.

We also continue to support the European Commission to ensure that high welfare standards are a requirement of the trade agreement, and we continue to work through international bodies such as OIE—the World Organisation for Animal Health—both to raise standards and to ensure that signatory countries fully implement the decisions reached.

Returning to the point I raised about the negotiating mandate, it is important to recognise in respect of the transparency for which the hon. Gentleman argues that the EU's negotiating mandate is publicly available online and sets out the key principles for animal and plant health in the TTIP negotiations. I would encourage any hon. Member who feels that these are too opaque to look at that mandate, which, for instance, highlights key areas for further co-operation, including using international standards, having a science-based approach to risk assessment and tackling animal welfare. Both food standards and animal welfare considerations are hard-wired into the EU negotiating mandate. The EC has made it clear in all its pronouncements that it considers it to be important, and it has not lost sight of that importance.

In conclusion, I believe that the UK poultry industry can remain resilient in an increasingly competitive global industry. For their part, the Government will continue to support the industry by opening new markets and promoting competitiveness. For example, we are investing £160 million in the UK agri-tech strategy to help take innovations from the laboratory to the farm. That strategy is already investing in two projects in the poultry sector—one on a more humane way of killing poultry and the other on creating a bank of genetic information on broilers and using that information to aid future breeding programmes. We are also reducing the regulatory burden on industry through implementing a risk-based approach to inspections. I believe that our excellent track record on animal welfare, traceability and production standards will continue to provide opportunities for British products in foreign markets. The British poultry industry has been very successful at exporting.

Jim Shannon: The Minister talks about the efforts made on the mainland here in the United Kingdom, and we are very grateful for that, but I wonder whether information on advances made in the industry here are exchanged with the devolved Administrations—the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly—so that our industry in Northern Ireland does not lose out.

George Eustice: Yes, the agri-tech strategy is a UK one, and we work with research establishments throughout the UK. Much of the information that comes out of the agri-tech strategy is made available.

It is also important that we continue to work together to ensure that high industry standards and quality of produce are maintained and demonstrated to our trading

partners to facilitate further growth in exports. As I said, the UK poultry industry has been successful in that regard. Opening new markets is a long and complex process, but we are determined to support the poultry industry to capitalise on global export opportunities. We should not lose sight of the fact that free trade is a two-way street, as the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire pointed out. On the whole, a more open and efficient transatlantic trade environment presents major opportunities for UK food and drink producers, and will also deliver real benefits for consumers.

I understand the concerns that the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire and others have highlighted in the debate, but I believe that there are benefits to the UK economy and to the UK food industry in concluding a TTIP deal. I believe that the sanitary and phytosanitary issues raised can be accommodated in such an agreement.

Question put and agreed to.

7.48 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 20 January 2015

[MR MIKE WEIR *in the Chair*]

Holocaust Memorial Day

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—(Dr Coffey.)

9.30 am

Mr James Clappison (Hertsmere) (Con): It is a privilege to have this opportunity to mark Holocaust memorial day. As colleagues will know, Holocaust memorial day falls exactly one week from today, on 27 January. I thank colleagues who supported the application for this debate, many of whom are here today: my hon. Friends the Members for Ilford North (Mr Scott), for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Eric Ollerenshaw), for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer), for Watford (Richard Harrington), for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd) and for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans). I also thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Sir Alan Beith) and the hon. Members for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer), for Dudley North (Ian Austin), for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman) and for Bassetlaw (John Mann). I am grateful to them for their support.

I pay tribute to the work of the Holocaust Educational Trust—I declare an interest as a member of the council of the trust—and I pay tribute to all that it does to keep alive the memory of the Holocaust to ensure that its lessons are never forgotten, and that we also keep in mind other holocausts that have taken place since 1945. It does very important work in giving young people the opportunity to visit Auschwitz-Birkenau. It does other good work as well, but that is very good work indeed. I know that many Members will have participated in those visits, as I have done. It is something that one needs to see for oneself.

This year is an important anniversary, because it is the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau by Soviet forces. When they arrived there 70 years ago, they found the remnants of the unique horror that had taken place there and in other death camps throughout occupied Europe. At Auschwitz-Birkenau, they found 348,820 men's suits; 836,500 women's dresses, all neatly folded together; pyramids of dentures and eyeglasses; and seven tonnes of women's hair. As colleagues will know, some of the physical evidence can still be seen at Auschwitz-Birkenau and at some of the other camps.

I want to draw particular attention to the living evidence of the Holocaust in the form of testimony of survivors of the camps, many of whom were young children at the time, but who now spend their time telling groups of young people of their experiences. I pay a special heartfelt tribute to them for the work that they do.

This 70th anniversary is in some ways a special milestone in keeping such events in living memory, because the survivors are all getting older. I am always struck by their vigour, but they are getting older. It is important

to keep their testimony alive for future generations to listen to and to understand what took place. I have listened to the survivors both in my constituency and elsewhere. It is a remarkable experience and a privilege to hear them. I pay special tribute to the survivors of the Holocaust in my constituency who visit schools, meet young people and tell them of their experience.

Take Alec Ward from Borehamwood. After a happy childhood in Poland, he found himself put in the ghetto at a very young age and was selected for work. His younger brother did not pass the selection and was taken away to be shot. Alec was then put to very hard work on the most meagre of rations. When studying and reading his accounts, one wonders how he survived. He received one slice of black bread, some black coffee and half a litre of watery cabbage soup, and had very little protection from the minus 30° cold of the winter in central Europe. He was put to work on building roads and doing other slave labour. He summarises his experience of the Holocaust and remembers:

“The hangings of prisoners, the selections, the dead bodies lying at the barbed wire fences early in the morning of Jewish prisoners who tried desperately to escape...and were shot. The painful hunger and malnutrition. The beatings. The man who cried every time he saw me as I reminded him of his young son who perished at the hands of the Nazis.”

It was remarkable that Mr Ward survived, but he was eventually liberated from Mauthausen camp by the allies in May 1945.

Another remarkable man is Mr Josef Perl, who lives in Bushey, but was born in Czechoslovakia. In the spring of 1940, at the age of 10, he was crammed on to a railway wagon to be taken to Poland. On arrival there he witnessed his mother and four of his sisters being shot and falling into a pit only a short distance ahead of him. He also saw other members of his family suffer the same fate. It seems he survived only because of an air raid when it was his turn to be dealt with. He somehow survived amidst all this and he was put to work and passed from camp to camp, including Auschwitz-Birkenau. He describes his arrival at Auschwitz in memorable terms:

“There was screaming and shouting, guards were lashing out and beating anyone who could not get out of the way. Dogs on the end of short leads were barking and jumping up at new arrivals, viciously biting many of them. I saw old people, ill people, people so weak they were almost dead, come tumbling out of the wagons when the doors were opened.”

He saw a baby being thrown away by a guard “like so much rubbish”.

Mr Perl was eventually put to work as well. Remarkably, he survived and was liberated from Buchenwald camp on 11 April 1945.

Listening to such remarkable men and women, it is hard for us to comprehend the scale of human loss in respect of those who perished and the severity of suffering of those who survived the unique horror of the Holocaust. It is important that we continue to hear their views. We know that there have been subsequent genocides since 1945 in Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda and Darfur. Holocaust memorial day reflects such tragic events, which stand as a rebuke to the post-1945 world and remind us that genocide can still occur.

Recently, we have seen evidence of hatred and extremism closer at hand in Europe—as well as anti-Semitism—and extremism has entered the body politic in several places.

[Mr James Clappison]

It is not on the same scale as genocide, but we know from history that hatred and extremism were the precursors to what took place in 1939 to 1945. We have seen a very extreme party—the Jobbik party—capture votes in Hungary, and, in the European elections last year, Golden Dawn captured nearly 10% of the vote in Greece. There are disturbing echoes when the deputy leader of a party such as Jobbik can stand up and call for the state to draw up a list of Jews who constitute a national security risk.

I welcome the robust statement by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that he has a policy of zero tolerance in respect of anti-Semitism. As he says, although the situation in this country is better than in many other countries, it is unacceptable that we have seen evidence of anti-Semitism here, including boycotts and attacks on Jewish charity shops and the disturbing survey of attitudes published by the Campaign Against Antisemitism recently.

I also welcome the work that is being done by the Holocaust Commission, which was launched by the Prime Minister last year and is due to report later this month. I look forward to the fruits of its work being brought forward, and I hope that the living testimony of survivors of the Holocaust will be preserved for future generations. We need to ensure that this country has a permanent and fitting memorial to the Holocaust and educational resources for future generations to learn about it.

Seventy years ago this year, the gates of the death camps such as Auschwitz-Birkenau opened and the world saw the full extent of the horrors perpetrated under the auspices of an extreme ideology. I hope—I am sure—that colleagues agree that we should never allow those experiences to be forgotten.

9.40 am

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr Clappison) on securing this important debate and on his comprehensive, graphic and informative speech. As we mark Holocaust memorial day 2015, it is important not only to remember what the Holocaust was and what happened during it, but to relate it to the ills of today in this country and elsewhere. I thank the hon. Gentleman for the way in which he did that.

This year's Holocaust memorial day is special, marking as it does the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. It is important, too, to remember that we mark the day in Parliament because of a decision we took, and that we did so on an all-party basis. The first Holocaust memorial day commemoration in the UK took place in 2001 because of a decision taken following a private Member's Bill promoted by the then Member of Parliament for Hendon, Andrew Dismore. The House of Commons decided to commemorate Holocaust memorial day and has done so ever since. When the Bill was being debated in Parliament, some Members were, perhaps not opposed, but doubtful, and they questioned whether it was right to mark out one genocide. What has happened since has shown the value of having Holocaust memorial day, because we ensure that new generations know about the Holocaust while relating it to genocides that have taken place since.

The strength of the commemoration of Holocaust memorial day is that it is not an isolated event. It brings people together and provides a focus for commemorating the Holocaust and learning the lessons of it, but is not something that takes place once a year; it is part of a series of events taking place throughout the year. I too commend the work of the Holocaust Educational Trust, of which I am a council member, in particular its educational work through the year with educators and students, including Lessons from Auschwitz and other programmes. We are talking not about one day a year, but about all the year.

I want to reflect on a recent event in which I took part, which has significance for Holocaust memorial day and for Holocaust remembrance. Last Sunday, I took part in a meeting of the Board of Deputies of British Jews—I am indeed a deputy—which was dominated by horrendous recent events: the murder of journalists at *Charlie Hebdo*, of a policewoman, and of Jews at a kosher supermarket, who were murdered simply because they were Jews. The anti-Semitic murders of French Jews did not take place in isolation—it was not one isolated event, but one of a series of anti-Semitic murders and attacks on Jews that have taken place in France in recent times, including the murder of three pupils and a teacher at a Jewish school in Paris. The cumulative effect of the murders and the series of attacks on French Jews has been for many of them to decide to leave France. We should all reflect on that.

At the meeting on Sunday, I heard excellent addresses from the Home Secretary and from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. They both pledged their support for British Jews and promised to increase security for British Jews in view of what was happening. I also watched the inspiring Ben Helfgott light the first of 70 memorial candles that are to be lit throughout the country to commemorate this year's Holocaust memorial day and listened to his wise words. As I sat in the meeting, listening to what was being said and watching what was happening, I reflected on what it all meant.

I am shocked and outraged that we still have to concentrate on and be concerned about anti-Semitism in Europe. French Jews have felt the need to flee their homes because of their fear of anti-Semitism and their experience of killings and a series of attacks, and their sense that they were not getting support from the wider community—at least until last week, perhaps. In the United Kingdom, the situation is different: Jews are not being murdered because they are Jews, but disturbing trends must not be ignored. The Community Security Trust has monitored the numbers of anti-Semitic incidents, which are up sharply, as well as the increasing intensity of anti-Semitic discourse. Anti-Semitic comments that at one time would have been seen as unacceptable now seem to be accepted almost as the norm. Not so long ago, during a demonstration, managers at a major supermarket in London felt that a Jewish kosher counter had to be closed because of the pressure of demonstrators outside. Such things are deeply disturbing.

British Jews do not feel that they are in the same position as French Jews, and they are not. British Jews feel very firmly part of British society and themselves to be strong members of the British as well as Jewish communities. Nevertheless, a sense of unease is growing among the Jewish community here in the United Kingdom.

That should be registered, not only by other Jews but by the community as a whole. When the Home Secretary and the Communities and Local Government Secretary spoke to the Board of Deputies of British Jews on Sunday, they spoke about anti-Semitism and what had happened, as well as about how Jews and other minorities form part of the fabric of British society. We are all part of British society. As we approach Holocaust memorial day, we should all reflect on that.

The Holocaust was a horrendous event. The fact that anti-Semitism remains, that the virus of anti-Semitism has not gone, is something that should concern us all and give us all reason to reflect not only on Jews and other minorities, but on the nature of our society. An attack on minorities in the United Kingdom, whether on the Jewish community or other communities, is an attack on all of us. When we reflect on Holocaust memorial day and on the Holocaust, we should register what is happening and be determined as a society to recognise that minorities are part of our community and that anti-Semitism is not to be tolerated.

9.48 am

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr Clappison) on way he introduced the debate. I am not Jewish; I am Catholic, but I would have been proud to be born a Jew. As I look around the Chamber, I can see that many of us are post-war babies. We cannot imagine the horrors that took place all those years ago. For that very reason, we must never forget what happened.

The 27th of January this year marks 15 years since representatives from 46 Governments met in Stockholm to sign a declaration committing to educate, remember and research the dreadful events of the Holocaust. As my hon. Friend said, the date commemorates the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi death camp—a place that was witness to perhaps the greatest failure of humanity ever. Holocaust memorial day also commemorates other genocides that took place in the decades after the second world war, including the genocide that took place between 1975 and 1979 in Cambodia under the radical leader Pol Pot, the genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994, the genocide in Bosnia in 1995, and the ongoing genocide in Darfur.

It is pitiful to see that the world has not learnt enough from the Holocaust. As the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellum) just said, we once again find ourselves watching such events without making a sufficiently decisive response. But the genocide in which the Nazis killed 6 million Jews still remains the most appalling failure of humanity: millions of human beings were tortured, used for forced labour and killed in Auschwitz-Birkenau, Kulmhof, Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec and other places across Europe. Many of the victims underwent inhumane pseudo-medical experiments carried out by Nazi doctors in concentration camps before being sent to gas chambers.

It is now our duty to remember and to learn lessons from the terrible events of 1941-45 and make sure that we prevent genocide from happening again. Professor Gregory Stanton, who is famous for his work in genocide studies and prevention, has identified eight stages leading to genocide. The classification stage is when differences between people are not respected and a simple division

between “us” and “them” is created—German and Jew, Hutu and Tutsi. That leads to the stage of symbolisation, when various symbols are applied to members of groups: as part of the symbolisation process, the yellow star was forced upon Jews under Nazi rule, as was the blue scarf upon people from the eastern zone in Khmer Rouge Cambodia. That leads to dehumanisation, where victims are refused any human rights, liberties, or dignity. During the following stages of genocide—organisation, polarisation and preparation—the destruction of a people is planned by the regime. That leads to extermination. What follows is the last stage, denial, where perpetrators or later generations deny the existence of the crime.

The Holocaust was more than a war crime or a genocide. It undermined the foundation of our civilisation, as it was carefully planned and executed by the authorities of Nazi Germany. That is why it is so important for us today to understand the mechanisms leading up to genocide—to ensure that we are ready to prevent it in the future by promptly punishing any hate crimes or atrocities.

As I said, the Holocaust was the greatest failure of humanity, but it was also a display of humanity at its finest. The Talmud teaches:

“He who saves a single life, saves the world entire.”

It is important that we remember those who, in the dreadful circumstances of Nazi propaganda and callousness, put their own lives at risk to save others. Irena Sendler, a Polish nurse and social worker, smuggled some 2,500 Jewish children out of the Warsaw ghetto, providing them with false identity documents and safe housing. Oskar Schindler, a German industrialist and member of the Nazi party, is credited with saving the lives of 1,200 Jews during the Holocaust by employing them in his enamelware and ammunition factories. Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish architect, businessman, diplomat, and humanitarian, is recognised for saving tens of thousands of Jews in Nazi-occupied Hungary during the second world war through his Schutz-Pass device. That hero is especially close to my heart, as I campaigned for many years to have a statue erected in his honour. I am pleased that the statue was eventually installed at Great Cumberland place in London, where it was unveiled by Her Majesty the Queen and the President of Israel. More than 25,000 non-Jews were recognised as “Righteous Among the Nations” by Yad Vashem, which speaks volumes about the good side of human nature.

Alistair Burt (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): I need to be somewhere else at 10 o'clock, so I hope my hon. Friend will forgive my intervening. Before he leaves the topic of the triumph of the human spirit, will he also reflect on one of the memories that all of us who have been to Auschwitz-Birkenau carry with us, of the number of young people from Israel carrying the Israeli flag who go round singing songs, whose spirit has not been dampened by what has happened and whose existence is a demonstration of the triumph of the human spirit over the evil that they are confronting?

Sir David Amess: I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend. What he describes gives us hope for the future.

I am happy to see many wonderful initiatives taking place in my constituency to mark Holocaust memorial day, including a tree planting in Cockethurst park in

[*Sir David Amess*]

Eastwood organised by the wonderful Southend and Westcliff Hebrew Congregation. As the Nobel peace prize laureate Elie Wiesel warned some years ago:

“To forget a Holocaust is to kill twice.”

I am therefore pleased to see that Holocaust memorial day has gained such momentum in the past 15 years, reaching out to thousands of people across generations and inspiring them to learn lessons from the past and keep the memory alive.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Mike Weir (in the Chair): Order. I intend to call the Front-Bench speakers at about 10.40 am, leaving us just over 40 minutes for Back-Bench speakers. Five or six Members are trying to catch my eye and although I will not put a time limit on speeches at the moment I encourage Members to bear that in mind when speaking.

9.56 am

Dame Anne McGuire (Stirling) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir. I will keep my remarks brief, as I appreciate that other Members want to speak. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess). Like others, I congratulate the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr Clappison). I also wish to pay a special tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman), who has shown significant bravery over many years in standing up against anti-Semitism in this country and others.

I will give a few personal reflections about visits to Auschwitz and to Terezin in the Czech Republic, which I have visited a couple of times. That site is not as well known as some other camps associated with the Holocaust but a visit there can have an equally profound effect, because of the sheer cynicism that was shown there in what was, effectively, an industrial process of slaughtering people of all ages.

My first visit to Auschwitz, which I made thanks to the Holocaust Educational Trust, was an emotional experience for myself and the other Scottish MPs and Scottish schoolchildren on the trip. One thing from that trip that has stayed with me is that at the end of our visit, a young woman said, “I don’t believe this happened.” Once I had got over the initial shock, I realised that perhaps she could not understand what had happened because it was beyond her experience as a modern young person who uses electronic equipment and sees lives in colour. It was inexplicable to her. Despite seeing the evidence that the hon. Member for Hertsmere mentioned—the clothes, shoes, glasses and cases—she still could not get her mind around the Holocaust and what had happened in Auschwitz. If ever we needed evidence why the Holocaust Educational Trust needs to continue, she gave it to me that day—it came as such a shock.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): I am grateful to have had the opportunity to visit Auschwitz with the right hon. Lady last year. Is she concerned that the Campaign Against Antisemitism has found that one in eight people believe that Jewish people talk about the Holocaust to get sympathy?

Dame Anne McGuire: Everyone will find that shocking. Although we were not born when these things happened, we lived with the aftermath, and those of us who, like the hon. Member for Southend West, grew up in the post-war period, saw the images of the Holocaust on BBC television in black and white and had a broadening knowledge of it. That is why such debates, as well as the work of the Holocaust Educational Trust and other organisations, need to be kept alive and to be re-energised.

My second thought is about going to Terezin. On the second occasion, we took two young people with us. For those who do not know much about Terezin, I should say that it was, effectively, a show camp—it had been disguised by the Nazis. They even brought the Danish Red Cross in. They dusted everything off, they painted the walls and they made it look as though this was quite a nice place to be held, but it was, in fact, a transit camp to Auschwitz. For me, that epitomises the fact that we are not talking about some random act of genocide or something that happened because of a few Nazis at the top: this was the industrialised extermination of people. That is very difficult for us to get our heads around.

None the less, some hope came out of Terezin. Despite the lives that people had to lead, the children still had art and music classes. Some of the beautiful pictures by the children, who led a horrible life, can still be seen in, for example, the Jewish museum in Prague and at the Yad Vashem Holocaust museum. Anybody who goes to Terezin, or Theresienstadt, which is the German name for it, will see a small town that carries the weight of history on its shoulders. It is a town of sadness, even though people still live there today. The people in the town appear to carry that burden with them.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): I have also visited a number of the places the right hon. Lady has been to, including the museum outside Jerusalem where tributes are paid to a lot of the people whose names have been mentioned today for the work they did. Will she join me in congratulating the Friends of Israel on the work it does, especially in Northern Ireland, where it has started going to schools to teach young people about the Holocaust and its aftermath?

