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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 2 July 2015

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

TRANSPORT FOR LONDON BILL [*LORDS*]

Motion made,

That the promoters of the Transport for London Bill [*Lords*], which was originally introduced in the House of Lords in Session 2010-12 on 24 January 2011, may have leave to proceed with the Bill in the current Session according to the provisions of Standing Order 188B (Revival of Bills).—(*The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered on Thursday 9 July.

Oral Answers to Questions

ATTORNEY GENERAL

The Attorney General was asked—

Forced Marriage

1. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What steps the CPS is taking to ensure its prosecutors will be able successfully to prosecute the criminal offence of forced marriage. [900695]

2. **Graham Evans** (Weaver Vale) (Con): What steps the CPS is taking to ensure its prosecutors will be able successfully to prosecute the criminal offence of forced marriage. [900696]

12. **James Berry** (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): What steps the CPS is taking to ensure its prosecutors will be able successfully to prosecute the criminal offence of forced marriage. [900709]

The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland): The first successful prosecution using the new offence of forced marriage was recorded earlier this year. Previously, the Crown Prosecution Service had to use offences such as assault and kidnap to address this serious issue. The CPS has provided legal guidance and learning support to its prosecutors on cases of forced marriage to raise their awareness of the issues involved, which includes the important work of joint workshops with the police in every CPS area to tackle this menace.

Bob Blackman: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for that answer. Clearly, we want to rid society of this scourge. Will he update the House on how many prosecutions have been brought to court and how many are in the pipeline?

The Solicitor General: From 2010, particular offences that involve forced marriage as a key element have been flagged by the CPS. I am happy to report that the volume of completed prosecutions in the last year, 2014-15, rose to 46, the highest ever. There is more work to be done, but the progress is encouraging.

Graham Evans: Forced marriage is a scourge across many communities in the UK and I welcome the work undertaken by the Government on the Modern Slavery Act 2015. Will my hon. and learned Friend update the House on the work being carried out to bring this scourge to an end? What advice has been provided to young men and women who might be at risk of forced marriage?

The Solicitor General: The joint Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office forced marriage unit, which has been in operation for about 10 years, provides free and confidential advice on the dangers of being forced into marriage and the precautions that can be taken. It operates both here and overseas and last year gave advice and support in nearly 1,300 cases. I commend its work to the House.

James Berry: I declare an interest, as a barrister. What is the CPS in London, where my constituency sits, doing to embed best practice for the prosecution of forced marriage?

The Solicitor General: I welcome my hon. Friend to the House. He brings a wealth of legal experience and I am grateful to him for his interest. He mentioned joint training courses; 14 London prosecutors attended last year's joint training course, held with the Metropolitan police on forced marriage, honour-based violence and female genital mutilation. There is a specialist team of about 25 lawyers in London dealing with all Crown court cases that include elements of forced marriage and there are similar arrangements in magistrates courts.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): Of the 1,271 cases, 11% involve victims who are under the age of 16. In the last Parliament, the Select Committee on Home Affairs specifically asked the Education Secretary to write to every headteacher to make them aware of this problem, especially before the summer holidays. Has this been done? If not, can it be done?

The Solicitor General: I do not have the information on whether that letter has been written, but I very much appreciate the importance of cross-governmental working to deal with this issue and, indeed, many others that, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, are cultural and need to be tackled head on rather than ignored.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): Given that the forced marriage unit, which the Solicitor General rightly commended, is offering advice on some 1,300 cases, we are clearly only touching the tip of the iceberg with the number of cases that come to court. Is he certain

that Crown prosecutors have the resources they need to deal with these complex cases and adequate training to understand the cultural and family backgrounds that might lead to victims wanting to withdraw the case?

The Solicitor General: The hon. Lady makes a proper point. I can reassure her that the degree of training and, importantly, the joint training that goes on with the police is very much understood by the Crown Prosecution Service. It applies not just to forced marriage, but to a range of offences in which cultural barriers and other issues can make it difficult for victims to come forward. It is well understood and I am glad to see that numbers continue to increase, but of course more work needs to be done.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Since the Modern Slavery Act came into force, there has been some limited success, but more has to be done to protect victims. What has been done to train staff in the public agencies to spot forced marriages?

The Solicitor General: I have dealt with training within the CPS and the police, but the hon. Gentleman makes a proper point about third-party agencies. In the case of young people it is an issue of safeguarding. Forced marriage is a form of child abuse and must be recognised as such. All agencies should be alert to this