Dame Anne McGuire: As the chair of Labour Friends of Israel, I like to think that, although we are not there to be apologists for any Israeli Government or any politician in Israel, the existence of the state of Israel is an important element not only in post-Holocaust history, because of the Holocaust, but in the future of the Jewish people.

I want now to talk about the visit to Auschwitz to commemorate the 69th anniversary of its liberation. It seemed a bit unusual to go on the 69th anniversary, not the 70th, but that was because of concerns about the survivors making the arduous journey—many, but not all, came from Israel. We joined politicians, clergy, rabbis, local government officials and others from across Europe, who came together under the sponsorship, and at the invitation, of the Polish President.

What struck me—I hope the hon. Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) will have an opportunity to say more about this—was that we were sitting in a marquee, fully clothed in warm garments, in temperatures of minus 10 or 13° C, and listening to the words of survivors who had

not had the luxury of having such clothes or the shelter of a marquee. We then went to say prayers with Christian clergy and rabbis for those who died in that awful camp. For me, that was the voice of Auschwitz—those survivors being there and saying to the world, “Auschwitz happened. We have to recognise that. It is not a figment of anyone’s imagination.” Given that it happened, democrats and people of good will across the world have to keep that flame alive and to make sure that these things never happen again.

10.4 am

Eric Ollerenshaw (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir, and to follow the right hon. Member for Stirling (Dame Anne McGuire). I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr Clappison) on securing the debate. These debates are almost becoming a ritual, and I say that as someone who comes from a faith where ritual counts.

As usual, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman) put the emotional finger on it. When we woke up this morning—in England, in 2015—we heard accounts on the radio of children at a Jewish school lying on the floor practising for a possible terrorist attack, so there is no question but that we should be doing what we are doing today.

I want to say one or two personal things. First, when I was elected in 2010, a previous holder of the seat and honourable Member of this House, Stanley Henig, was just about keeping Holocaust memorial day going there. In 2011, it was held in a small room in the chaplaincy in Lancaster university—the actual constituency has a minute Jewish population, so this was perhaps more of an issue in terms of the campus. Then, however, the National Coalition Building Institute, to which I pay tribute, and particularly a lady called Liz Neat, got hold of things. With the support, to be fair, of Lancaster city council, we then began to hold a much bigger event on 27 January around the war memorial next to Lancaster town hall, and we have done so ever since. My job is to read the dedication to the righteous gentiles, whom my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) talked about. Next week, I am proud to say, we will be in the centre of the town, outside Lancaster castle, which has now opened for the first time—it was a prison, but that closed.

Hon. Members have paid tribute to survivors who can deal with the emotion. I pay tribute to Stephen Breuer, who turns up every time to read the dedication. This year, we are quite proud, because we are going to host one of the 70 candles mentioned by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside, which were designed by the artist Sir Anish Kapoor for the 70th anniversary.

It is perhaps more important that those things are happening, and recognised, in the small town of Lancaster—officially, it is a city—with its minute Jewish population, than it would be in other areas. Hon. Members have talked about the post-war period, and I grew up in the 1950s, after the second world war, but I do not remember any mention of the Holocaust. If we read the history—I taught history—there was some mention of the Nuremberg trials when they were going on, but there was little mention of the Holocaust when I was growing up in that part of Lancashire, certainly not in

school. That remained the case until—this was another anniversary—Adolf Eichmann was put on trial, having been taken from Argentina, when these issues were suddenly mentioned again.

Quite rightly, survivors who had escaped the Holocaust and come to Britain—I think of people I met when I was a councillor in Hackney, representing Stamford Hill, which has a significant, visible Jewish population; I have talked about that before—wanted to get on with their lives, and many were able to do that. I am extremely proud about that, and I know they are proud about it too.

As I say, these things perhaps only got talked about after Eichmann. Of course, we were also involved in the cold war, so that raised other big issues. When I was a teacher in the 1980s—I have mentioned this before, but it still needs to be underlined—the Government brought in the national curriculum, and the Holocaust was to be taught at key stage 3 of the history curriculum. As I have mentioned in previous debates, we should not underestimate the arguments that went on in the teaching profession about whether the subject, which is taught particularly in year 9, was suitable and whether children of that age would be able to deal with it.

Having been a teacher for 38 years, I can tell the House that children can deal with almost anything, and they were able to deal with being taught about the Holocaust. It was quite eye-opening. I have mentioned before that when I was teaching the subject, children—sixth formers or 14-year-olds, so hardly children, really—said that they knew nothing about it until they got to the classroom. That is another reason for continuing the ritual, if we call it that, of Holocaust memorial day. The day must be recognised.

I pay tribute, as other hon. Members have done, to the Holocaust Educational Trust, and Karen Pollock particularly—she is sitting just behind me. I am thinking particularly of the trips to Auschwitz, and the school ambassadors. At Holocaust memorial events, it is incredible the way those children can describe their visits and articulate their experience, as hon. Members have done this morning.

When I was a teacher, I avoided going to Auschwitz-Birkenau; I had mixed feelings about whether it would be just a museum, and how I would deal with it, having taught it over and over. In fact, it was because of Karen nagging me that I finally went a few years ago. The emotional experience is difficult for me to articulate, as it is for everyone else. It is powerful in many ways that we might not consider. The thing that still stands out for me is the sheer scale and size of Birkenau.

Having seen school visits by Holocaust survivors—I remember one such visit to Cardinal Allen school in Fleetwood a couple of years ago—I do not think that there is anything that the children, pupils or young adults, or whatever we want to call them, cannot take in this context. Hearing someone’s experience produces an impact, and leads to questions, and I pay tribute to that work and to the survivors. I do not know how they relive those experiences again and again; I suppose it is through their determination that those things should not be forgotten. They are right about that.

We hold town commemorations, but it occurred to me that a new Holocaust Educational Trust project might be to consider individual school commemorations.

[*Eric Ollerenshaw*]

When I was teaching, it was a struggle for us, given that schools are now multi-faith, to create assemblies that covered everything, but there may well be a way to take that further, particularly as everyone is concerned about what will happen when there are no survivors to provide their testimony. Perhaps we can think about doing something as part of the curriculum within schools; the Holocaust is rightly still part of the history curriculum.

As I have said, waking up in the morning and hearing what now has to happen in Jewish schools in England gives us clarity about why we feel we must continue with Holocaust memorial day. We must take pride in the country that gave a home to so many. There is worry among my Jewish friends, but I hope that small things such as today's debate will reassure the Jewish population of this country—those who came across to make a home here before the war and those who survived the war years and came here afterwards—and that they will still feel part of this country. Today is significant as the 750th anniversary of the first Parliament. Its duty was and still is to protect the people who live in this country.

10.13 am

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): It is a pleasure to take part in the debate under your chairmanship this morning, Mr Weir. I commend the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr Clappison) for ensuring that we have the opportunity to mark Holocaust memorial day in Parliament.

Holocaust memorial day was first formally marked in Northern Ireland in 2002. I was then Deputy First Minister and I spoke at that event in the Waterfront hall. I believe it is important, for me and every other representative, to continue to mark the day every year; it was not just because of the office I held at the time that I felt the burden of remembrance. Like other hon. Members, I have benefited from one of the Holocaust Educational Trust's visits to Auschwitz, as part of the "lessons from Auschwitz" project. The only trip from Northern Ireland happened in 2007. I was struck by the number of young people from all over Northern Ireland who did not have a full sense or appreciation of what the Holocaust entailed.

We began our trip with a visit to a Jewish cemetery, and many of the children thought that we were going to see the graves of victims of the Holocaust. The children from Northern Ireland were particularly struck by the explanation that they were being brought there so they could understand that there were real, full, thriving Jewish communities living even in a town such as Auschwitz, which were wiped out—and that there were attempts to destroy and desecrate the cemetery and use its very head stones as paving stones around the town. They were struck more by the sense of Jewish communities and families being systematically destroyed—with little trace left, to this day, other than a small synagogue—than they were by the big statistics and the figure of the slaughter of 6 million.

Hon. Members have described their visits and how they looked at the suitcases and glasses, but it was the pigtailed that really stuck with me—perhaps because I had a two-year-old daughter. Those things make us realise what was involved and what was destroyed, and how many were lost, including the complete families

that were destroyed so that there is no one left to remember them. That is why there is a burden on the rest of us to ensure that they are not forgotten to this day.

Reference has been made to what went into achieving the Holocaust. It was not just slaughter on an industrial scale; an infrastructure was created and organised to achieve that. That all stemmed, of course, from idle prejudices that were easily and evilly exploited and manipulated. That is part of what we must remember to this day: how easy it is for anyone, even in a supposedly democratic context, to start to mobilise prejudices in that vicious, pernicious way, so that people go against the expected judgments of their system of values and ethics. We must be vigilant because of that.

Prejudice is voiced in many forms, with many excuses. It uses events to construct constant criticism, to denigrate a faith or outlook, and to generalise in a vicious and nasty way. We must be conscious of the dangers and recognise anti-Semitism's new guises in our age, when it tries to recruit particular events and circumstances and turn what might be valid criticism of events into a sweeping attempt to dehumanise and caricature everyone of a particular faith outlook. That is why this year we must, as the Holocaust Memorial Trust says, reflect, respect and remember, and continue to learn the lessons and show vigilance.

In my constituency, on 28 January, we in Derry will mark Holocaust memorial day in the garden of reflection, which recently hosted a month-long Anne Frank Trust exhibition. People in my city will join in the same spirit that is reflected in the debate by hon. Members.

10.19 am

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): It is a privilege to speak in this debate and to follow such thoughtful and heartfelt speeches. So much has already been said, and I am conscious of time, so let me make a modest contribution through two stories—one personal to my family and one pertinent to my constituency—that converged at the end of last year.

A few days before Christmas, I took my parents-in-law, who were visiting us for the holidays, to a museum in my constituency; hon. Members may be aware of it. The National Holocaust Centre, a few miles north of Newark, is, remarkably, the only museum dedicated to the Holocaust in this country.

My parents-in-law are the children of Holocaust survivors. My wife's grandfather and grandmother were Jews who lived in what was then Belarussia at the outbreak of world war two. The Nazis came to their village near Minsk, rounded up the able-bodied young men and took them to labour camps, where, as one can imagine, they experienced enormous hardship. The young men were told that if they tried to escape, their families back in the village would be killed. That threat held the line for some time until, through various back-channels, word came to the camp that every member of the village had been shot. Many had been burned to death and their bodies had been dumped in an open grave. The village had been razed to the ground; young and old alike were slaughtered. Furnished with that reality, which had been long-feared, my grandfather-in-law narrowly succeeded in escaping from the camp and spent the

remainder of the war fighting the Nazis as a partisan, predominantly in the vast forests on the Polish-Russian border and in Ukraine.

At the close of the war, my grandfather-in-law returned to the smouldering, blood-stained ruins of his former village and, amid the ruins of the world he had lost and on discovering that every member of his family, including his six brothers and sisters, had been killed, found my wife's grandmother—herself a survivor with a story equally remarkable. They fell in love, and the rest is history. My mother-in-law, my wife and my two beautiful daughters are the result.

On that wintry morning prior to Christmas, I drove my mother-in-law to visit the National Holocaust Centre outside Newark. It gave me great pride not only that the only museum in our country dedicated to that cause should be in my constituency, of all places, but that I could take the daughter of a Holocaust survivor to it. I suspect that she was proud to visit it with her son-in-law, a Member of Parliament.

Let me briefly tell hon. Members who are not familiar with it the extraordinary story behind the museum and its founders. It is worth retelling on this day. Twenty years ago, two brothers from Nottinghamshire, who were not Jewish and did not have any intimate family connection with the Holocaust but whose parents possessed a deep social conscience, visited Israel and were captivated, if that is the right word, by Yad Vashem, the great Holocaust museum that was being developed outside Jerusalem. On returning to their parents' farmhouse in an idyllic but remote village north of Newark—the worst place, one might think, to build a museum—they conceived a remarkable vision to turn their home into a Holocaust museum. That is exactly what they achieved.

James and Stephen Smith are remarkable individuals from a remarkable family, and they are well known to those who follow this subject. They are now world leaders in their field, but they deserve further recognition. I cannot speak for their motivations—they are humble people who do not tell their story—but I suspect that they felt a moral duty to give dignity to the victims of the Holocaust, to acknowledge the crimes, to contribute to justice and healing and to preserve memory, through education, as a warning. That seems a fair summary of the ideals behind Holocaust memorial day.

I recommend to everybody a visit to that museum. It has two profound missions for Holocaust memorial day, for the commission, whose report will be published next week, and for all who do its work and preach its message. The first is the journey of the Smith brothers to ensure, as the direct memories fade away and the children of survivors, such as my mother-in-law, grow old, that the records, pictures and stories do not die and that people are always able to visit the museum and meet on this day. There are many museums in this country—many, even, in my constituency—but that museum is our conscience. If it is here for future generations, our conscience will be here forever.

Secondly, the museum reminds us of our common humanity by showing that whatever motivated the attacks on the Jews was a virus—the idea that all that matters in life is our differences. That virus takes different forms all over the world, but it is alive and well today. We see it in ISIS, in Boko Haram, in anti-Semitism in Paris and, I am afraid, in anti-Semitism and extremism in this country. It is still the major cause of suffering in the world, and it

is the greatest threat to my children and the children of others, who have reaped the extraordinary benefits of an interdependent world.

I drove home from that visit to our museum to my two beautiful children—the great-grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, who were not meant to be here. I looked into their eyes as I tucked them into bed, and I thought of the Smith brothers of Laxton. I felt that in those four lives, brought together by my election to this place, there is a source of optimism. We have decisively triumphed over the evil that tried to devour our lives and those of my ancestors. There is nothing more beautiful than seeing undaunted, undamaged optimism in human beings, which the Smith brothers displayed.

The Holocaust Centre in Laxton needs our support. I hope that the Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission, which is due to report next week, will recommend an endowment fund to recognise explicitly that extraordinary outlier in this cause and make a commitment to it and other projects out in the British regions, not just those in London. The Smith brothers were motivated to act. The message of Holocaust memorial day, which is not simply about remembrance or fine words, to which we are all accustomed, is that there are no bystanders in history. History flows through us; we are of it and we cannot look away. The Smith brothers acted, and I applaud them for it. That is the message that I send out today.

10.27 am

Mr Lee Scott (Ilford North) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr Clappison) on securing this debate. Like many others in this Chamber and beyond, I pay particular tribute to Karen Pollock and all the staff at the Holocaust Educational Trust for the vital work that they do—not only for all of us, but for the whole country. If we do not educate young people, I fear history could repeat itself.

Let me speak briefly about a few personal issues. Since becoming a great Member of the House of Commons—[*Interruption.*] I mean a Member of this great House of Commons—that was a Freudian slip. Over the years, I have received death threats and anti-Semitic abuse. Most recently, just before the end of last year, I was called a “dirty Jew” and told I should die.

I saw something on TV this weekend that saddened me greatly; I do not know whether other hon. Members saw it. A French lady said on one of the news channels that she told her young child that if a man or a woman came to school with a weapon, they should not say they were Jewish. It saddened me greatly and made me reflect on some of the things I saw when I visited Auschwitz and Terezin.

What I saw also made me think of something else—I say this not only for myself; I implore other people to say it. I am proud to be British, I am honoured to be a Member of Parliament and I am proud to say that I am a Jew. That will never change. No matter how many people tell me that I should be killed for being a Jew, while I have the honour of being a Member of Parliament, I will continue to fight for all communities and all religions because prejudice against anybody is unacceptable. If we have not learned anything from history, we should be ashamed of ourselves.

[Mr Lee Scott]

This goes completely beyond party politics. I express my gratitude to the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) and the shadow Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), who came and offered their support to me when I was going through these problems recently, as did the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary. I am not going to name everyone who did this, but the most encouraging thing was that I had hundreds and hundreds of e-mails from people around the whole country deploring anti-Semitism.

We live in a great country where everyone can feel safe. We have a great police force, a great protection unit, and no one should fear living in our country. These vile people who persecute others—whatever that is, whether it be Jews, Muslims or Christians—want us to live in fear. They want us to be scared of them, and they want us to get out, but they are not going to achieve it. We are not going anywhere. We are part of Britain. We have been part of Britain for hundreds of years and we will continue to be part of Britain.

In the few minutes I have left, I want to reflect briefly on my visit to Auschwitz. I am not somebody who cries easily—I have cried a few times—but I did cry when I visited Auschwitz. I have been to other camps and I have seen what happened, but it did not impact on me in the same way as it did standing there in the freezing cold—I am sure that did have something to do it. The hon. Member is perfectly right, and please forgive me for not knowing her constituency—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Glasgow North—

Dame Anne McGuire: Actually, it is Stirling.

Mr Scott: We are having a great day, Mr Weir—Southend has become Basildon, Stirling has become Glasgow North. The right hon. Member for Stirling (Dame Anne McGuire) is right. I was wearing a thick jacket, a scarf, a thick shirt and thick trousers, and I knew that I was going home in the evening, but the people who perished there did not have that. They were persecuted because of nothing more than hatred and misunderstanding.

Whenever things are tough, everyone needs someone to blame—so, “Let’s blame the people who are the easiest to blame.” That is the importance of Holocaust remembrance day and of the work done by the Holocaust Educational Trust: to remind people and keep reminding them. When, sadly, no survivors are still alive, we have to keep on reminding people, because if we do not, I fear history will repeat itself. The onus is on us to stop that from happening.

10.32 am

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): It is an honour to follow my friend and Jewish brother, my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Mr Scott), who made the most moving comments, and my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick), who spoke about the moving life story of his own family.

I know that Holocaust memorial day is next Tuesday, but it is appropriate that this Parliament should be talking about this issue today. On 20 January 1275, on

the other side of the street, in the Westminster chapter house—one can see it through the windows—our first Parliament was founded. That is what the British people are about. Where does the word “Parliament” come from? It comes from the French word “parler”—to talk together and understand each other, and to understand our differences and try to sort them out. It is important that we have this debate to try to recognise what in human nature creates these appalling events. It is still here; there is some of it in all of us. Unless we recognise that, we are doomed to repeat history.

Solzhenitsyn said in “The Gulag Archipelago”:

“If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.”

That sort of hatred, somehow and inexplicably, rests in human beings.

After the war, a German officer, who had had a normal war and done nothing very remarkable, was being interrogated. He was in the pen with thousands of other people. He had not been the commandant of a camp or anything like that—he had fought in Germany and Russia and all the rest of it; there was nothing remarkable about him. However, when he was being interviewed, there was a gap in his war, so the American officer interviewing him asked, “What were you doing in that gap?” The German officer could have given any answer; he was being interviewed with thousands of other people. He said, “I was just working for the Einsatzgruppen.” The interviewing officer knew what they were doing. He said, “What were you doing for those nine months working for the Einsatzgruppen in Poland?”, and he replied, “I was killing Jews.” The officer said, “Well, how many did you kill?” He said, “Oh, about 90,000.”

This was just a normal person, a German officer, and somehow he had been infected with this appalling evil. It is there. Germany was the most advanced nation in Europe, with an extraordinarily successful economy, and we still do not understand why Jewish people—who were largely integrated, were a tiny proportion of the population, were making a wonderful contribution to Germany and had fought patriotically in exactly the same proportion as everybody else in Germany for their nation in the first world war—were treated like that. It is something in human nature, and it is here now.

Only last year, we had a debate on Srebrenica, which happened not 70 years ago, but in our time. Boys and men—hundreds of them—were carried out of a village and shot simply because they were Muslim. It is here now, and we have to recognise it in all of us and root it out; that is why this debate is so important. It is also important for us to proclaim that because this great and appalling act of murder was committed against the Jewish people, they have the absolute right to live in peace, freedom and security wherever they are in the world. Because they, almost uniquely, were subjected to this appalling act of genocide and torture, they deserve our special protection.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North spoke most movingly about the Jewish people who have settled in this country. We should proclaim loudly in this Parliament, on the day of our 750th anniversary, how much we value the contribution of Jewish people to our nation. This is a people who came here and sought

shelter, often from pogroms at the end of the 19th century—although, as my hon. Friend said, some have been here for centuries—and they have given so much to our country. They have integrated so well, and they are an object lesson to all immigrant communities.

Although my hon. Friend has talked about a particularly horrible incident, I do not personally believe there is much anti-Semitism in this country; there certainly should not be. We are a tolerant nation and we welcome our Jewish brothers and sisters; we welcome them for the contribution that they make. However, this debate is an opportunity to say that we shall never forget what happened to them in the past, and in never forgetting, we hope that we can stop it from happening again.

10.38 am

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): It is an absolute privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir. Members on both sides of the House have made very moving and powerful contributions, sharing stories, memories and facts that should never be forgotten. As has been said, it is a matter of deep shame that despite the proclamation of “Never again” after the Holocaust, from the killing fields of Cambodia to the desert sands of Darfur, to the mountains and savannahs of Rwanda, we—the international community—have failed to prevent genocides from taking place.

The theme for Holocaust memorial day this year is keeping the memory alive, which is particularly appropriate, as we have heard, given that a week from now marks 70 years to the day that Auschwitz-Birkenau was liberated by the red army. The SS knew they were coming and attempted to destroy the evidence of their heinous crimes. They built bonfires of documents detailing their atrocities. They blew up crematoriums II and III and set fire to Kanada II, the barracks that held property plundered from the victims. The Nazis did not want us to know about the systematic, state-organised murder of Jews, Roma Gypsies, the disabled, homosexuals, communists and socialists. However, by keeping the memory alive, we reaffirm that they are not forgotten. The voices of the 11 million echo still across this Chamber and, indeed, the world. Those voices will be heard.

About 1.5 million children were murdered during the Holocaust, and the young suffered the most brutal treatments, tortures and punishments, often for the smallest offences. A 16-year-old boy, Czeslaw Kempisty, was hanged from a post for several hours with his hands twisted behind his back. What was the reason? He had thrown some turnips to famished Soviet prisoners of war. Thirteen-year-old Halina Grynstein was shot for approaching the camp fence to exchange words with another prisoner. Seventeen-year-old Benkel Faivel was shot in the head by an SS guard for trying to pass a piece of bread to a woman prisoner. Those were small but very real rebellions. They shout against the idea that the victims of the Nazi Holocaust were passive.

Everyone in this Chamber will have heard the stories of the Warsaw ghetto uprising—the Jewish community held out longer in Warsaw than the entire Polish army did to protect their borders against the Nazi army—the Bielski partisans and the Sobibor uprising, but I want to talk also about the small acts of resistance, which are not as well known. In that way, when we think of Auschwitz and remember the emaciated bodies, the

piles of corpses or, indeed, the shoes, suitcases, artificial limbs and human hair plundered from victims, we also remember the vital acts of resistance: a prohibited conversation, the passing of some bread or the throwing of a few turnips to starving prisoners. Those acts showed a real determination on the part of the prisoners, including children—and they knew full well the price that they could pay for their actions—to retain their basic humanity.

Some of the most unforgivable actions in Auschwitz were the experiments by the so-called camp doctors, including the notorious Josef Mengele, who inflicted inconceivable levels of suffering on children with his quasi-medical experiments. Eva Mozes Kor describes her arrival at Auschwitz with her identical twin, Miriam:

“Everything was moving very fast...I noticed my father and my two older sisters were gone. As I clutched my mother’s hand, an SS man hurried by shouting, ‘Twins! Twins!’...Once the SS guard knew we were twins, Miriam and I were taken away from our mother, without any warning or explanation. Our screams fell on deaf ears. I remember looking back and seeing my mother’s arms stretched out in despair as we were led away by a soldier. That was the last time I saw her...”

Eva remembers her introduction to life at Auschwitz:

“The first time I went to use the latrine located at the end of the children’s barrack, I was greeted by the scattered corpses of several children lying on the ground. I think that image will stay with me forever.”

During their time at Auschwitz, Eva and Miriam were put through many brutal surgeries and experiments. Their survival was a miracle in itself; only a few twins were left when the camp was finally liberated. Eva is still with us. She founded the Holocaust museum and education centre in Indiana and CANDLES. That is the acronym for Children of Auschwitz Nazi Deadly Lab Experiments Survivors, an organisation whose dedicated aim is “to heal the pain; to teach the truth; to prevent prejudice.”

What a remarkable woman! I pay tribute to her.

In many ways, simply refusing to give up and die in spite of it all was the ultimate act of resistance—living on, like Eva. However, resistance came in many different forms and shapes: active and passive, violent and non-violent, and written and spoken. I shall now tell another story. In the spring of 1943, 19-year-old Ester Wajcblum arrived at Auschwitz and was assigned to work in the munitions factory, where she met Regina Safir and Ala Gertner—women who were engaged in resistance activities. Together with Roza Robotka, they began smuggling out gunpowder.

The Sonderkommandos were Jewish prisoners who worked in the death camps. Their duties included guiding new arrivals into the gas chambers, removing the bodies afterwards, shaving the victims’ hair, removing their teeth, cremating their bodies and disposing of the ashes. Due to their knowledge of the camp’s inner workings, the Sonderkommandos were marked for certain death—it was a choice of die on arrival or die in four months’ time. As the time of the Sonderkommandos’ execution approached, they planned their revolt. They fashioned crude grenades by using sardine tins filled with the smuggled gunpowder and, on 7 October 1944, the workers of crematorium I began the revolt. That was followed by uprisings in crematoriums II and III. Crematorium IV was victoriously blown up. However, the SS guards counter-attacked and brutally suppressed the uprising. About 200 of the Sonderkommandos were rounded up and executed with a single shot to the head.

[Lyn Brown]

The gunpowder was traced to Ester's munitions factory—Ester, Regina, Ala and Roza were betrayed. They were tortured: they were beaten and raped and electric shocks were applied to their genitals. But they never gave up the names of people who were not already dead. On 5 January 1945—so close to liberation—the four women were hanged in front of the women's camp. Their last words were:

“Be strong and be brave.”

As we reflect on the Holocaust and consider the genocides in Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda and Darfur, we all have a duty to use these memories as a catalyst to rid us of the cancers of racial hatred, intolerance and discrimination. We should be immensely grateful to the Holocaust Educational Trust and the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, which do vital work in keeping alive and accessible the stories and lessons of the Holocaust as the number of survivors, sadly, dwindles over time. I join others in commending their work and that of Karen Pollock and Olivia Marks-Woldman in particular.

However, each of us has a responsibility to keep the memories alive and to challenge and defeat the politics of racism and hate at every turn. Evil must be resisted, and if the people of whom I have spoken could resist the evil that they faced, despite their apparent powerlessness, that tells us that we all, as individuals, have a part to play in combating evil. It also tells us how much more responsibility there is on the state to fight all forms of racism and the politics of hate, whether at home or abroad. We must hear the voices of the past and keep their memories alive.

10.48 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Stephen Williams):

I am glad to join other hon. Members in thanking the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr Clappison) for initiating our discussion. I also thank all hon. Members for drawing on their understanding of the past and their personal experiences, conversations and visits in order to give such thoughtful speeches.

While listening to all the individual stories told by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown), I noted that we often think about those times in terms of victims and perpetrators, but it is important to remember that among the group of people who were meant to be victims were those who refused to be victims, those who resisted, those who escaped and those who survived through it all and gave us the individual testimonies, which have been handed down the generations to today, and among the group of people who were the perpetrators were those who dissented and those who protected their fellow citizens, either through diplomatic channels, as the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) mentioned, or simply by protecting their neighbours. I have heard a story from one of my Hungarian friends of how her mother protected their piano teacher during the Holocaust. From such stories, we remember the hatred and we can despair of it, but we can also draw hope.

Many hon. Members have reflected on their visits to Auschwitz-Birkenau through the agency of the Holocaust Educational Trust and other bodies. I visited Auschwitz-Birkenau as a young man while I was inter-railing in the

autumn of 1992, and there was hardly anyone there. I, too, was shocked by the paraphernalia and the remains of death, which the hon. Member for Hertsmere mentioned—the piles of glasses, the suitcases and the discarded passes—and by the sheer scale of the machinery of death, as the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Eric Ollerenshaw) has said. One can appreciate it only by walking up to the now-familiar brick railway arch at the entrance to the death camp itself at Birkenau, as I did 23 years ago, and standing there, looking at the vast expanse of land and asking, “How could people do this?” People have to see it for themselves, but once they have seen it, it is not something that they want to see again.

The array of commemoration plans proves that the passage of time does nothing to impair our collective memory. It is our duty to recall the horrors and lessons of the Holocaust and to keep the stories of the survivors alive. It should not, and will not, fall to the survivors and their relatives to keep the memory and lessons of the Holocaust alive, especially as the voices that offer such significant witness to the Holocaust's atrocities are gradually fading. If we do not encourage everyone to remember, it will be no wonder if many start to forget.

Today is also about remembering genocides since 1945, as well as remembering the persecution of the Jews and other minorities by the Nazis and their collaborators. As has been mentioned, Holocaust Memorial Day, which this year is the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, is also the 20th anniversary of the genocide at Srebrenica. I recall, as will many hon. Members, the dreadful events of 20 years ago when the full horror of the Bosnian civil war was beamed into our living rooms every night for three years, and the ghastly phrase “ethnic cleansing” became part of the language of war-zone reporting. Such things took place in modern Europe during our lifetime, half a century after the continent had last been convulsed in a war in which civilians were the main casualties.

Following our debate on the subject last year, when I mentioned Bosnia, I went, in April, to Srebrenica with a delegation of British youth leaders. I was shocked by what I saw there, including photographs in various exhibitions and the cemetery at Srebrenica, where more than 8,000 obelisks mark Muslim graves. I met some of the survivors, including the mayor of Srebrenica, a man in his 30s who is the only male survivor of his class. I ask my male colleagues to imagine being the only male survivor among the people with whom they went to school. I met Hassan, whose twin brother was killed. Imagine the horror of that. I met a remarkable group of people, the Mothers of Srebrenica, who are keeping alive the memory of what happened to their husbands, fathers, sons and uncles. Women spoke to me of the other side of genocide, which has not been mentioned today. We have spoken about the death that is caused by genocide, but those women told me of the acts that were perpetrated against the survivors, particularly the women, many of whom were raped, humiliated and robbed of their dignity. We must not forget that aspect of genocide.

We will always remember the innocent lives that have been lost, no matter where that happened, whether it was in the killing fields of Cambodia or the churches of Rwanda. An understanding of history is important to ensure that we learn from the past in education, policy

and how we, as individuals, treat others. The Holocaust Educational Trust, which most hon. Members have mentioned, is now in its 27th year of educating children through “lessons from Auschwitz”, which is surely the most poignant way to help children understand what happened. We revisit painful memories and shocking scenes not merely for the sake of doing so, but to ensure that history is never repeated.

This year, the theme of Holocaust Memorial Day will be “Keep the memory alive”. Pledging to keep the memory alive is a way in which we can pay tribute to those who have lost their lives and those who have lived a life beyond those terrible experiences. As we utter those immortal words, other words associated with holocaust remembrance come to the fore. “Never again” is a phrase often uttered in such debates, but night after night our television screens are filled with images that show man’s inhumanity to man. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman) mentioned the terrible events that have occurred in Paris during the past month. Just as it was appropriate for people to say, and to hold up signs that read, “Je suis Charlie”, it is appropriate for those of all denominations and none to hold up signs that read, “Je suis Juif”.

We need, more than ever, to ensure that never again means never again. That is why the Holocaust Commission, which was announced by the Prime Minister, will report on its recommendations on Holocaust Memorial Day a week from now. The importance of the commission cannot be over-emphasised at a time when the link to those who survived the Holocaust is becoming ever weaker. The current generation of young people will be the last to have the opportunity to hear at first hand the testimony of holocaust survivors. That was brought home to me only yesterday when my Department hosted its annual holocaust memorial day, and our special guest, Auschwitz survivor Susan Pollack, was unable to attend because her husband and fellow survivor Abraham had sadly just died. That is why I ask all who are present to pay tribute to holocaust survivors who bear testimony in schools and colleges across the country. It is because of people such as Susan that the commission is tasked

with ensuring that future generations never forget the Holocaust, and that the stories of survivors are not lost when they can no longer bear testimony.

I join many colleagues in paying tribute to the Holocaust Educational Trust, and in particular their chief executive, Karen Pollock, who has been key in ensuring that holocaust education has been at the forefront of our efforts to ensure that we reflect on and, we hope, learn the lessons from the past. Holocaust education brings to life the names, the memories and the identities of those who suffered; not only the 6 million Jews and many other minorities who were persecuted between 1933 and 1945, but the more than 1 million Cambodians who were murdered by Pol Pot, the 1 million who died in Rwanda, the hundreds of thousands who died in Darfur and the thousands who were killed in Bosnia.

Holocaust education reminds us that behind the statistics were real people, who lived, loved and laughed, and who might have gone on to be mothers, fathers or even Nobel laureates. That is why we continue to support the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust. I thank its chief executive, Olivia Marks-Woldman, and her team for their work to ensure that we all remember. This year, the trust has commissioned the artist Anish Kapoor to design candles that have been placed in 70 locations around the country. My colleague the Secretary of State will take one of those candles to Auschwitz-Birkenau as part of the 70th anniversary commemorations next week. I pay tribute to the Anne Frank Trust and to Sir Andrew Burns for their work on making sure that people remember the lessons from the past.

As has been said, such events repeat themselves, and the UK is experiencing a reported increase in anti-Semitism. We must say clearly that that is completely unacceptable in modern Britain. It is important never to stand aside when we encounter prejudice and hatred of any kind. Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel said,

“I swore never to be silent whenever wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation.”

Today, reflecting on our democracy, as the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) has said, our duty is to remember the past, and never to be silent about prejudice, bigotry and hatred in our own time.

Drugs (Ultra-rare Diseases)

10.59 am

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): I am delighted to have the opportunity to raise this hugely important issue, which affects a number of children across the country represented here today by a good number of right hon. and hon. Members. Although the debate is scheduled for only half an hour, I will take interventions from Members who wish to raise constituency cases. I am happy to do so because this is an important issue that affects families across the country. At the moment, 88 children in the United Kingdom have Morquio. There are 2,500 people with Duchenne muscular dystrophy, but 50 have a nonsense mutation, which falls into the category of an ultra-rare disease. We are talking about 138 people, 111 of whom are currently on treatment trials with the two drugs that are relevant to this debate.

I am delighted that there was a powerful lobby last week on behalf of the group with the nonsense mutation of Duchenne muscular dystrophy. Families from across the country gathered in Portcullis House and then presented a 24,000-strong petition calling for Translarna. I was with the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr Anderson), who chairs the all-party group on muscular dystrophy, and the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan), who was there with her constituent Archie Hill. We were joined by Liam and Saul, two other boys with the condition. We were all delighted that the hon. Member for Blaydon managed to ask a question at Prime Minister's Question Time, and the answer gave hope to all those children because the Prime Minister gave a very personal answer comparing his own son to Archie—he had a picture of Archie playing football. The Prime Minister came to speak to us, and he said that he would personally do what he could, which echoes the Minister's work. I thank the Minister for his personal assistance, which has been extremely helpful. I have met him twice, and I know he is very engaged on this matter, which I appreciate.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I pay tribute to him for his work on this subject, which is second to none. I also thank him for mentioning my constituent Archie Hill and his parents, who have campaigned tirelessly for Translarna for their son. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is important that NHS England takes on board what the Prime Minister said to us, and to the families whom we represented, at Downing street last week by introducing a plan that enables Translarna to be available to those children who could benefit now, rather than waiting for the bureaucracy that is tying the drug up in knots? It could be available for those children now.

Greg Mulholland: Absolutely. It is a pleasure to be working on this issue with the right hon. Lady and other right hon. and hon. Members from both sides of the House. This is a personal issue for me, too. My attention was drawn to the issue when Simon and Katy Brown came to see me with their son, Sam, in 2012. Sam was then four, and he is now six. Sam is receiving Vimizim, which is the only drug that clinically works for Morquio. Both drugs have been shown to have a very

significant impact on the health of these individuals, changing what they are able to do with their lives, which is crucial.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I congratulate him on securing this debate. Is the supply of drugs purely down to finances, or is it totally bureaucracy? What is it? Why is there a hold-up on such an important issue?

Greg Mulholland: That is a good question, and it is the nub of the issue. It is not finances. Finances are clearly an issue, but it is important to get the message out that they are not the cause of the hold-up. There is an element of bureaucracy in the process, which I will address. I know that the Minister is seeking to ensure that we have a proper process, but ultimately we have to make decisions based on the effectiveness of the drugs. In this case, both drugs have been shown to work and are licensed and used by health systems in other countries.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way, and I congratulate him on securing this debate. On effectiveness, would he agree—I hope the Minister also concurs—that it is about timing, particularly with Translarna? The drug will extend the ability of young boys to maintain their mobility and to keep out of a wheelchair, which is why it is so critical that the bureaucracy is speeded up for individuals such as my constituent Jagger Curtis and his dad, James. They need the drug now, not in six, 12 or 18 months' time. It comes down to ensuring that the drug is available when it will be effective.

Greg Mulholland: Absolutely. That is very much the case with Morquio, too. Simon and Katy Brown have told me that the drug is having a huge impact now. I met Sam and saw him running around when he visited my surgery. When there is deterioration in such conditions, the clock can never be turned back, which is why we are urging the Minister to address the situation. I am delighted that we had meetings with him. All the organisations involved, the MPS Society, the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign, Action Duchenne and Joining Jack, are urging the Minister and NHS England to find a way to ensure that all these children, not only the 111 who are currently on the trials—some of whom are, of course, receiving placebos—but all 138 children with these conditions, are able to access the drugs now. We have asked for a decision on that by the end of January.

We are in this situation because a decision was supposed to have been taken by NHS England on 15 December 2014, but a letter was sent by the MPS Society and a young man with Morquio syndrome, Kamal—I am delighted that his family are visiting Parliament today—and on receipt of that letter NHS England, realising that its process was potentially discriminating against people with ultra-rare conditions, pulled the entire process, leaving all these families in limbo. NHS England has a responsibility to put another proper, robust process in place.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. I will be meeting my constituent Angela Paton on Friday afternoon. She was part of the trial, which helped her immensely,

but she is worried that the drug may now be withdrawn. Would my hon. Friend like me to report to him after that meeting on Friday?

Greg Mulholland: Absolutely. It is critical that we all work together on this issue. Indeed, I would like to hear from the MPs for all these families across the country so that we can have one voice to say to NHS England and the Minister, who has been very helpful, that we need a solution and that we need to hear some news by the end of January.

NHS England is now consulting on a new process, and it has said that it will take 90 days. That may seem a reasonable time to come up with a process, but considering that the old process was flawed, there needs to be something to fill the gap that enables all these children to access the drugs now. At the moment, the drugs in this case are being supplied through the good will of the drug companies: BioMarin in the case of Vimizim and PTC in the case of Translarna. Both companies are engaged in the process, both have a part to play and both are involved in dialogue with the Minister and NHS England.

I will briefly explain the two conditions so that people understand. Morquio is caused by the lack of an enzyme needed to break down certain chains of sugar molecules used in building bones, cartilage, tendons and other bodily tissues. Those unbroken molecules are stored in parts of cells called lysosomes, which become swollen, disrupt cell functions and cause progressive damage. Babies with the syndrome grow normally, but growth slows significantly after 18 months. Those severely affected stop growing at about age eight, and their final height may be three or four feet, which has many effects on their quality of life. There is no cure for Morquio, but the enzyme replacement therapy Vimizim, for which clinical trials are ongoing at the moment, has been shown to be effective. As we have said, any delay with the drug will cause damage that cannot then be reversed.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): Before I came in, I was speaking to my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami), who would have liked to be here but who has a meeting and sends his apologies. When reading the testimonies from the MPS Society UK, I was struck by how significant a difference the drug makes to children's energy levels. Obviously, clinical trials and other formal assessments are important, but the personal testimonies from the families about the changes that they have seen in the children and how much energy the drug gives them are far more compelling than any scientific assessment could be. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that listening to the families is important?

Greg Mulholland: It is crucial, but that also tallies with the medical evidence. It has been shown that that particular treatment stabilises symptoms, slows deterioration and has a hugely positive impact on quality of life. Children can do more and lead more normal lives; they have more energy and stamina. People with Morquio can live full lives and go on to education and employment, but childhood is their only opportunity to take a drug to slow the effects of the disease.

Duchenne muscular dystrophy, also caused by a mutation, affects young boys specifically. It also has no cure and gets worse over time. It begins by affecting a

particular group of muscles and then muscles more widely, leading to difficulty walking, running, jumping, standing up and climbing stairs. Children with Duchenne muscular dystrophy may end up in a wheelchair fairly young, and are certainly predicted to become wheelchair-bound between the ages of eight and 14 as their muscles weaken and they lose their ability to walk.

Mrs Gillan: The thing that came home to me was that those children need to access such drugs quickly, while they are still walking. Is that not why the time scale is so urgent? As soon as the child is no longer ambulatory, the drug will not have an effect. That is why we must have a speeded-up timetable and access to personal budgets for such drugs.

Greg Mulholland: The right hon. Lady is absolutely right. Without such drugs, boys with Duchenne and children with Morquio are deteriorating now while waiting. They were expecting a decision on 15 December about whether they would be able to access those two drugs.

Translarna changes the natural course of the mutation in Duchenne muscular dystrophy, slows the decline in physical functioning and can therefore also play an important role in reducing the burden that the condition places not only on the boys who have it but on their families. They can do more, lead normal lives and see their boys do normal things with their siblings.

The number of people affected by the nonsense mutation in Duchenne is very small: there are only 50, 34 of whom are currently in the Translarna trial. The number expected to be eligible for Translarna is about 80 to 90 people, so we are not talking about huge numbers. Some of those people, incidentally, are not yet diagnosed; it is believed that that is the largest potential figure. Vimizim is already licensed in various countries: more than 20 European countries have access to it outside clinical trials, including France, Germany, Italy, Denmark and the Czech Republic. Translarna has been given conditional approval by the European Medicines Agency to treat boys with the nonsense mutation. Data gathered from clinical trials of Translarna indicates that the drug, as well as being effective, is safe. Results of the phase 2B trial were encouraging. Boys who received a low dose of Translarna could walk an average of 31 metres farther than boys receiving the placebo. Translarna is already available in Italy, Germany, Spain and France.

The clear message from all the families and organisations representing people with both those conditions is that we cannot wait for the drugs. NHS England has a responsibility, but so does the Department of Health, because the abolition of the previous highly specialised commissioning service led to an unfit-for-purpose process that had to be scrapped in the face of the pre-action. There is a moral and potentially a legal responsibility to find a way to make that decision. We are now already more than a month past the day when those families were expecting a decision that could literally be life-changing for them.

We understand, of course, that NHS England must put in place a proper process, but I urge the Minister to carry on doing what he is doing and the Prime Minister, who has taken a personal interest in the issue, to find a way to allow all those children to access these two drugs, which have been shown to be effective and to

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have a hugely transformative effect on their lives and those of their families. I will carry on working with the Minister and the two drug companies, but I urge him to listen to this message. We cannot wait 90 days. We need an interim solution, and I hope that we can have that by the end of January, soon as that is. I will carry on working with him and colleagues throughout the House until we get that news.

11.16 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (George Freeman): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) on his tireless work on this issue, and colleagues across the House, including the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr Anderson), my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) and others here today.

I thank the hon. Member for Leeds North West for his kind words about the work that I have been trying to do for him, and about the Prime Minister's signal of support. The issues are incredibly complex and do not lend themselves to an easy waving of a ministerial wand, but we are committed to finding a solution.

The hon. Gentleman has been tireless in his support of one of his constituents, six-year old Sam Brown from Otley, who has the very rare Morquio syndrome. A new treatment is now available called Vimizim, from which Sam has already benefited as part of a clinical trial. I wish to state my support for Sam and his family, and for all those who suffer from the disease, including those in the trial who have access to the drug when others currently do not. I also pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's support for the family of another young boy, Archie, who has Duchenne muscular dystrophy, a very rare form of muscular dystrophy that affects only boys. Archie's family want him to be treated with a new medicine, Translarna.

I will say a little about the background to the diseases and what we are trying to do about them. Both conditions are very rare—there are about 80 children living with Morquio syndrome in England, and about 140 boys with Duchenne muscular dystrophy—so we are talking about a very small number of children with those life-limiting conditions. However, rare diseases are not rare: there are between 5,000 and 10,000 known types of rare disease, and an estimated one in 17 people will be affected by a rare disease in their lifetime, amounting to some 3 million sufferers in the UK alone.

The truth is that the more we know about the human genome and the behaviour of genes in disease development, the more we understand its complexity. In cancer particularly, we know that the tumour itself mutates at different stages of the disease. The more we know about genetics, the more we discover that diseases that we thought yesterday were one disease in fact break down into different bundles of rare disease. New knowledge, technology and advances in biomedicine are a wonderful thing, but that does not detract from the fact that the NHS operates with finite resources and that difficult funding decisions must be made daily.

I was delighted to meet Sam's mother and Archie's family early in December, along with the hon. Gentleman and representatives of the Society for Mucopolysaccharide

Diseases, to whose work I pay tribute, and of the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign. As the hon. Gentleman mentioned, we had a number of meetings over the Christmas period. I was delighted to meet patient groups and the manufacturers of Vimizim and ataluren just before Christmas. In that meeting, I asked the patient groups and companies to set out their proposals, which they have now done. I am grateful to them, and I have passed on that information to NHS England.

This morning, I met NHS England's clinical director of specialised services, James Palmer, and its director of specialised commissioning, Richard Jeavons, and I will convene a further meeting shortly to pursue the issues that the hon. Gentleman has raised this morning. Since he first made me aware of this issue, I have been absolutely determined to bring as much ministerial focus to it as I can. I am also grateful for his acknowledgement of the Prime Minister's support. The Prime Minister and I are both determined to ensure, without compromising due process, that the case for these children and their families is properly heard, and that the system works as it is supposed to.

I am acutely aware of the urgency behind the hon. Gentleman's comments today and that is why I have taken the unusual step of trying to broker an agreement on what we might do to help children affected by these diseases, but I must stress that it is for NHS England, which in the end is the responsible commissioner, to make any decisions about making funding available so that the treatments are available on the NHS. It will act on the best clinical advice from the UK's specialist body, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence.

I will say a little more about the options for accelerating that process in a moment, but first I will talk about our approach to improving access to treatments for rare diseases generally, because I know that this debate is being watched closely by others who have an interest in a number of other drugs and conditions, in the commissioning process, and in NHS England's prioritisation and decision-making framework. In setting the scene, I remind right hon. and hon. Members of the pressures that the NHS faces, particularly on budgets for rare diseases. The emergence of new treatments, the increasing personalisation of medicines, the end of the one-size-fits-all model and the possibilities offered by the rapid advances that we are making in genomic medicine and diagnosis are all putting immense pressure on NHS England's resources for the commissioning of services for rare conditions.

Ideally, of course, we would want to fund all the treatments that are shown to benefit patients in any way, but we have to make difficult decisions about how we spend the money that we have available. That is why we have put clinicians in charge of the process, so that they can make decisions based on patient benefit and on the best health economic assessments that we can make. The painful truth is that with finite resources, when we make a decision in one case to accept a drug, we will make a decision elsewhere to reject, and we have a duty to all to ensure that we make those decisions fairly.

For people with rare conditions, their families, carers and clinicians, having access to the latest and most effective treatments is obviously critical, and I am absolutely committed to ensuring that patients with rare diseases have access to the latest and most effective treatments

that represent value to the NHS and the taxpayer, as well as delivering benefits to patients. That is why we recently introduced the early access to medicines scheme, which aims to give patients with life-threatening or seriously debilitating conditions access to medicines that do not yet have a marketing authorisation or licence where there is clear unmet medical need. I am delighted that initial products have been brought forward in the last six months under that scheme.

More generally, our strategy for life sciences sets out an ambitious longer-term plan to improve the wider environment for health and life sciences companies in this country. Recently, I launched a major review of the landscape in the UK for bringing innovative medicines and medical technologies to patients much more quickly, and I will soon announce the chair, the terms of reference, the scope and the timetable of that review.

We are not in any way complacent. The truth is that the challenges in this sector, which are being driven by the pace of technological change, demand that in our policy-making framework, in the Department of Health and in NHS England, we adapt the way in which we handle these processes. Because of their rarity and the low patient populations, services for rare conditions are directly commissioned nationally by NHS England as specialised services. They account for approximately 14% of the total NHS budget and represent spending of about £14 billion a year. Both Morquio syndrome and Duchenne muscular dystrophy fall within these national specialist commissioning arrangements.

As right hon. and hon. Members are aware, NHS England is considering draft clinical commissioning policies for both Vimizim and ataluren. I understand that they are being considered as part of NHS England's wider prioritisation process for funding in 2015-16. NHS England's clinical priorities advisory group formulates recommendations on the commissioning of new treatments for rare diseases in England. It is made up of clinicians, patient representatives and commissioners of health services.

In summer 2014, a decision-making aid for the prioritisation of new interventions and treatments was developed by a partnership of stakeholders, including more than 250 patient representatives. It was due to be used for the first time in early December 2014, but on 28 November 2014 NHS England decided to postpone its introduction, in response to concerns that some patients affected by rare diseases might be disadvantaged by its application. The legal process about that must now run its course. I understand that NHS England is, rightly, reviewing the appropriate approach to prioritising new treatments and interventions within specialised commissioning in response to those concerns. A 90-day consultation on the prioritisation framework and decision-making process for commissioning decisions on new treatments will be launched by NHS England shortly. This morning, I again raised the importance and urgency of that consultation process.

I know that patients and their families are understandably concerned that it may take a long time for a decision to be made by NHS England on whether it will fund the drugs, and that in the interim the children affected will not receive them. However, I am delighted to say that NHS England has assured me that the consultation will have no impact on the decision-making timetable for commissioning NHS services from April 2015 onwards. In addition, it has assured me that existing treatments

will continue to be commissioned, ensuring that support for patients is maintained. NHS England understands that the manufacturer, Bio Marin, is providing Vimizim under an expanded access arrangement to those patients who are on the clinical trial until an NHS England policy decision has been made.

Since April 2013, NICE, which is responsible for the evaluation of selected high-cost low-volume drugs under its highly specialised technologies programme, has been playing an important role in ensuring that commissioning decisions are based on a robust and thorough assessment of the available evidence. NICE has recently been asked to evaluate Vimazim under this programme, and it is also considering whether to develop guidance on Translarna. That is a very positive step, and I look forward to receiving NICE's proposals on future topics that will be considered. I know that NICE will also be keen to learn lessons from its recent experiences with the new highly specialised technologies process, to make that process as efficient and effective as possible.

For my part, I am absolutely determined to continue playing the active role that I have taken on in the last few months, to drive this process and give it the focus that it requires. I am delighted to have confirmed with NHS England that it will continue to meet the treatment costs. I have signalled, and will continue to signal, to NICE, without compromising its processes, the strength of the case that has been made by Members and patient groups to put Translarna on the list, and to consider whether it can expedite its process in any way, but I do not want to compromise that process in any way. I will also ask NICE to ensure that it uses its review of the experience of the HST programme to explore how we can speed up both this process and others in due course.

Finally, I am committed to continuing to work with the companies to see whether I might be able to help broker some kind of planning arrangement that might encourage NICE to make the decision that I know everyone in Westminster Hall today would like to hear.

Mrs Gillan: I am grateful to the Minister and I congratulate him on taking up the cudgels on this issue and trying to move it forward. The Muscular Dystrophy Campaign has asked whether the individual funding requests from patients would be a route to secure access to Translarna while the Minister is waiting for due process to take its course, because I am afraid that muscular dystrophy waits for no man and no process.

George Freeman: I understand; my right hon. Friend makes an important point. In fact, I raised it this morning in my meeting with NHS England. My understanding is that NHS England will continue to consider individual applications for Translarna through its individual funding request process from patients who may be exceptional. However, my understanding is that such cases really do have to be exceptional. In reality, the members of the whole group that we are considering are more or less suffering from the same condition and therefore they may not qualify under those criteria. I merely share that with my right hon. Friend because I myself raised that point this morning with NHS England.

Greg Mulholland: I stress to my hon. Friend the Minister that we are discussing two conditions and two drugs, Translarna and Vimazim. I also have to say to

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him again that we understand that NHS England has to put a process in place; of course it does, because the process it had put in place was not fit for purpose. Does he accept that NHS England has a legal, as well as a moral, responsibility in this regard? It certainly has a moral responsibility. Having said that the decision will be made on 15 December, NHS England cannot now hide behind saying, "There needs to be a new process," when this situation is their fault in the first place. We are now a month on from that initial deadline, and there needs to be an interim solution to somehow allow these 138 children to access the two drugs in the meantime, and before that process is complete.

George Freeman: I certainly accept the moral case; I think that everyone would accept that there is a moral duty to get this matter right and to try to make these decisions on the right basis and on the basis of the right evidence. The legal position, given the legal challenge, is more complicated, and it has triggered a formal process of reappraisal. As I have said, I will meet NHS England officials to urge them to try to expedite that process as best they can. However, I must stress that I do not want to get into a situation where we compromise due process and inadvertently undermine a case. What I want to see is a NICE decision being made as quickly as possible, and I will urge NICE to expedite that process in every way it can, so that we get the right decision that we all want.

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.

North Sea Oil and Gas (Employment)

[*MR GARY STREETER in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Mr Doran: It is a pleasure to operate under your chairmanship, Mr Streeter. We are here to discuss United Kingdom oil and gas, which is in severe difficulties, partly because of a substantial drop in the world oil price. In these debates, it is always important to get the facts right. One key thing about the industry is just how important a part it plays in the UK economy. According to Oil & Gas UK, the industry body, the industry supplies 73% of the UK's primary energy: oil for transport and gas for heating. The UK balance of payments benefited from oil and gas to the tune of £30 billion last year. The oil and gas supply chain achieved sales of £20 billion outside the UK. The total expenditure in services and infrastructure investment from oil and gas companies in 2013 was £20 billion. Since 1970, the industry has invested £500 billion.

In recent years, the expenditure has been particularly high. In 2014, the industry invested around £14 billion of capital investment in UK oil infrastructure, following on from investment of £11.4 billion in 2012 and £13.5 billion in 2013. Across the industry there is a total committed expenditure—that is, projected future expenditure—on projects in production or under development totalling £44 billion. Figures like these have not been seen since the 1980s. They are massive figures: there is no question about that.

The industry claims to support 450,000 jobs in the UK. These break down as follows: 36,000 employed directly by offshore operators; 200,000 in the supply chain, providing goods and services to the industry; 112,000 jobs in services such as hospitality, taxis, and so on; and 100,000 jobs in the export of goods and services. It is difficult to visit any foreign oil base or complex without hearing a Scottish or English accent. We are operating throughout the world.

Many of these jobs are now under threat because of the collapse of the oil price. Major companies—Shell, Chevron and, last week, BP—have announced redundancies. Some of these have been expected for some time and were part of company restructuring as well as the downturn in the oil price. More announcements are inevitable.

I can find no reliable figures showing the numbers so far made unemployed, but I know from union sources, for example, that roughly 600 people have been made redundant in companies where there are recognition agreements. However, most cuts are likely to be made to the self-employed, who comprise a large number of offshore and onshore employees; they are the easiest and cheapest to remove. At the moment it is estimated that there will be around 2,000 job losses in total. I think that is a fairly realistic projection.

How things will proceed from hereon is difficult to judge at the moment. Many jobs lost so far have been lost onshore and it may take time before large numbers of offshore jobs are put at risk. Everyone will be mindful of the need to retain skills for when the upturn arrives, whenever that might be.

In the history of the North sea oil and gas industry there have been at least three serious downturns. The worst and most damaging was the downturn in the mid-1980s, when 20,000 jobs were lost in Scotland, most of them in Aberdeen and the north-east. Some 50,000 jobs were lost in the whole country. The fact that the job losses were higher in the rest of the UK than in Scotland reflects the fact that, although the industry is centred in Aberdeen, the supply chain and the work force is spread throughout the UK.

There is a risk that this year's downturn could be as serious as the one in the 1980s, but I think it is possible to take steps to mitigate that. In the first place, the industry has changed substantially from the industry we had in the 1980s. For example, it is much more widely spread with fewer of the majors involved. I believe that with the right sort of focused support from Government and the industry, this very difficult time will not develop into the tragedy that we saw in the 1980s. Of course, there is very little we can do about the global price of oil, but we can look at the other issues that have faced the industry for some time now and consider how we can soften the blow and minimise damage.

Exploitable oil and gas are proving harder to find, and discoveries that are made are often in places that are difficult and expensive to exploit, particularly if there are issues around access to infrastructure. Some of these problems will be addressed when the recommendations of the Wood report are fully implemented, but that is likely to be some time away, although there are moves to accelerate the process.

Then there is the skills shortage. Until relatively recently, few companies offered apprenticeships in technical skills. In the 1970s and '80s, the industry attracted engineers, welders, boilermakers and others from the collapsing smokestack industries: mining and shipbuilding, and so on. That supply has been exhausted and the work force are ageing. Trainee and apprenticeship programmes have been introduced in recent years, but those take time to make an impact. In the meantime, labour costs have risen enormously and companies have poached skilled staff from each other, driving wages to high levels. With my trade union background, I am the last person to complain about that, but it has a serious impact on costs offshore.

Oil & Gas UK says that contracting prices have doubled since 2010. One executive from a major company told me recently that the cost of scaffolding alone—there are 6,500 workers working on scaffolding in the North sea—has tripled in the last two years. It is obvious that a slice of the money that previously would have been spent on research and development, exploration and appraisal, which are all things to take the industry forward into the future, have been diverted into meeting these wage costs.

Sir Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this timely debate. He is making some important points. Does he agree that if we—the industry and the Government—get this right, and indeed make the industry more efficient, as and when the recovery happens we will be much more competitive than we have been? The point he is making is that we have been in danger of pricing ourselves out of the business.

Mr Doran: That is the sole point that I planned to make in this speech. *[Interruption.]* No, the right hon. Gentleman is right to raise the issue. It is important that Government and industry work together to try to tackle the problems that we have all identified.

In addition to labour costs, there are real issues about the way in which equipment is purchased by companies operating in the North sea. In Norway, for example, there is standardisation of equipment. The state is a more engaged regulator and Statoil, the state-owned company, has by far the largest stake in the industry, with a share of around 60% of production. Its purchasing powers are enormous and most companies will buy the standardised equipment developed or ordered by Statoil at much cheaper prices than bespoke equipment. Our largest operator in the UK has only 10% of production. There is no company that can lead standardisation in the way that Statoil can in Norway, so everyone purchases to their own requirements.

One example I heard about recently was the purchase of light switches. That may be an odd place to start, but it is relevant. In Norway, the norm is standardised plain light switches. In the UK, company insignia or another unique requirement is demanded by many operators, usually at double or more of the cost. Scale that up through the requirements of offshore operators, from light switches to drilling rigs, and you have very expensive processes that I think are holding the industry back. Of course, this has an impact on Government, too. Every bespoke item has a higher cost than a standardised one, which reduces profits, which reduces taxes paid.

The sooner the Wood review recommendations are fully implemented, the better. I do not think that that will affect the price of light switches, but I hope it sends a clear message. I know that the industry is developing a strategy at the moment, but it will take time to put that in place. Cutting costs that are incurred at present is a must if any progress is to be made.

Probably the major issue for the industry is the tax system. Every Government since oil was first discovered in the North sea have treated the industry as a cash cow. Tax increases, occasionally unannounced, are the norm. The tax system is complex and expensive. The Government are anxious to protect their income from the industry, but that will become more and more difficult if current problems persist. Profits have to be made for taxes to be paid. I understand that in the last financial year the overall performance of the industry was negative—this year might be even worse.

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing today's debate, which is on an issue of deep concern to all of us from the north-east of Scotland, where so many jobs are dependent on the oil and gas sector. I want to add to his point about taxation. Does he agree that we need those tax changes now? I have no doubt that we will see those announcements of job losses in the coming weeks. We need changes to the fiscal regime now, not a couple of months down the line.

Mr Doran: I think there is a case for what the hon. Lady says, but I disagree with her. We will have a Budget in two months' time, and announcements will be made then. In the meantime, we know that the Treasury is working on the position. As she will see

[*Mr Doran*]

from the rest of my contribution, I am more concerned about how the tax cuts are made, rather than that tax cuts are made. I want focused and targeted tax cuts, not just a chop off the supplementary charge that was introduced in 2011.

It is important to look at the responses that should be made to the current situation. In the 1980s, there was virtually no Government response. There may have been one behind the scenes, but it was not visible to those of us who were involved at that time and were concerned about what was happening in the industry. We have the opportunity to mitigate substantially the impact of the collapse in the oil price. Members would expect me to say this, but I was pleased when Councillor Jenny Laing, the leader of Aberdeen city council, announced in December her plan to host a summit in Aberdeen to consider the challenges facing the industry. That summit will be held on 2 February. It is supported by Oil and Gas UK and will be attended by the UK and Scottish Governments, as well as by industry experts. That announcement caused the various other bodies with an interest to consider their reaction. Since then, Government ministers and MPs have been queuing up to visit Aberdeen. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East (Margaret Curran) has made her trip there. The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change was there last week. The issue is being taken much more seriously than it was in the 1980s.

To go back to the question from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Dr Whiteford), tax reliefs are back on the table. The Chancellor has made it clear that they are being considered, which suits the oil industry, because it has been asking for them. Since the collapse in the oil price, industry representatives and others have insisted that there needs to be a tax cut. Oil companies are still angry about the increase in the supplementary charge made in the 2011 Budget, and they would like to see it removed completely. The Chancellor has met them a small part of the way by introducing tax reliefs for brownfield sites and for high-temperature and high-pressure fields, and after his much hailed tax review last year the mouse of a 2% reduction in supplementary charge was announced.

Regardless of the 2011 increases, both field reliefs are important and have resulted in extra activity from the industry, even in these difficult times. The lesson from that is that it is in the interest of the industry and the taxpayer that any tax reliefs that are given should be focused and not random. There are many areas where more targeted and focused tax reliefs would create a win-win situation for all sides. For example, an investment allowance would encourage more activity and create more income and thus more tax revenues. Investment in research and development has slowed significantly in the industry, yet that is crucial in the search to find and produce oil and gas, whether by enhanced recovery techniques, better infrastructure to improve recovery or whatever other area that could improve the industry. The Government should also consider targeted reliefs to protect jobs and skills. Health and safety is a major issue for me. For many years, I have been heavily involved in that issue offshore. It must remain a priority. The Government should consider a specific targeted

relief to support the continuing maintenance of infrastructure and the improvement of health and safety systems and equipment.

The consequences of the 1980s downturn were not only job losses. All projects that were in progress were stopped. The platforms that were producing oil and gas carried on producing, but many costs were cut to the bone. In particular, areas vital to safety, such as fire safety equipment, deluge systems and others, received little or no maintenance. The consequences of that approach were not immediately apparent, but on the night of 6 July 1988 they were there for the whole world to see. The Piper Alpha platform exploded with 167 deaths. It is still the most serious loss of life from any incident anywhere in the offshore oil and gas industry. If there is slippage in maintenance through the downturn, the dangers for offshore workers will increase significantly.

Mr Iain McKenzie (Inverclyde) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. On safety, is he as alarmed as I was to hear from a constituent who runs a business in my area and who came to my surgery on Friday—he offers safety courses to oil firms operating in the North sea—that he has seen a significant reduction in the number of people that firms are placing on those courses and on refresher courses for safety?

Mr Doran: I think my hon. Friend is talking about the sort of work on offshore that I mentioned at the beginning of my speech. Those who are self-employed—probably with their own companies where they are often the sole employee—are the first to be removed. I am concerned to hear that people operating in safety are part of that process, and we should all be concerned by that.

For offshore oil workers, working on offshore platforms is dangerous, but the dangers do not stop on the platform. The only realistic form of transport offshore, because of the distances involved, the difficulty of access to platforms and the hostile weather conditions, is by helicopter. In the UK sector of the North sea, there have been 13 helicopter-related incidents, in which 118 people have died. The most recent one, just 17 months ago, saw four deaths. For most of the history of the North sea oil and gas industry, helicopter transport companies have been treated in exactly the same way as other contractors and subjected to often severe cuts in contract costs. That might suit the oil industry accountants, but it makes no sense to companies that have to keep helicopters flying safely. I hope that the oil industry is taking a much more cautious and sensible approach this time round, and that the Government and the regulators will strictly monitor how health and safety standards are maintained on both sides of the industry.

There are difficult times ahead, but they need not be as damaging as the downturn in the 1980s. The industry has allowed costs to spiral out of control and needs to address the problems it has created. Everyone—the industry and the UK and Scottish Governments—should be focused on maintaining employment, jobs and skills. The economic climate will change, and it is important that the oil and gas industry is capable of getting into gear as quickly and safely as possible when that happens. A key player will be the Chancellor, and I urge him to consider seriously further tax reliefs, which, in the interests of the taxpayer and the industry, should be focused on

maintaining employment, training in skills, research and development and investment that will ensure the future success of the industry.

Mr Gary Streeter (in the Chair): Colleagues, the wind-up speeches will begin at 3.40 pm. Six colleagues are seeking to catch my eye, and we have 50 minutes. By my calculations, about eight and a half minutes each should do the trick.

2.49 pm

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Thank you for giving me the opportunity to take part in this debate, Mr Streeter.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Mr Doran) on bringing this timely and important debate to the House. He has set out how important the industry is to the north-east of Scotland and the whole of the UK. I declare an interest recorded in the Register of Members' Financial Interests to do with the oil and gas industry—a shareholding in Shell—but I am participating in the debate because mine is one of those north-east constituencies and many of my constituents are affected by what is happening out in the North sea, and because of how important the industry is to the country.

It is not only the specialist jobs that are at risk; in fact, some of those jobs might well not be so much at risk in the long run, because of the skills shortage and the need for people globally to sustain oil and gas production. I worry about the cascade effect on jobs: as companies reduce their use of catering facilities, for example, those who work in catering will lose their jobs locally, and they will not be able to go to Angola or Azerbaijan to find other employment. I have written to the Department for Work and Pensions to find out what it is doing to gear up its facilities and resources to tackle that challenge in the local economy. Perhaps the Minister will chase up the Department for a reply.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen North mentioned 1986, and some people have said, “We’ve been through this before. We’ve had downturns. We had one in 1986 and we bounced back.” He was right to say that there was a difference going into this downturn, but even without the cut in oil price, a restructuring was needed in the industry and there were concerns about the cost base and the profitability of the North sea, as it was becoming more challenging. In 1986 the platforms were younger; the neglect of maintenance showed through only later on in their life. Also, in 1986 the finds and the reserves were bigger, so the temptation was to hang on, see through the trough and still be there when the upturn came.

Now we have much smaller finds, but we still need the larger hubs to be sustained and maintained throughout the downturn. It is not only a matter of price; there is still a future. BP is coming forward with investments that will last for 40 years, and that is before they get an extension of life—almost every field seems to last longer than originally planned. It is the scale of the future that we need to be worried about, as well as the size of the tail and how it is to be sustained.

As the hon. Gentleman said, it is very important to deal with tax incentives and the implementation of the Wood review. That review should result in swifter and more independent regulation, and bring the industry

together to co-operate in maximising production from the North sea. The crucial message to the Treasury is that it does not have the skills to produce oil and gas from the North sea; with the Treasury acting alone, there would be no oil and gas production. It needs to incentivise skills so that tax can be taken off the profits that come out of the North sea, and we need a cross-party consensus.

The hon. Gentleman highlighted some of investment incentives needed. We need to build on the work that the Treasury has already done. The 2% cut was small, but it was symbolic of the fact that the Treasury is beginning to understand how important the long-term signals are to the industry. The wider investment allowance will be helpful and investment in more seismic will encourage greater exploration, but the current negotiations to see what else can be done to encourage exploration are extremely important. We still need to look at the message that a cut across the board in the supplemental tax would send to investors. If they can see that more of the profit will be retained by them after an investment, they will see that this country wants to see us through this trough and come out the other side.

An important message to the Treasury is that a smaller percentage of a real cake is better than a bigger percentage of no cake. It is crucial to optimise those signals to the industry, not just for the benefit of getting more of our energy out of the ground rather than importing it, or for the jobs in the north-east of Scotland and throughout the United Kingdom, but to sustain that jewel in the crown of the industry: the export potential of the skills that we have developed in the North sea, particularly in subsea engineering, where we are world leaders. By keeping the North sea as vibrant and as active as possible, we maintain the anchor that keeps those industries here in the United Kingdom, exporting and earning us considerable amounts of revenue and keeping many people in employment.

We have a Budget coming up that can be used, following the negotiations, to produce the best signal and incentive to see us through this trough and through to a brighter future, when we can maximise the jobs, the energy production and the tax take for future generations.

2.55 pm

John Robertson (Glasgow North West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir Robert Smith). I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North (Mr Doran) on securing this debate. It is perhaps a sign of the times that we have decent turnouts in debates only when a disaster or something bad has happened. I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work he is doing in his constituency, along with his fellow Members of Parliament in the area, and I thank the shadow Chancellor, who, along with the new leader of the Scottish Labour party, is in Aberdeen today to help to fight for jobs. I do not want to make a political point about it, but it would be a lot better if the Secretary of State for Scotland and the First Minister and various others were with them, putting up a political united front to help the industry and jobs.

According to Oil & Gas UK, about 450,000 jobs are associated with the oil and gas industry. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Dr Whiteford) asked about jobs and the number of people who have been hit

[John Robertson]

in the north-east, but only 202,000 of the jobs are actually in Scotland; the rest are outside Scotland. With 130,000 jobs in the Aberdeen area and all these other jobs, the whole country is suffering. It is not just one small area.

Dr Whiteford: I fully accept that many jobs throughout the UK depend on the oil and gas sector. The difference in the north-east of Scotland is the concentration of jobs. It is not just the direct oil jobs that depend on the oil and gas sector; it is not even just the jobs in the wider supply chain. It is the small shops, our retailers, our service providers, our construction companies—our whole economy is heavily dependent on oil and gas, so the ramifications of this go far further than simply just jobs in the oil and gas sector.

John Robertson: The hon. Lady is absolutely right, but a small company in my constituency that makes goods that are used up in Aberdeen also uses local shops and local people. If the jobs of 450,000 people in the United Kingdom are in danger, we can multiply that by goodness knows how many, but it would probably be millions of people who could be affected.

We know from previous times in the North sea that there will be losses. It has happened before and, sad to say, it will probably happen again, but the fact of the matter is that the North sea is in a particularly unusual position now. It is not what it was back in the '80s, when we were getting oil and gas into the country. We are still getting oil and gas, but we are getting it from other places. We are not self-sufficient any more in these commodities; we now rely on other areas, so we have to fight to keep these jobs.

At a time when America has been diversifying into shale and is now the biggest seller of oil in the world, rather than the middle east, we have to look at where we are going in the future, but as the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan and my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North said, we also have to look at skill shortages and how to increase our knowledge of how to work in these areas. Some of the experts I have talked to tell me that this depression in oil and gas will go on for at least two years. If it lasts that long, that might be fair enough and we could recover, but I have a horrible feeling it may last a lot longer than that. The price of oil is now down to less than \$50 a barrel and the middle east countries are talking about continuing to supply oil and gas at the same rate, to ensure that the price remains low. That will have a knock-on effect for the North sea.

As my hon. Friend—we are on the same Select Committee—the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine said, oil and gas jobs have a knock-on effect for everyone. The rigs and everything else out in the North sea grow old and rust; they have to be maintained, but there will be no point in maintaining them if they do not get used. We have to find something like £40 billion over the next 30 or 40 years to clean up the North sea. That is not so bad if it is still in operation, but if the North sea is not in operation, we have to find that money from somewhere else.

My point is that we are talking about only the North sea at the moment. Some jobs in various companies have been lost already, but if we, the politicians of this

nation, do not get our act together and do not work together to preserve jobs, not only will Aberdeen and the areas where the other 200,000-odd people are working suffer, but the whole nation will suffer. All the parties should get together and we should all fight for those jobs.

3.1 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Streeter.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Mr Doran) for securing the debate. As has already been remarked, his timing is appropriate. Although the fall in crude oil prices is good for the UK generally, it has serious implications for this important industry, which provides highly skilled jobs and forms an important part of the UK economy. Much of the sector is concentrated in Scotland around Aberdeen, but the industry is important in East Anglia as well, employing approximately 105,000 people directly and in the wider supply chain.

The immediate problem was caused by the dramatic slump in the price of crude oil, but that served to highlight the challenges facing the North sea oil and gas sector, which Sir Ian Wood considered in his excellent report. They include the growing difficulty and escalating associated costs of finding and extracting oil and gas from what is now a mature basin. In a sector that is globally footloose, most investors have no particular allegiance to the UK—they will do business wherever in the world conditions are most favourable. Our fiscal and regulatory framework is now not fit for purpose and does not encourage them to come here. It is in need of a major overhaul.

We have a regulatory regime that Sir Ian Wood noted was appropriate for the industry in the early days, but it is no longer suitable for a basin that now has more than 300 fields, much smaller new discoveries, many marginal fields and much greater interdependence in exploration, development and production. That model needs to be updated for the 21st century. In addition, a complex, unfriendly and outdated tax structure makes today's smaller fields a riskier bet.

From my perspective, I am interested in the specific problems of the southern North sea. A significant number of potentially attractive gas prospects could generate much economic activity, create jobs and improve the country's energy security, but their exploration is not viable, due not only to rising costs and the falling wholesale price of oil but to the relatively low price of gas in relation to oil. That is having a negative knock-on effect on East Anglian businesses, resulting in investment in new facilities and assets being deferred or postponed; a reduction in business investment in advance of the anticipated growth in the offshore wind sector; and a reduction in the ability to attract investment into an area in which many of the larger businesses are owned by overseas companies.

It is necessary to reflect for a moment on the vital importance of the industry to the UK economy. Sir Ian Wood himself drew attention to the industry's substantial contribution to energy security, the economy and employment. In 2012, production on the UK continental shelf met 67% of the UK's demand and 53% of the gas demand, and the sector directly supported the employment of 450,000 people throughout the UK. Moreover, in 2012-13, the industry paid £6.5 billion in corporate

taxes on production. Despite the challenges and the downturn in production in recent years, Sir Ian points to significant momentum from current production and major investments in capital expenditure over the past two or three years enabling the industry to continue to play the key role that it has been playing over the past 50 years. In that time, many skills and considerable expertise have been developed in the industry and its supply chain, resulting in thousands of well paid jobs and the generation of significant export earnings.

Another advantage is that those skills are largely complementary to the ones needed in the emerging offshore renewables sector. If the potential jobs in that industry, whether in the construction of wind turbines or their subsequent operation and maintenance, are to be fully realised for the benefit of the UK and not exported to foreign yards and ports, it is vital that we retain the skills and develop them further. As a country, we have built up considerable expertise and experience that we must now build upon and not lose or squander.

The Government's announcements in the autumn statement show that they recognise the importance of the industry and its challenges. The industry must reduce costs and improve efficiency so as to ensure its long-term sustainability, but the further reductions in crude oil prices since the autumn statement in early December mean that more action by Government is now required. There is a pressing need to change the tax regime and to address the industry's regulatory shortcomings, and the recommendations of the Wood review must be implemented as quickly as possible.

Looking at the industry in East Anglia, an early priority action for the new regulator should be the development of a regional plan for the southern North sea. As Sir Ian Wood himself pointed out, the southern North sea is the most mature region on the UKCS, with first production from the West Sole field in 1967. It is a gas-producing region, now vulnerable to rapid decline, but still with great potential, which has been illustrated by the recent Cygnus development and the Tolmount discovery. Wood commented that the southern North sea is especially vulnerable to premature contraction and decommissioning. He emphasises the pressing need to prepare a regional plan to address all the challenges that the area faces.

In conclusion, the North sea has produced significant benefits for the UK economy over the past 50 years—we must all wonder where on earth we would be without it. With the right stewardship, it can continue to play a similar role for the next two decades and, in doing so, increase GDP, sustain jobs and facilitate the transition to a low-carbon economy. Time is very much of the essence. There is now a need for immediate action.

3.8 pm

Mr Mike Weir (Angus) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Mr Doran) on securing this timely debate.

Despite current difficulties, the North sea oil and gas industry remains vital for Scotland—north-east Scotland, in particular. The industry makes a huge contribution not only to the Scottish economy, but to the economy of the whole UK: since its inception, it has contributed more than £300 billion in taxation to the Treasury.

We have built a world-class industrial cluster in the North sea, and we now export the skills and services required to support it around the world.

In my constituency, for example, many people work in the oil and gas industry, increasingly not only in the North sea, but in various parts of central Asia, Africa and the far east. Many companies in Angus are also part of the supply chain for the North sea industry. The low level of oil and gas prices and the difficulties that that is causing are obviously of great concern. Clearly, we have experienced such falls in prices before; the previous time it happened was as recently as 2009, when the price plunged from \$144 to \$40 a barrel. Nevertheless, the current low price is of concern, and action must be taken to ensure that the industry is assisted through such a turbulent period.

Despite the rather dramatic headlines in some newspapers and other media reports, the North sea oil and gas sector continues to have a bright future. Indeed, when I spoke to BP about the job losses that it announced last week, it emphasised that it remained committed to the North sea, with the Kinnoull field coming on stream and the Clair field due to continue operations well into the 2050s. We should not, therefore, get too downhearted about what is going on. Immediate action is needed, however, to ensure that employment and exploration continue.

Sir Robert Smith: We need to realise that we face quite a large challenge. There is an undercurrent of jobs going, and that is not necessarily being reported. Contracts are being lost, especially by subcontractors, but that does not necessarily show up straight away in unemployment figures.

Mr Weir: I accept that. This is going on throughout the industry—in direct employment and among subcontractors.

Within their limited powers in this area, the Scottish Government have taken action. The First Minister has announced a new taskforce to focus on supporting jobs across the energy sector, with an initial emphasis on the oil and gas sector, and to secure an employer apprentice guarantee, under which firms would commit to taking on apprentices facing redundancy to ensure that they completed their training. That commitment would be supported by the Adopt an Apprentice recruitment incentive—currently, there is a one-off grant of £2,000, which is to be increased to £5,000—and by Skills Development Scotland staff.

If we are to protect Scotland's vital oil and gas sector, however, the UK Government, specifically the Treasury, need to step up to the plate and to make immediate tax changes. We have already called on them to take urgent action to support investment and exploration. The Scottish Government have consistently called for measures to be implemented without delay, including an investment allowance to provide support for the development of fields that incur higher costs. That would support technically challenging, high-cost fields and sustain future investment. Professor Alex Kemp, a respected oil economist at Aberdeen university, estimates that an investment allowance could increase investment by £20 billion to £36 billion to 2050 and boost production by 1.2 billion to 2.2 billion barrels. Scottish Government estimates suggest that it could support between 14,000 and 26,000 jobs per year across the UK.

[Mr Weir]

The Scottish Government have also called for a reversal of the increase in the supplementary charge implemented by the UK Government in 2011. The high overall tax burden faced by the sector is damaging its international competitiveness. The supplementary charge was increased by 12% in 2011, and the 2% cut announced so far does not go far enough in the current context of falling prices. Professor Kemp estimates that a reversal would increase production to 2050 by 500 million barrels and boost investment by £7 billion. Scottish Government analysis suggests that such a move could support up to 5,600 jobs per year across the UK.

In addition, the Scottish Government have called for the introduction of an exploration tax credit to help increase levels of exploration and sustain future production. As most of us are aware, levels of exploration in the North sea are low, which will inevitably reduce future discoveries. An exploration tax credit would help to increase exploration and, in turn, sustain future production. A similar approach was adopted in Norway in 2005. In the three years following its introduction, the number of exploration and appraisal wells drilled in the Norwegian North sea increased fourfold.

We have previously highlighted and backed industry concerns about the speed with which the new Oil and Gas Authority is being established, and we have called for appropriate resourcing of the new OGA to be put in place swiftly. The industry is concerned that the investment allowance the Chancellor is expected to announce in the March Budget will not be nearly enough at current oil prices, and we share that concern.

It has also become evident that an early commitment to reduce the supplementary charge rate would have the benefit of instilling confidence in operators and the sector, while discouraging premature decommissioning, which is obviously important for future work in the North sea. To significantly enhance the industry's long-term competitiveness, we have recommended that, at the very least, the industry requires a reversal of the supplementary charge increase implemented by the Government in 2011.

That substantial package of measures should be announced without delay to safeguard investment, jobs and the long-term sustainability of the North sea. If it is not forthcoming, UK Government policy on the industry will be found seriously wanting once again. Despite what other Members say, reform of the fiscal regime must not wait until the Budget, but must be implemented now, and that should include a commitment from the UK Government to a substantial reduction in the supplementary charge rate.

Thomas Docherty (Dunfermline and West Fife) (Lab): I have a genuine question on a point of interest. Is Scottish Enterprise putting together a taskforce at this time? I understand what the hon. Gentleman says about the fiscal measures that may be needed, but what is Scottish Enterprise doing right now in terms of practical help on the ground?

Mr Weir: I have already referred to that; the hon. Gentleman should listen a bit more carefully. I did mention the First Minister's announcement about what the Scottish Government were doing.

The Scottish Government have endorsed the findings of Sir Ian Wood's review on maximising recovery on the UK continental shelf and particularly his recommendation of a stronger, more effective regulatory body, and so, too, did the UK Government. We welcomed the long-awaited announcement of the appointment of the OGA's chief executive. However, it is imperative that progress is much quicker so that we can start to reap the benefits that an effective, well resourced authority has the potential to bring the industry and the nation.

John Robertson: Has the hon. Gentleman taken into consideration the fact that the Saudi Arabians and the Russians have enormous resources in this field, which we are trying to maintain? If they wish to keep undercutting us, the policy he outlines will become useless.

Mr Weir: In a way, I am surprised by that comment from the hon. Gentleman, because it seems to be a counsel of despair. We must do what we can to keep our industry going. Unfortunately, we cannot influence what the Saudis or anybody else do with their oil prices. As far as we can, however, we must take the action necessary in the UK to make sure that the North sea industry, and particularly the employment that it provides, survives.

Even if the Saudis do try to do what the hon. Gentleman says, they cannot do it for ever. At some point, oil prices will start to come up again; indeed, the International Energy Agency has predicted—obviously, this is only a prediction—that the price will probably return to about \$80 a barrel in the current year. We will have to wait and see whether that happens and, if so, how fast.

The OGA is particularly important, given the pressures being felt by the industry. The Scottish Government were pleased to see Aberdeen confirmed as the location for the OGA's headquarters in June, and the suggestion that there will be an increase from 59 to 145 full-time equivalent staff by 2019 is welcome, because it might help to address the serious understaffing identified in Sir Ian Wood's review.

The challenge is to ensure that the appropriate level of expertise and knowledge is secured, but it is critical, given present circumstances, that appropriate resourcing is put in place swiftly at the new OGA, with the correct level of industry experience and expertise. Industry is clearly concerned about delays in the process. As Malcolm Webb, the head of Oil & Gas UK, has pointed out, it looks as if it will take until summer 2016 before all the processes involved in setting up the OGA are completed. I agree that that is far too long, and I would appreciate an explanation from the Minister of why the process is taking so long and what action will be taken to speed it up.

The Wood review must be implemented effectively and with increased speed and resources, in the light of the growing challenges facing the industry. On the website Energy Voice, on 6 January, Malcolm Webb said:

“Years of confused and confusing energy policy, not helped by a revolving door approach to the appointment of ministers (we've seen a total of 35 different Energy and Treasury Ministers given responsibility for our industry in the last 14 years), have raised serious questions about our politicians' awareness and understanding of this industry and its vital importance to the UK economy.”

I agree, and the UK Government need to take urgent action to assist the industry at this difficult time.

3.18 pm

Sir Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): I congratulate my neighbour, the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Mr Doran), on securing this debate at a critical time.

I have been connected with the industry since I first arrived at the North-East Scotland Development Agency in 1971—two months before BP announced the discovery of the Forties field. We have certainly had ups and downs before, but my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir Robert Smith) was right to point out that we are much more vulnerable in a mature province than we were in the early stages. That is why it is much more important that we take appropriate and considered action—not panicky action—to get ourselves to a place where the industry has a secure future. One thing that we all have to accept is that the UK has no control over the world oil price. We must deal with it although it is, as all commodity prices are, erratic and unpredictable. It is certainly not a good basis for planning economic policy.

The other thing that we should recognise is that the good thing about our mature province, as the hon. Member for Aberdeen North pointed out, is that we have created a centre of excellence and a critical mass that are incredibly valuable to the UK domestic economy, and which sustain a £10 billion export industry; that industry, however, depends on an active domestic market and levels of activity, which we must secure. It is interesting that Sir Ian Wood, who inevitably has been quoted several times, is taking a characteristically calm and considered view of the situation. He has explicitly said that the Budget is the entirely appropriate place in which to determine the tax cuts and the timing, and he recognises that they need to be balanced and considered.

Having mentioned Sir Ian and the Wood review, I want to commend my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, whose initiative it was to invite Sir Ian to conduct his review, on the basis of discussions with the industry and in the wake of its reaction to adverse tax changes in 2011. My right hon. Friend wanted to see how we could better co-ordinate the infrastructure and future development of resources, which the industry admitted were being undermined by its commercial rivalries; unusually, an invitation was issued to partnership with Government, to try to create a framework to secure and unlock a lot more resources than would be done if the industry was just competing within itself. That was a powerful initiative, and although I agree about the importance of establishing the new authority as quickly as possible, we should recognise that it would not exist at all without the initiative of the Secretary of State. I think we all agree that the sooner it can be set up with the right mix of people—who might just be available now—the better it will be able to get on with its important work.

Oil & Gas UK made the point that, with \$50 oil, 20% of North sea activity is uneconomic. There are perhaps too many projects in the North sea that have become conditioned to looking at \$70 to \$90 oil as the essential basis. Frankly, from every discussion that I have had with an oil and gas economist, that is not a wise basis for planning. It has partly been necessitated by the escalating costs that the hon. Member for Aberdeen North addressed. We have a unique opportunity to tackle several problems at once.

Mr Russell Brown (Dumfries and Galloway) (Lab): Like the right hon. Gentleman and, I think, everyone else present for the debate, I received an Oil & Gas UK briefing. It deals with the immediate problem in the sector, but there is no mention of how it arose, with the downturn in China and India, and oil and gas fracking in the United States. That is a longer-term issue. Something of a quick fix may be required, but in the longer term we must take cognisance of what is happening globally.

Sir Malcolm Bruce: That is a fair point; I would say only that I have never yet met an oil economist who was any good at anything other than explaining why prices did what they did, rather than what they would do next. Yes, the hon. Gentleman may be right, but people have told me many times that the oil price would stay low, and then it has gone up. When they have told me it would stay high, it has gone down. We have to live with that.

Those of us close to the industry, and the taskforce, of which many of us are members, are aware that in recent years prices have escalated unrealistically and unreasonably on the back of the high oil price. I want to make it clear to the hon. Member for Aberdeen North that that is no excuse for a slash and burn response on employment; it is, however, a recognition that a lot of fat has built up in some of the contractual arrangements.

With the right approach, it would be possible to slim down and maintain skills and capacity for the future. The wrong approach means, of course, making people redundant and losing their skills, so that if and when there is an upturn we will have lost capacity as well. I argue that we need to manage things proportionately. The industry has been rather late in tackling that problem. Quite a few of the redundancies that have been announced since the oil price fell were part of reviews that took place because of the escalating costs before we knew that the price was going to fall.

Sir Robert Smith: One of the lessons of history is that if downsizing in the current crisis is inevitable, the way it is handled and the way people are treated, so that they are still interested and willing to come back in the good times, are important. There is a lesson for the industry about the way it behaved in the past.

Sir Malcolm Bruce: I completely agree.

Finally, I want to set out what things the Government must consider—for which the Budget seems to be the appropriate place. First, the investment allowance that has been announced needs to be confirmed in the Budget. Secondly, there must be a review of the supplementary charge. In my view the Government will get none of it anyway in the present climate, so getting rid of it would not cost much.

There should also be a review of the petroleum revenue tax for the future. The industry has traditionally been taxed at about double the rate of any other sector. Perhaps that was all right in the good times, but in a mature province, in the present situation, asking for a review is not asking for subsidy; it is asking for a realistic tax regime that can secure an industry that has made a massive contribution to the balance of payments and contributed 25% of our fixed industrial investment every year for the past 40-plus years, and which has a great future if we manage it now. If we do not get it

[*Sir Malcolm Bruce*]

right, there is an existential threat to the industry—certainly to an industry on the scale that we have looked for. We do not need to score points off each other. We need to work together and come up with a systematic package of measures that will restore confidence.

I accept that one thing that has damaged the industry is constant change. It now needs a clear, simple, strategic regime that says that the UK wants its investment and will provide a climate in which, provided it can make itself competitive, the Government will work with it to enable it to secure jobs, exports and investment for the future. If we can do that, whenever the oil price turns up, the industry will be much stronger than it would have been if the crisis had never happened.

3.27 pm

Thomas Docherty (Dunfermline and West Fife) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship once more, Mr Streeter. I draw Members' attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, as I believe in clarity. I received some hospitality from ExxonMobil last year.

I have a strong constituency interest, because not only is FMC Technologies a major employer in my constituency, but in the neighbouring seat, represented so ably by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown), is Mossmorran. I want primarily to talk briefly about them. However, I want to pick up on the point ably made by my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries and Galloway (Mr Brown): Members may be interested in the fact that today the executive director of the International Energy Agency, Maria van der Hoeven, has been quoted as saying that there can be no expectation of a quick fix on oil prices—that the situation we face is a long-term one. Therefore, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North (Mr Doran) is right to draw the conclusion that we need to move away from Governments blaming each other and work together to achieve a sustainable future for the industry, across the United Kingdom and more specifically for interests in the North sea.

I have mentioned two companies working in West Fife and the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North West (John Robertson) are right: there is, rightly, a great deal of focus on the north-east of Scotland, but we should not forget that across Scotland and the United Kingdom the North sea industries are significant employers. To take FMC Technologies as an example, it employs 1,000 people across Scotland, a couple of hundred of whom are based at two sites in Dunfermline in my constituency. It has going on for 250,000 square feet of fabrication plant and engineering facilities in Dunfermline and it supplies the North sea market, among many others. It is located in West Fife because of the ready access it provides through the port facilities at Forth Ports and elsewhere, so the company can send around the world.

The company is fortunate in that it has a diverse market share and operates right around the world, so the North sea is not its critical life-support system, but without doubt it will be facing challenging times in the coming weeks, and I will seek to provide whatever assistance I can. However, my hon. Friend the Member

for Glasgow North West was absolutely right to remember the knock-on effect that such industries can have in the communities where they are based.

Mrs Mary Glindon (North Tyneside) (Lab): Specifically on that point, which has been made by others, that is also the case for places such as Tyneside and the north-east of England, where there are fabrication companies such as OGN. It is currently providing 2,000 jobs, but they will dry up next year. There is bound to be a massive knock-on effect across the whole of Britain. Our region has the highest unemployment rate and cannot afford to lose more jobs. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Thomas Docherty: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the diversification of interests in this important sector across the United Kingdom. These are highly skilled engineering jobs, which are highly regarded and greatly sought after. She is also right that such jobs are particularly sought after in areas of relatively high unemployment. I used to work in the nuclear industry, and I was based in what was then part of the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries and Galloway and is now in the Minister's constituency. Unlike in the south-west of England, where the engineering and scientific industries were in competition with other companies, there was almost a monopoly on the work force in places such as Dumfries and Galloway. To an extent it is the same in the north-east of England and the north-east of Scotland, where there is not the same diversification in jobs. It is important that the two Governments recognise their responsibility to work together.

John Robertson: I was in Belfast yesterday, right beside where Harland and Wolff used to be. There are some oil rigs sitting there that are now being fitted out because the contracts are signed, but what will happen to the companies that have invested in that kind of industry if we do not start getting work back in the North sea?

Thomas Docherty: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. That is why I was genuinely asking the hon. Member for Angus (Mr Weir) what practical steps Scottish Enterprise will be taking. Many of us have had a slightly cynical or bitter experience of Scottish Enterprise as being great at putting out the initial press release, but when it comes to taking tangible, practical measures to help communities—I do not need to tell my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries and Galloway or the Minister this—it comes into such situations with great promises but 10 years later everyone is scratching their heads and looking for the diversification it is supposed to have delivered.

I am conscious of the time and the important contributions that will be made by the two Front Benchers. On the other issue I mentioned, Mossmorran plant, which sits just over the border with the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath, is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. Natural gas is brought ashore at St Fergus, primarily from the Brent field and from the Goldeneye field in the North sea, and is brought down from there in a pipeline that is about 140 miles long—my calculation might be slightly off—to Mossmorran, where it is split. The ethane goes across from the Shell plant to the ExxonMobil part of the plant, where it is heated to 800° so that it can

be cracked, to use the scientific term, and turned into ethylene. Of course, ethylene is a daily part of our lives, as it is used in a huge variety of products—perhaps even in the cups we are using today.

That work sustains jobs for more than 200 people, many of whom are my constituents. They will be looking to see that when we talk about long-term sustainability for the oil and gas industry we make sure that those crucial scientific jobs, which are also highly sought after, often by graduates—in both Parliaments we talk so much about encouraging those sorts of jobs—are protected. We need to see genuine substantive steps to do that for the sake of our constituents and their families. I hope that the two Governments will set point scoring aside and get on with standing up for all of our communities, whether they be in Aberdeen, Glasgow, my own area of Fife or across the border.

3.35 pm

Margaret Curran (Glasgow East) (Lab): Mr Streeter, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairpersonship—I do not know whether I am permitted to use that word, or whether that is a precedent, but I have done it now, so so be it. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North (Mr Doran), whose contribution demonstrated his depth of knowledge of the industry and his enduring commitment to it and the people who work in it, which is greatly respected in this House and throughout the country.

The entire debate has demonstrated the magnitude of recent events and the sweeping impact of such a significant decline in oil prices. As we speak, oil is currently trading at below \$50 a barrel. In July 2008, the price stood at \$145 a barrel, and as is well known in Scotland the White Paper that was used by the Scottish National party during the recent referendum was based on financial planning with an oil price of \$110 a barrel. This debate is therefore a significant one.

It may not have been said today but it will certainly be said in other forums that although the price might offer some relief to Scotland's motorists it has significant impacts on the oil and gas industry. Many Members have referred to the key facts and figures, which I will emphasise once more. The production of oil and gas contributed £30 billion to the UK balance of payments; the supply chain, which has been a focus of the debate and is of great importance throughout the country, generated over £20 billion in the past year and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North West (John Robertson) said, the industry supports 450,000 jobs across the United Kingdom.

It is an industry of international importance that is vital to the UK and iconic for Scotland, and has particular significance for Aberdeen and the north-east of Scotland—the effects of the fall in oil price will be felt throughout the country, but most deeply there. We heard about the loss of 300 jobs announced by BP but know that there are more to come.

Dr Whiteford: In the past half an hour or so, while we have been having this debate, a further 300 job losses have been announced by Talisman. I have stressed the importance of urgency and am worried that there will be further similar announcements between now and March. The Government need to give confidence to the industry that they will cut taxes. Does the hon. Lady

share that view and will she urge the Government to act with more haste rather than waiting for announcements of yet more job losses in the North sea industry?

Margaret Curran: I will indeed emphasise that very point when I come to it later. I will begin by addressing the hon. Lady's primary point about job losses. We are deeply concerned about them. As my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North made clear, operators and trade unions are warning about job losses and their impact. Of the 30,000 jobs directly linked to the industry, 23,400 are in Aberdeen itself. One can only imagine the conversations taking place not only in companies but around kitchen tables in Aberdeen and the north-east. Jake Molloy of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers drew parallels with 1986, when the fall in oil prices led to long-term job losses and a very significant impact on the industry. We certainly do not want that to happen again, and need to take action. Sir Ian Wood, who has featured in many contributions this afternoon, indicated that there could be between 30,000 and 40,000 job losses. It would not be surprising if that were the long-term impact.

The Scottish Parliament information service said that 15,750 jobs could be lost in Scotland as a result of what is happening. The core question we must ask ourselves is, can we be assured that the Government and the Scottish Government get the magnitude of what is happening and what needs to be done? The trade unions have said that it would be the largest loss of jobs since the Ravenscraig steel works closed its doors 23 years ago in Scotland—23 years later, we still remember the impact of Ravenscraig. Let us take action now to ensure that does not happen again. The message of this debate must be that we have to work together on a cross-party basis to properly challenge the Government when they are not doing enough. The oil and gas industry is a strategic industry of critical importance, and it needs a long-term, predictable context in which to operate.

I congratulate, as one Member did, Jenny Laing, the leader of Aberdeen city council, who took immediate action, called for an oil summit and managed to get all the key players together. That was the right thing to do, and I expect that it will be successful, but the UK and Scottish Governments must take decisive action.

The UK Government's 2011 tax reforms created difficulties and undermined confidence—I hope the Minister will acknowledge that. In the autumn statement, the Chancellor indicated the difficulties that it caused, and he hinted that there must be a new strategy for oil and gas. I concur with the hon. Members who said that we need action now. I hope the Minister will indicate that the Government will take action and respond to the industry's call for support.

I ask the Minister to use his good offices to put pressure on the Scottish Government to publish the oil and gas bulletin as soon as possible. Scottish National party Members have said that they are looking for a range of actions, but we are asking the Scottish Government to provide the evidence on which they based their recommendations. They previously published a number of oil and gas bulletins and figures showing the impact that the industry will have on their revenues. I hope they will publish another one as soon as possible so our approach can be evidence-led, and so we know the basis on which we can take action.

[Margaret Curran]

My right hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Mr Murphy) called for a resilience fund to help strategic industries and to enable us to address local needs, including issues affecting local companies, local industries and the devastating impact the downturn will have on local communities. He has also talked about reducing business rates to help people through the downturn. As my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North said, my right hon. Friend is in Aberdeen this afternoon with my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Outwood (Ed Balls). They are calling for profound, strategic action to address these issues. We need a road map—a strategic plan—for the industry that is not about short-term changes but comes to terms with the profound shifts that we are seeing. It must create certainty so the industry can be sure about the tax rates over a Parliament and firms can invest in the long term. It must be about sustainability, and it must put oil revenues in a UK public finances framework so we can protect ourselves against oil price volatility. It must not create high levels of risk that could jeopardise Scotland and our public finances.

We must ensure transparency. We must not make short-term, ill-thought-out tax changes, but consult with the industry to ensure a transparent regime. We must have the flexibility to meet immediate challenges. As many hon. Members have said, we must implement the Wood review. Will the Minister tell us when the new oil and gas authority will be established? That demand is coming straightforwardly from the industry.

This has been a very good debate, and we have covered a lot of ground. Hon. Members have demonstrated a great depth of knowledge about the industry's demands. We need to tell people—not only those in the north-east, but those in Scotland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom—that we understand the scale of the job losses that may be imminent, and that we can take action to address that. We must let them understand that, as we gather here together, we will challenge the Government, who must stand up and do more. That is what the industry is asking the UK and the Scottish Governments. We are prepared to work together to support our iconic oil and gas industry, of which we are so proud in Scotland, through this challenge to prevent job losses and to ensure that it has a healthy, sustainable future. We do that best when we recognise the true depth of what is happening and do not try to duck it. Government action can have results, but we need to see it now.

3.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Streeter. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Mr Doran) not only for securing the debate but for his well known support of the sector and, as his time in Parliament draws to a close, for his contribution to politics in the north-east over many years. I welcome his considered contribution. Many other Members also made valuable contributions. I apologise for the absence of the Minister for Business and Enterprise, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matthew Hancock), who is currently overseas and would otherwise have responded to the debate.

Mr Doran: The Minister is apologising for the absence of his right hon. Friend; I should have noted the absence of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Dame Anne Begg), who is with my right hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Mr Murphy) in Aberdeen, but would otherwise have been here.

David Mundell: I echo the comments of all contributors, who pointed out the importance and timeliness of the debate, given the challenges faced by companies operating in the North sea and all those who work in the sector in the United Kingdom; that was emphasised by my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) and the hon. Member for North Tyneside (Mrs Glindon).

The Government are committed to the long-term future of the sector in the North sea. We recognise that the sustained fall in oil prices presents real challenges for the sector. Announcements of job losses, such as those we have heard about this afternoon, are a real concern and particularly affect Aberdeen and the north-east. The effects will be felt not only in the north-east of Scotland and by big international companies, but by the hundreds of small and medium-sized businesses that are an integral part of the supply chain. Those businesses work across the UK to service the sector, and they play a role in the whole of the UK economy.

We are committed—I hope that the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (John Robertson) accepts this—to working in partnership with others. I welcome the tone of the contribution of the shadow Scottish Secretary, the hon. Member for Glasgow East (Margaret Curran). We are committed to working with the Scottish Government, local authorities and the industry to provide all we can for those affected by job losses. I will pursue the issue that the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir Robert Smith) raised about the Department for Work and Pensions. My colleague, the Secretary of State for Scotland, has committed to participate in the First Minister's jobs taskforce, which was announced last week, and the Aberdeen city council's oil and gas summit in February.

Mr Tom Clarke (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): I apologise to the Minister and the House for not being at the earlier part of the debate; I was at a Committee speaking about, among other things, the issue of autism.

As the Minister was referring to the supply chain and jobs that link to the wider oil industry, may I remind him that in my constituency 30,000 people work in the Bellshill industrial park, and many of them fit that description? All of them are asking for honesty and transparency about the flexibility of the oil market and the oil industry.

David Mundell: I certainly take that point on board; it reinforces the fact that this issue is resonant not only in the immediate area of Aberdeen, but in the whole of Scotland and the rest of our United Kingdom.

At the PILOT meeting in London last Tuesday, industry leaders expressed real concern, but recognised the need and opportunity to work collectively with Government to introduce a range of efficiency measures that would help them through the downturn and ensure that the industry was stronger in the longer term. The right hon. Member for Gordon (Sir Malcolm Bruce) made the

point strongly that the industry could emerge fitter from this time, without the necessity for sustained job losses.

The sector is a vital economic asset—one that supports growth and investment and one that we will do all we can to support. There are other events in Parliament today, one of which was the Chancellor's appearance before the Treasury Committee. Given the signal that was asked for, he has made it very clear that he will take further steps in the Budget. As we heard in the debate, Sir Ian Wood and others in the industry have indicated that they think the Budget is the right time to take such steps. I do not think that that message could be clearer. I will undertake to convey the comments and thoughts of everybody who took part in today's debate directly to the Chancellor, and I am sure that he and the Prime Minister will continue to engage directly with the industry.

The Government have already taken action in a number of areas. Our recent headline cut of the supplementary charge from 32% to 30% sent an important signal, as some contributors have mentioned, that the North sea is open for business. Last year, we commissioned Sir Ian Wood, one of the world's foremost industry experts, to examine how we could maximise the North sea oil and gas industry economic recovery. Without being unduly partisan, I am very pleased to hear Sir Ian being lauded again for his contribution to the oil industry; only a few months ago, some people—I do not think they are in this room—were deriding him because he said he did not feel independence for Scotland was in the industry's best interests.

On this matter, Sir Ian's response is twofold: get the right regulator in place and get the right fiscal regime. The Government have moved fast to implement his recommendations. We have set up the regulator in the form of the Oil and Gas Authority. It will be up and running this year and based in Aberdeen, under the expert stewardship of Andy Samuel. Since starting in his role as chief executive at the beginning of the year, Mr Samuel has been working at pace to ensure that the authority will be ready to start operating effectively by the beginning of April.

Last week, in light of the recent falls in global oil prices, the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change asked Andy Samuel to accelerate work with industry to identify key risks to oil and gas production in the UK continental shelf and what further measures might be taken by Government and industry to mitigate them. In addition, we have carried out the oil and gas fiscal review to examine how we can build on the success of our existing field allowances and put in place a regime that is internationally competitive.

The oil and gas industry has acknowledged that our system of allowances has been transformational in incentivising North sea investment. Allowances were directly responsible for £7 billion of 2013's record-breaking £14.4 billion investment in the North sea. That investment has supported more than 50,000 jobs in the United Kingdom. At the autumn statement, we announced a new allowance for high-pressure, high-temperature oil and gas projects. That allowance will reduce the tax rate on a portion of the company's profits from 60% to 30%.

Last year, we also announced further reforms to the fiscal regime—reforms to generate investment. We will be introducing a basin-wide investment allowance to simplify and replace the existing system of offshore

field allowances over time. We are also taking action to encourage companies that are already investing by extending the ring-fence expenditure supplement from six to 10 years for offshore oil and gas activities, helping the short-term cash flow of companies looking to invest.

Our third area of reform is exploration, where access to good-quality seismic information has been an issue for the industry. Our commitment to provide financial support for seismic surveys in under-explored areas of the UK continental shelf will help the situation.

We want to reward investment in the North sea. As the UK's economy grows and our recovery strengthens, our direction of travel will be to implement further measures to increase investment. Of course, decommissioning also has to be considered; in the coming decades, that will be increasingly important as the UK continental shelf moves into the decommissioning phase ahead of many other basins. The challenge here is that the North sea, owing to its maturity, will often have to be the site of pioneering methods. Industry will need to develop new operating models and bring in skills and expertise. However, the opportunity is immense. Get this right and we will develop highly valuable—and saleable—expertise here in the UK and reap great rewards down the line. It will be vital to attract new entrants and specialists into the basin to take on decommissioning work.

Sir Robert Smith: The Minister is making an important point about the value of decommissioning, but we really want that to be as far away in the future as possible. The crucial thing is to sustain production. I would be grateful if he took the message back to the Treasury that when people drill for oil, they take a big risk, and if they find something, they would like a larger share of what they find as a reward. The supplemental tax needs serious review.

David Mundell: I think I had set out in my initial remarks that the issue is a combination of ensuring that what future production there can be is maximised and of taking advantage of the opportunities that may arise through decommissioning.

I want to address a point that the hon. Member for Aberdeen North raised on health and safety and the ageing infrastructure. As many of the UK's onshore installations are working beyond their original design lives and have been exposed to a harsh environment and heavy usage, it is absolutely essential that asset integrity is maintained. Asset integrity is critical to effectively managing and controlling major accident hazards, protecting the work force and maintaining production. Maintaining such arrangements, even during a period of low oil prices, is essential for the two key reasons that he set out: first, to comply with legislation to manage major risk hazards; and secondly, to maintain these assets for use in the future. I assure him that the Health and Safety Executive will continue to inspect thoroughly asset integrity issues and raise those with the industry at every opportunity to ensure that regulatory standards are not compromised.

It is by bringing a package of measures together and by working together—I think that is the sentiment of this afternoon's debate—that we will maximise the potential of the industry and support vital jobs across the sector and the supply chain in the north-east of Scotland, as

[David Mundell]

well as in areas such as East Anglia, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney drew attention so adroitly. We have been talking about those jobs today; it is because the UK has such a large and diverse economy, of course, that we are able to commit to these long-term support measures.

We can deal with the volatility of oil prices and continue to provide the stable regime that is so important to the industry. The hon. Member for Glasgow East drew our attention to the many predictions that have been made about oil prices, but it is in a country on the scale of the United Kingdom that changes can be sustained. On that basis, having listened to today's debate and set out the measures that the Government have taken, I conclude my contribution.

Football Broadcasting Rights

4 pm

Mr Gary Streeter (in the Chair): We now move to the next debate. Will colleagues who are leaving please do so quietly and speedily? We are turning to the important issue of the Ofcom consultation on football broadcasting rights, and it is a pleasure to call Thomas Docherty.

Thomas Docherty (Dunfermline and West Fife) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again so quickly, Mr Streeter. The subject of this debate is probably slightly less pressing for many people, but is none the less of great interest to all our constituents.

You will recall, Mr Streeter, that John Major famously evoked an image of cricket being played on village greens for the Britain that he thought we should all aspire to, but of course the reality is that football holds a special place in people's hearts in all four parts of the United Kingdom and is, indeed, our national sport. On Saturday afternoons, up and down the United Kingdom, football supporters put on their coats and woolly scarves and hats and travel to support their teams. This cultural phenomenon stretches back 150 years in the United Kingdom. More recently, the growth of television has enhanced people's enjoyment of football. It is probably fair to say that "Match of the Day" still holds a special place in everyone's heart—the theme music, which I will not try to emulate this afternoon, still makes the hairs on the back of everyone's neck stand up when it comes on. It is great to see "Match of the Day" enjoying its 50th anniversary this year.

Of course, there has been a revolution in football in the United Kingdom in the past 20 years with the advent of the Premier League and, in particular, Sky Broadcasting. I should probably declare a constituency interest, in that Sky is our third largest private employer, employing some 2,000 people in my constituency and contributing, at a conservative estimate, more than £30 million a year to the local economy. I am incredibly grateful for the work that Sky does locally and for the opportunities it provides to local people.

I share the concerns of many—I do not know whether the Minister would care to comment on this—about the way Sky is advertising gambling products alongside football. I do not know whether the Minister is aware of whether Ofcom or the Advertising Standards Authority plans to look at gambling and particularly the spot gambling that we see on Sky Sports News and during football matches. None the less, Sky has been an absolute force for good in revolutionising the way football is understood and enjoyed and the calibre of football. Football is now without doubt a cosmopolitan sport, not just in the Premier League but throughout the English leagues and in Scotland, with players drawn from throughout the European Union, from the Commonwealth and, indeed, from emerging footballing nations. That is a sign of a multicultural sport. I believe that it is not just because we have got away from mullets and short shorts that there is no great desire to go back to 1980s football.

It is interesting to look at the attendance figures for football grounds—as always, I am indebted to the House of Commons Library for its assistance. When the Premier League began in 1992-93, the attendance figures for

Premier League grounds showed that only two thirds of the capacity was being taken up by supporters—average attendance in the stadiums of Premier League clubs was only 70% in 1992-93. Now, despite the economic conditions and the fact that the cost of football has risen for supporters, 95% of seats are taken at Premier League games. If we bear it in mind that 40% of games are on television—live to broadcast—that goes to show that the Premier League and the broadcasters have delivered a product that people want to buy.

Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): It is worth making the point also that of course a number of larger stadiums have been built, from Old Trafford to the Emirates. The capacity at many of the Premiership clubs is markedly higher than was the case before, so the statistic possibly slightly understates just how much more popular the game has become, notwithstanding the television. Many of us remember that in the 1970s and '80s, when only a handful of games were shown at the weekend, it was felt that TV would be the ruination of football, yet in many ways it has proved to be the absolute opposite.

Thomas Docherty: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right. That, indeed, is my point. Vast sums of broadcast revenues are paid in. From memory, the deal that BT and Sky have with the Premier League is worth just over £3 billion for the current broadcast period. The hon. Gentleman refers to the very modern stadiums. I was at the Emirates a couple of years ago for a Champions League game. It is an absolutely modern, first-class, wonderful facility, and that is repeated up and down the country.

The problem, if I may digress for a second, involves those clubs that aspired to get into the Premier League, because of those riches, and have fallen along the way. They built those stadiums because they were holding on to the dream, the aspiration, of reaching the top flight and then found themselves in great difficulty. I do not believe that that is the fault of the Premier League or the broadcasters; it was a business decision taken by the boards of those clubs. Those of us who are a little older, Mr Streeter, will recall some of the great names of English football that have found themselves in very difficult situations in recent years. One need only think of Leeds United, whose board gambled everything. Reckless decisions were made by the board to aim constantly not just for Premier League status, but for Champions League status, with the additional riches that that brings.

It is worth remembering that the broadcast deal brings huge benefit to the grass roots as well. I am very grateful to the English Football Association for the briefing that it provided to me and, I think, to other hon. Members, which shows that hundreds of millions of pounds are coming down to grass-roots football as a result of the deal. The Premier League is also right to point out that through the parachute payments and the solidarity payments paid to lower league clubs, it continues to support grass-roots football. Whether we represent constituencies in Scotland, England, Northern Ireland or Wales, it is without doubt the case that every young boy's ambition is to play in the Premier League.

Mark Field: The hon. Gentleman makes a perfectly valid point. It is important that we stress that although many people feel that footballers are earning untold

riches, certainly compared with those of a generation or two ago, and perhaps too much money, from the television funds does go directly to the talent, there is still huge investment in the grass roots of the game, which has transformed the game over the past 20 years. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that unfortunately in terms of this debate relating to Ofcom, there has not really been any serious attempt to demonstrate how just showing more matches, as Ofcom suggests, would lower the cost to the subscriber? The TV deal that has been done, which has gone onwards and upwards, none the less does sustain and is of interest to—

Mr Gary Streeter (in the Chair): Order. Thomas Docherty.

Thomas Docherty: I am grateful for that short speech. The hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field) makes a serious point, which I have raised with Ofcom myself, that there is frustration among many fans that even after Sky lost a quarter of the fixtures, it did not reduce its price by a quarter. Can the Minister say whether he believes that Ofcom should be taking that up with Sky—whether the fact that the reduction in the number of games has not been passed on as a reduction to the subscriber should be considered as part of the broader picture?

I want to talk specifically about the splitting of the packages. At the moment, some 154 of the 380 games are shown live on BT or Sky. In the next round, the intention is to increase that to 168, so we are talking about approximately 40% of fixtures now, rising to 45% in the next period. Genuine concerns have been raised by the FA and supporters' groups about the drift away from Saturday afternoon. Football clubs and publicans report a pattern: a lot of match day customers either watch a game beforehand and go along to their local club at 3 o'clock, or go to their local club first and then watch the 5.30 pm game at the pub or elsewhere. Ofcom has refused to rule out allowing the 3 o'clock slot to be looked at, but even if it is prepared to allow that, there are real concerns that moving more and more fixtures away from 3 o'clock to Saturday lunchtimes, Saturday afternoons, Sundays or even Friday nights—I believe that there are 10 games planned for Friday nights—will have an impact on the wider football community.

I am sure you know, Mr Streeter, from your constituency that many local, grass-roots clubs play on Sunday or on Saturday morning. If more and more fixtures are shown on Saturday at lunchtime or on Sunday, they will attract people who otherwise would go along to support a club or to play grass-roots football. Ofcom must bear that in mind, because not only does it have a duty towards competition in the narrow sense as it relates to broadcasters, but it has a broader social responsibility for the good of the game in the United Kingdom.

I am aware that many fans, particularly of some bigger clubs—I include Chelsea in that for the benefit of the Minister, who I know is a Chelsea fan—complain that their clubs' fixtures are regularly moved. They see the initial fixture on a Saturday afternoon, so they make travel arrangements, book time off work and spend a lot of money on tickets for their families, but at a relatively late stage the broadcasters shift the game. My cousin, Philip Morgan, complained to me about that on Facebook the other day—a big Manchester United fan, he is very frustrated about that practice. I hope that the

[*Thomas Docherty*]

Minister will assure us that the Government will make it clear to Ofcom that it must bear those things in mind when it carries out its investigation. The interests of the supporter who goes through the turnstile are absolutely critical.

I wish to make two points before I conclude. One is about individual deals versus collective bargaining. I am conscious that Conservative colleagues in the room do not always agree with collective bargaining, but I am sure that Members of the House would agree that collective bargaining is one of the strengths of the Premier League. That is not the case in La Liga, for example, where Barcelona, Real Madrid and other major clubs negotiate their own deals. As a result, large clubs become richer and richer, while smaller clubs struggle a lot. In last year's Premier League payout, however, the total payment to the winner was only 1.5 times the size of the payment to Cardiff City, which finished bottom of the table. All clubs receive the same amount of money as the initial broadcast share, there is an element based on prize money and there is a small element based on how many times they are shown. It is important that Ofcom understands that collective bargaining must be maintained.

My final point concerns a good book that can, I am sure, be found in the Commons Library: "The All American War Game" by award-winning British journalist James Lawton. It came out about 30 years ago, when Channel 4 was covering American football for the first time, and it looked at the state of American football in the United States. James Lawton talked at great length about the fact that in the US, people can watch American football on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday; if they have cable, they can watch college games, the NFL and the local high school game. He was absolutely blown away by the idea of American football saturation, culminating in the Monday night game. At the time, of course, we only had four channels in the United Kingdom, and Channel 4 was very new.

Fast forward—pardon the pun—30 years. We now have a situation where football is readily available seven days a week. We can watch a Friday night game, perhaps a Scottish game or one of the 10 Premier League games that will be available; there is a Saturday lunchtime game, and there is a Saturday evening game. There are two games on a Sunday and there is a Monday night game. This evening, League cup fixtures are taking place—I am sure that the Minister will be taking a close interest in those. We have Champions League and Europa League football on a Thursday. My constituents tell me that, as football mad as they are, there is a limit to how much football we need on the television.

I am conscious that I am eating into the Minister's time, but I think that the issue is important. I respect the fact that Ofcom has the lead on it, but I hope that the Government will make it clear to Ofcom that they expect the regulator to be the supporter of the supporters and not the champion of media interests.

4.16 pm

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): I am grateful to appear under your chairmanship, Mr Streeter. I thank the hon. Member for Dunfermline and West Fife (Thomas Docherty) for

giving us the opportunity to debate this important issue, in which Members of the House clearly take a significant interest. It has been useful to hear the range of views—both of them, thanks to the able contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field). Today's debate concerns a topic about which the public and many Members of the House are passionate—football—and a far-reaching issue that directly affects consumers and the economy, namely competition in the broadcasting market.

The last time I debated football matters in this House, I engaged in some good-natured football banter. That spectacularly backfired on me, but it taught me a valuable lesson: football fans are extremely passionate about their clubs. Let me say on the record that although I am a Chelsea fan, I have nothing but admiration for all other football clubs, particularly Manchester United.

Competition in markets is important in all parts of the economy. It can drive down costs, improve consumer choice, encourage innovation and boost growth. A thriving, competitive industry reacts readily and at low cost to changing consumer demands. In an ideal world, made up of highly competitive markets, new entry would be unimpeded, products would be supplied at minimum cost to the consumer, there would be a lot of innovation and we would encourage economic growth.

Football remains as great a passion for people in this country as it has ever been. The hon. Gentleman pointed to the extraordinary success of the Premier League over the past 20 or so years. It has been a phenomenon, and it has become part of the fabric of our country and our culture. It is arguably the most exciting, compelling and competitive league anywhere in the world, with many of the best managers and players in the world coming here to ply their trade, and has some of the safest football stadiums to be found anywhere.

The popularity of football is making a big impact on our creative industries. As Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy, I note that clubs have not only their own websites and but often their own TV channels. Football is almost an anchor tenant for some television channels, radio, print and internet media, all of which use it to attract consumers.

Thomas Docherty: Although Crystal Palace are my second team, I forgive the Minister his Chelsea links. I have seen Sky's new XD technology, which it piloted at the Ryder cup—XD is 16 times the quality of high definition. Does the Minister agree that that is the type of creative technology breakthrough that we should be supporting in the United Kingdom?

Mr Vaizey: I do. Football and sport are a mode of content that encourages technical innovation. I remember watching football broadcast in 3D by Sky, and I thought it was compelling, although for some reason it has not had the consumer impact that we expected. HD television was probably partly driven by football, and it is another example of the kind of innovation that the hon. Gentleman talks about.

Sports content remains critical to the success of a lot of our broadcasting industry. It is common sense to say that the success of pay TV has been built on sport. It could be argued that it is a chicken and egg situation in the sense that the Premier League has benefited greatly from the innovation that has come from the way in

which Sky has broadcast the Premier League, but equally Sky has benefited from having those rights. Indeed, about one in four people who watch pay TV say that sport is their must-have content. Premier League football is hugely valued by those customers, particularly as it is not available live on free-to-air platforms. Content such as the Premier League drives consumer decisions about pay TV subscriptions, so it is not a surprise to find such an inquiry taking place.

Broadcasting rights to key content remain in the hands of a small number of providers, mainly BT and Sky, and there was a complaint to Ofcom by Virgin Media last September. People often miss this point—they think that Ofcom has somehow woken up one morning and just decided to call an investigation, or that perhaps the Government have asked Ofcom to call an investigation—but the investigation, like most Ofcom investigations, emerged from one part of the ecology, in this case Virgin Media, complaining about its perception of the behaviour of another part of the ecology, namely the Premier League and, behind it, Sky and BT. As a result of that complaint, Ofcom decided to open an investigation into how the Premier League sells the live UK audiovisual media rights for Premier League football matches.

Virgin Media's argument is that the collective selling of live UK television rights on an exclusive basis by the Premier League for matches played by its member clubs is in breach of competition law. Virgin Media's key argument is that the proportion of matches made available for live television broadcast under the current rights deal is lower—154 out of 380 matches a season—than in some other leading European leagues. Although, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, the new auction will see the figure go up to 168 matches a season, Virgin Media would argue that more matches are available for live television broadcast in other European countries.

Thomas Docherty: The Football Association and the Premier League point to the fact that the attendance of away fans in other leagues, such as La Liga, is very poor because there is such availability of broadcast. Does the Minister accept that point?

Mr Vaizey: It is not for me to accept or reject that point, but I will elaborate on my answer. Virgin Media would say that, because fewer matches are broadcast, consumers pay more money for their pay TV packages because there are fewer matches to go around and therefore less competition—that is the argument in its crudest form. If this were a court or a competition appeal hearing, an extremely expensive Queen's counsel would no doubt pick me up on how I have characterised the argument.

As the hon. Gentleman indicates, there is a counter-argument. First, the Premier League would talk about its success over the past two decades. Both he and my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster have pointed out the increase in live attendance at Premier League matches over the past 20 years and the commercial success of clubs due to the way the Premier League sells the rights to live matches. I was inadvertently in the position of, in effect, supporting a socialist solution: the Premier League selling its collective rights. The hon. Gentleman made a compelling point, which will be of particular interest to my hon. Friend, on whether we could introduce collective selling into the

City of London, whereby the top-performing traders collectively negotiate their salary with the rest of the company, so that the difference between the highest earners and the lowest earners is somewhat smaller—but I digress, and no doubt that is not helpful.

Mark Field: I would not describe myself as a socialist in any way, but the collective system has worked very well, which is greatly to the credit of all concerned. It is worth putting it on the record that Sky has done a terrific job of transforming the broadcasting of the game, in tandem with the BBC and other providers. I feel that Virgin Media's complaints are unfounded. There is no evidence to suggest either that there is dissatisfaction with subscription rates or that subscription rates would be lowered if we had more games on TV.

Mr Vaizey: I cannot be drawn on that point, except to say that I have described Sky's acquisition of Premier League rights as a bit of a chicken and egg situation. Sky's success has been built on having those Premier League rights, but there is no doubt that Sky has brought extraordinary innovation to broadcasting Premier League games.

Thomas Docherty: On attendances and popularity, is the Minister aware that, even with so much live football on a Saturday and even with the high attendances, the BBC reports that 4.5 million people tune in on a Saturday night to watch "Match of the Day"? Another 1.5 million watch the repeat and 2 million watch "Match of the Day 2" on a Sunday. Does he agree that that shows that football fans have a genuine appetite to watch recorded highlights and to see the punditry and technology to which he refers while also going along on a Saturday afternoon to support their team? We should protect that.

Mr Vaizey: I absolutely agree. The post-match punditry on the Chelsea victory at Swansea on Saturday's "Match of the Day" was some of the best punditry I have seen for a long time. As I said earlier, we have talked about solidarity and the Premier League's business model, which is heavily reliant on its broadcasting deal. The deal is important for Premier League clubs, but it also helps the football league pyramid. Having put Virgin Media's arguments, I stress the hon. Gentleman's point that the FA's position of preserving the 3 o'clock kick off for a number of matches that are not broadcast in order to maintain attendances at live football matches is very important.

I have little time left, so I will simply help the hon. Gentleman in the best way I can by explaining the process. Ofcom will gather further information using its powers under the Competition Act 1998. The case is still at an early stage, and it does not mean that the Ofcom investigation will go the full length. Ofcom has to reach a view on whether there is sufficient evidence of infringement of competition law, and I understand that it hopes to reach an initial view towards the end of March. Ofcom is also mindful of the timing, given that the auction of UK audiovisual rights is under way and is expected in the spring of 2015.

I have obviously been briefed on Ofcom's investigation process. Ofcom has emphasised to me—this will be music to the hon. Gentleman's ears—that the heart of

[Mr Vaizey]

its investigation is the best interest of fans and consumers and that it is aware that fans and consumers benefit from the principle of collective selling. This is a complex issue with a number of arguments to be made. I have outlined some of those arguments, but it is important to stress in my last few seconds that Ofcom, quite rightly, is an independent regulator. I assure anyone watching this debate that the hands of politicians will not be directing how Ofcom goes about its investigation. The arguments on both sides of this debate have been well rehearsed. I have every confidence that Ofcom will conduct its investigation in a scrupulous and fair manner and will come to clear decisions at each stage in a timely and helpful way.

Planning (Community Right of Appeal)

4.30 pm

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Streeter. This debate is about the potential for changing the planning system to give communities a genuine stake in the planning process. My proposal is to introduce a community right of appeal.

The Government rightly recognised when they came to office that there was a significant housing problem, and that one of the challenges was unburdening the planning system of bureaucratic processes so that the houses we so badly need could be developed. The Government said that while liberating planning processes to make them easier, they would give communities a greater say in what happens in those communities and in planning decisions.

However, the reality was that the changes in the planning system and in communities' rights did not move at the same pace, although the legislation was passed pretty much in parallel. The benefits of the community legislation—the Localism Act 2011—inevitably lagged, because neighbourhood plans, the last stage of the planning process, could not be put in place until local plans were in place. Although there was some grey debate about whether they could precede local plans, in reality, neighbourhood plans must conform with a local plan, so one had to follow the other. Clearly, they will give communities great benefit, as they bring community infrastructure levy benefits, but they are late.

There were many other provisions in the Localism Act 2011: for example, communities' ability to identify community assets, which could therefore be considered for preservation for community use, and a further provision enabling them to be acquired. The problem is that many such community assets are owned by local authorities, which decide whether or not an asset can be listed, giving them an inevitable conflict of interest.

Likewise, although the potential sale option was not intended to give communities a particular financial advantage to give them time, the reality is that it will not help communities acquire time, because if the local authority owns the asset in question, all it has to do is wait for the months to expire and then sell to a developer who will give a better price. I have some concerned constituents in Shaldon and Kingsteignton who have suffered as a result of those deficiencies in the legislation.

Meanwhile, the planning side of the balance—the national policy planning framework and local plans—moved ahead apace. The Minister wrote to me recently to advise me that 80% of all planning authorities now have local plans in place. That is much to his credit, but the problem is that during that tortuous three to four-year process, developers have been able to develop without communities feeling that they have a real say. Clearly there are provisions for consultation, but that is not quite the same thing. Communities feel that they are in no better position now than in the old days, when parish councils used to be consulted and then, they felt, roundly ignored. As I am sure the Minister will tell me, where communities are agreed, there is the option of judicial review, but the problem is that it is an expensive process that few communities can afford.

I will give some examples from my constituency of how the process has frustrated constituents and made them feel that they are not being listened to and do not have a voice. As local plans were introduced, the Government indicated that as a plan got closer, more weight would be given to it. In Shutterton, in Dawlish, an application was made for 350 houses. Those houses were not part of the local plan provision, and the council and constituents violently opposed them. None the less, three weeks before the local plan was adopted, the application went through. After our local plan was adopted, the council continued to authorise infill development. Although some infill development is understood and accepted, the amount in this case was substantial.

In other cases, we have found that a number of developers applied for more housing on the site allocated than was in the plan. On other occasions, due to density changes, where a site would not take the designated number of houses, the local authority extended the land on which the development could take place. The result in Dawlish was that instead of the expected 1,200 houses in the area, the community are now facing 2,000. That seems to be a significant mission creep from what was originally intended.

Mr Andrew Smith (Oxford East) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important debate. Does she agree that what ought to be at issue is not a question of more or less development but of the quality of planning decisions? Would not the right of appeal for which she advocates correct an asymmetry in the present system, whereby an applicant who thinks that a refusal is contrary to the planning framework can keep appealing to get the decision that they want, whereas a community that thinks an approval is contrary to the planning framework has no right of appeal other than judicial review, which as she says is prohibitively expensive? Therefore, it would empower people to balance things out.

Anne Marie Morris: I could not agree more, and I commend the right hon. Gentleman on his comments. The point that he makes entirely supports the point that I am making. It is about creating a balance and fairness in the planning system that do not currently exist.

The final complaint, which it is worth articulating for the Minister, involves the infrastructure challenge. Although stakeholders involved in roads, schools and so on are consulted, some stakeholders who are relevant are not statutory consultees, including the NHS. There is no obligation for the NHS to put forward its views about whether there is an adequate number of GP surgeries and the like. It is probably fair to say that although county councils have a duty and will consider infrastructure issues carefully, if one looks at how they justify some developments, it is in the hope and expectation of a school that might open in five or 10 years' time, or a road that might be built if some other development occurs in two or three years' time. Sometimes, communities feel that that is a bit fanciful. They perceive—I share that perception—that some communities have significant infrastructure issues that seem to have been ignored.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. Does she agree that infrastructure is

not just about roads and schools? One huge concern in my constituency is drainage. Local communities are absolutely terrified that new development will be granted permission and built without an adequate upgrade to the existing sewerage system.

Anne Marie Morris: My hon. Friend makes a key point. When houses are joined to the system, it puts far too much pressure on it, resulting in the flooding problems that many of us have experienced in our constituencies. She is absolutely right, and her point is well made.

I emphasise first and foremost that the concept of a community right of appeal is for the community. I am not advocating a third-party right of appeal. It would clearly not be appropriate for anybody who simply does not agree with a development in their neighbour's garden to be able to bring back the bureaucracy that the Government has rightly tried to get rid of, just in order to complain about an issue next door. It would not be a nimbyist charter; it would be a proper rebalancing of the planning system to be fair and balanced. The idea would be to ensure that between the developer and the community, both sides' arguments would be properly considered and have some power in the process.

It would also ensure that local authorities think long and hard about their decisions. Clearly, there is a great incentive for them to develop, because then they get community infrastructure levy moneys, but if they recognised that there was potential for an appeal from both sides, they might give some thought to it.

Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for calling this debate; I am listening with interest to what she says. I declare my interest, having introduced a ten-minute rule Bill back in 2012 to call for a community right of appeal. What does she think about neighbourhood plans? It is unfair that local plans get precedence over neighbourhood plans. Could a community right of appeal be linked to neighbourhood plans, which would give those plans teeth and put rocket boosters under them, convincing people that they are the right things to produce?

Anne Marie Morris: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. What one could certainly do is to link a right of appeal to those communities that have adopted a neighbourhood plan. However, we could go further than that and perhaps at this point I can set out what a community right of appeal might look like.

First, there must be true planning grounds for such a right of appeal, including a situation in which the local authority was ignoring Government guidance. The case in Shutterton was not entirely on-point here, because clearly the decision there was made by the inspector. None the less, there could be a right of appeal if it is seen that Government guidance is not being followed. Secondly, there would be grounds for appeal if there was a failure by the local authority to abide by the provisions of a local plan. Thirdly, and this addresses my hon. Friend's point, there could be an appeal if there was a failure to abide by the neighbourhood plan. Finally, there could be an appeal if there was a failure to provide infrastructure properly.

Those are my suggestions; I am sure there are many other planning grounds that could and should be included in that list. Perhaps, however, they could be a "starter for 10".

Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing a really important debate. Does she agree that a community right of appeal would help residents not only where they oppose developments but in situations where, for example, the council has set a limit on the number of houses in multiple occupation, specifically student homes, in a designated area, and yet it fails to take enforcement action against predatory landlords who are disregarding the planning rules and already exceeding the limit? Alternatively, perhaps the council is granting permission for HMOs in apparent contradiction of its own rules, leading to a situation in which neighbourhoods are up in arms against the people who are supposed to help them.

Anne Marie Morris: That is an interesting point. Clearly, the devil will be in the detail, once this proposal is properly worked up. In a way, however, the hon. Lady leads me on to my next point, which is this: for this appeal system to work, we must define what a community is. For me, a community will be something like a ward, or a neighbourhood as defined under Localism Act 2011, but it also needs to be the people in an area who will be truly impacted by a development. I do not have a precise solution, but that is a way forward.

Clearly, there must be weight, and therefore a percentage of the community that feels strongly about an issue. There cannot just be nimbyism, so there has to be quite a high threshold before a planning appeal can be triggered.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): My hon. Friend is the champion of communities and we are all grateful to her for securing this debate. On the specific point of a community right of appeal, does she agree that one aspect that councils and therefore the Department for Communities and Local Government should look at is situations in which a council has already listed something as being an asset of community value but then decides to give a developer permission to do something that effectively destroys that asset? Does she agree that that is entirely contradictory, and that we need to include consideration of such situations in a community right of appeal?

Anne Marie Morris: I strongly support that suggestion and it would be an excellent addition to the list of things that might be considered.

If the appeal mechanism is to be effective, it must be easy to use, low in bureaucracy and cheap. However, it cannot be beyond the wit of the Government to come up with a set of forms and a formula that will make it accessible to communities. I also believe that there are communities, community groups and charities out there that will be more than happy to put forward proposals for support.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP) *rose*—

Mr Gary Streeter (in the Chair): Before the hon. Lady gives way again, I must say that interventions are becoming rather long, and we want to give the Minister plenty of time to respond to the debate.

I call Jim Shannon to speak—very briefly.

Jim Shannon: I will be very quick. The hon. Lady mentioned the figure—the number of people—that would trigger an appeal. In every case, the number of people

living in an area who are impacted by a development might vary. There would be occasions when the impact of a development would be great, but the number of people living in the area impacted would be small. So I just wondered what the trigger figure would be.

Anne Marie Morris: Again, the devil would clearly be in the detail. However, the challenge is to create a relatively simple system. If we make things too complicated, including the definition of the “group” or “community”, this system will never be established. So, while I take the hon. Gentleman’s point, we must look at how we would make the system work in practice.

The appeal would need to be an appeal to the inspector, to give communities a right equivalent to the one that developers now have. In the same way, it is right that the council would have to pay a penalty if it refuses an application but the developer then succeeds in overturning that decision. Similarly, if the community succeeds on appeal, having initially been refused, the council would have to pay a penalty.

The benefits of this process would be that the community would at last see some fairness; that developers would be encouraged in a proactive way to better engage with communities; that local authorities would have to think long and hard, and not only about the community infrastructure levy, when making their decisions; and that in the future we would create communities rather than blocks of houses.

I commend the Government for what they have done in dealing with our housing issues and problems. However, I hope that the Minister will recognise and accept that there is a challenge here, and that communities feel aggrieved at their lack of engagement in the planning process. I also hope that he will agree to give this issue some proper attention, and will consider whether or not such an appeal is workable. Clearly, the matter would have to go out to proper consultation and I appreciate that this close to an election it may be more of a manifesto issue, rather than something to be done today.

Nevertheless, this is not just a case of amending existing legislation, and it would not be an adequate response to say, “We have done a great job.” We have; the Government have done a good job. And—dare I say it?—if the Opposition’s view held sway instead, communities would have no rights or say in where housing was located. However, we need to take this issue seriously and come up with some positive proposals. So I ask the Minister—through you, Chairman—to acknowledge that there is an issue and to agree to take some concrete steps.

4.46 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government (Brandon Lewis): Thank you, Mr Streeter, for calling me to speak. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris) on securing this debate. In her closing remarks, she said something that I absolutely agree with: what is important for us, as we go forward, is that we are building communities and not just houses. I myself have said that we cannot afford to see lots more big housing estates built just to hit various targets that people set from time to time; we had 13 years of

top-down numbers and hitting targets, rather than building communities. The changes that we have made to the planning process are specifically designed to ensure that we are building communities—homes that not only make the people who live in them proud, but are welcomed by the communities that those people are becoming part of. I will touch on that issue in the next few minutes.

It is also worth noting that one of the reasons why we are having this debate is the frustration that many of us have experienced—I myself was in local government for a decade or more—about the lack of power that people have had over what is happening around them compared with the power of somebody in a suit in Whitehall saying, “This is what will happen in your area.” It will take some time for people to realise that we have moved on from that situation and that we should attack this issue from the front end of the planning process instead of from the back end. The appeal system itself is at the back end.

Local authority decisions overturned during the course of a year still represent just 1% of all local planning decisions, although at the same time a record number of planning applications—about 240,000—were approved in the last year. One of the reasons for that small percentage is that more and more parts of the country are now having development in areas where they have specified they want development through their local and neighbourhood plans.

The planning reforms introduced by this Government have gone further than ever in ensuring that planning is centred on community involvement, by maintaining and strengthening a plan-led system rather than just the development control system of the past. We are removing regional strategies and introducing neighbourhood planning. We are also making the system not only fit for purpose but more accessible to everybody in terms of its understanding and outline.

The system currently gives statutory rights for the views of communities and individuals to be heard at each stage in the process—for example, in the preparation of the local plan. That is achieved most directly through neighbourhood plans, but also, of course, in making representations in any applications or appeals that arise. As I said, we are looking to create a much more collaborative and effective planning process in which people are engaged and able to take the lead from the beginning, not at the back-end, particularly regarding the future development of their area. Our reforms are empowering communities to take a leading role, and we want to continue to see development proposals being determined locally, through plan-led and community-led planning decisions.

Caroline Nokes: Does the Minister share my frustration that, particularly in places such as Bassett in Southampton, where the local community has been working on its neighbourhood plan for some years now, it still takes a phenomenally long time for neighbourhood plans to be worked up, consulted on and come to fruition?

Brandon Lewis: I have been determined about speeding up the neighbourhood plan process. I hope that my hon. Friend is pleased that we have made some new announcements in the last few weeks. I will drop her a

note about them to outline how we can speed the process, although we can probably still do more. I can certainly get some details to her on that.

Our aim is to make sure that everywhere has a clear local plan: that is where people’s local views on how they want their community to develop, consistent with the national planning policy framework, and against which planning applications will be decided, are going forward. Local plans form the basis for decisions on planning applications and appeals, of course, under planning law. Plan preparation is the best way for communities to be involved. Good progress has been made. Some 62% of all authorities now have an adopted plan and 80%, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newton Abbot said, have now published theirs. That is up from just over 30% in 2010.

The NPPF reminds local authorities that the community should be proactively engaged in the process as far as possible, reflecting a collective vision on an agreed set of priorities for the sustainable development of their area.

Anne Marie Morris: The Minister is making some good points. I do not for one minute disagree that there has been change and improvement, but I still cannot see any movement on his part beyond consultation. The crux of the matter is that communities do not feel that consultation is enough; they want some form of right.

Brandon Lewis: Actually, they do have a direct right because a local plan, when adopted by a local authority, has not only been consulted on with the local authority, but is voted on, adopted and approved by the elected councillors. It is part of that democratic process.

Going further than that, neighbourhood plans are the real key to what my hon. Friend is talking about. They can, and in some areas do, go ahead of the local plan and they have weight in law. They were introduced by the Government, and for the first time communities are able to produce plans that will be used in determining planning applications: as well as having powers to grant planning permission for development, they want to see through neighbourhood plan development orders. Neighbourhood planning gives a community direct power to develop a shared vision for its neighbourhood and deliver the sustainable development that it needs. The local community gets a vote on this by referendum in the community.

It is clear that communities have positively embraced these new powers, going beyond the old approach and giving real community involvement at every stage. Let me outline that by mentioning that we now have just over 1,300 designated areas, so more than 5.2 million people are now covered by neighbourhood planning. Four areas in my hon. Friend’s constituency are going through the neighbourhood planning process. I hope there will be more to come, because with that process people get direct involvement and a say in what development will go on, how it goes on and the look and feel of it—in relation to not just residential, but commercial, retail and infrastructure.

Anne Marie Morris: Will the Minister clarify? He said that the neighbourhood plan went beyond and above the local plan. Can a neighbourhood plan override and rewrite what is in a local plan? I thought not.

Brandon Lewis: That is not what I said; I said it could go ahead of it and lead. There can be a neighbourhood plan where a local plan is not necessarily adopted and finished, so it can move ahead. It obviously has to fit with the local plan—it might need to be reviewed down the line—but if an area is getting on with a neighbourhood plan, it does not necessarily need to wait for the local plan. In some areas there have already been planning decisions. I point my hon. Friend to case law in relation to Coates road in Devizes, where a planning appeal decision was made, backing up a neighbourhood plan that had not yet been to referendum.

There has been overwhelming support for neighbourhood planning. So far in referendums, an average of 87% of voters have said yes to a neighbourhood plan or an order, on an average turnout of 33%. That means that local people are directly involved. The NPPF clarifies that early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussions enable better co-ordination between public and private resources, as well as improved outcomes for the community.

We have been determined to make the planning system more accessible to everybody through the publication of the NPPF and by simplifying the system—moving away from documents and often complex, repetitive technical guidance found in 230 separate documents and 7,000 pages. We have moved to the NPPF, which has just 50 pages, dropping away from the more than 1,300 pages of sometimes impenetrable jargon in 44 separate documents. We now have the NPPF with 50 readable pages. That is making the planning system easier to navigate for everybody.

Interested parties already have statutory rights to contribute their views as well—at each step of the process in the production of the local plan or, as I outlined, even more directly in the neighbourhood plan, as well as at the planning application stage and in response to any appeal by the applicant against a local authority decision. Interested parties can raise all issues that they are concerned about at each stage of the process, in the knowledge that the decision maker is required to have regard to their views in making a decision.

The existing right of appeal recognises that, in practice, the planning system acts as a control on how an individual may use their land. As a result, the Government believe it is right that an applicant should have the option of an impartial appeal against the refusal of planning permission. The existing right of appeal compensates for the removal of an individual's right to develop.

We do not, at this stage, support the proposal for a community right of appeal; this would create a further opportunity to challenge development proposals in a system that is already geared towards ensuring that the views of third parties are heard and understood.

Richard Graham: On the point that I raised with my hon. Friend the Member for Newton Abbot, will the Minister clarify something about assets of community value? Once an asset has been listed as of community value, is it appropriate or inappropriate for a council then to give permission to a development that would inevitably mean the destruction of that asset?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend knows that I cannot comment on any particular case, although I appreciate that he was not talking about a specific case. These things sometimes come down to specific cases. Obviously, listing an asset of community value gives protection—potentially, if an asset is to be sold or changed—for six months so that the local community can come together to consider acquiring it. However, it does not move to the next stage of stopping somebody from developing, changing or using that property should the community not be able to come together. The listing of an asset of community value gives the opportunity to pause the sale for six months so that the necessary capital can be raised, but it does not necessarily stop it ad infinitum and was never designed to.

Richard Graham *rose*—

Brandon Lewis: I see that my hon. Friend wants to intervene again.

Mr Gary Streeter (in the Chair): Order. I would prefer him not to intervene again. I think the Minister should respond to the person who has actually secured the debate.

Brandon Lewis: Absolutely—that is a fair point, Mr Streeter. I will happily liaise with my hon. Friend after this debate.

I return to the point that I made at the outset. Inherently, the idea behind the planning reforms is to make sure that there is community involvement through local plans and neighbourhood plans—I cannot stress enough that those are a key way for people to be involved—by getting public involvement where development should be: what it should look and feel like, what it should be built like and how it should be supported at the beginning of the process, not at the back end.

Anne Marie Morris: The Chairman is being very indulgent. The Minister's point is that the appeal system was intended to provide redress for the individual owner. I understand why that change was made. I think we are at a point in history where we should review again the importance and value of a community, and we should seriously consider its having a voice now, given how closely we live together and how many houses are built in such close proximity.

Brandon Lewis: We believe that the best way for communities to have a voice in the planning system is for them to be engaged in the development of local and neighbourhood plans at the beginning, not to wait till the back end of the process, because that forms the basis of decisions on planning applications under planning law.

A community right of appeal at the end of the process is too late to allow meaningful engagement and has the potential to slow down or even prevent sustainable and appropriate development at a time when our other planning reforms are geared towards speeding up the planning system, to drive our economy and provide the homes and jobs that we need.

We want a more collaborative and effective planning system, where people are engaged early in the process and able to influence meaningfully the future of their areas. We want development proposals to be determined locally, in accordance with local and neighbourhood

plans, and our planning reforms are already empowering communities to achieve their aspirations by taking an active role in planning their areas.

Question put and agreed to.

4.59 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Tuesday 20 January 2015

CABINET OFFICE

UK Statistics Authority

The Minister for Civil Society (Mr Rob Wilson): The Cabinet Office wishes to report that a cash advance from the Contingencies Fund has been sought for the UK Statistics Authority (referred to as the Statistics Board in the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007). The advance is required in order to settle material liabilities arising from an anticipated reduction of the year end creditor balance.

Parliamentary approval for additional resources of £35,000 will be sought in a supplementary estimate for the Statistics Board. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £14,249,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

[HCWS208]

TREASURY

Double Taxation Agreement (Croatia)

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): A double taxation agreement and protocol with Croatia was signed on 15 January 2015. The text of the agreement and protocol has been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses and made available on HM Revenue and Customs' website. The text will be scheduled to a draft Order in Council and laid before the House of Commons in due course.

It is also available online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenstatements>

[HCWS209]

DEFENCE

Nuclear Deterrent

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon):

As part of his statement on the strategic defence and security review (SDSR) on 19 October 2010, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced that we had reviewed our nuclear deterrence requirements. He concluded that we could deliver a credible nuclear deterrent with a smaller nuclear weapons capability and would incorporate these reductions into the current deployed capability and the future successor deterrent programme. The number of deployed warheads on each submarine would be reduced from 48 to 40; the number of operational missiles in the Vanguard class ballistic missile submarines (SSBN) would be reduced to no more than eight; and we would reduce the number of operationally available warheads from fewer than 160 to no more than 120.

The then Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Liam Fox), announced to the House on 29 June 2011, *Official Report*, columns 50-51WS, that the programme for implementing the 2010 SDSR warhead reductions had commenced.

I am pleased to inform the House that this Government have now met their commitment to implement these changes across the SSBN fleet. All Vanguard class SSBNs on continuous at-sea deterrent patrol now carry 40 nuclear warheads and no more than eight operational missiles. We have therefore achieved our commitment to reduce the number of operationally available warheads to no more than 120.

The nuclear deterrent remains to serve as the ultimate means to deter the most extreme threats. The Government continue to plan to renew the UK's independent strategic nuclear deterrent, though the Liberal Democrats will continue to make the case for alternatives. A "Main Gate" investment decision will be required in 2016 to replace the four Vanguard class SSBNs currently in service. At the same time, as a responsible nuclear weapon state and party to the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons (NPT) the UK remains committed to creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons.

The completion of these reductions is a key milestone, demonstrating the UK's continued leadership within the NPT.

[HCWS210]

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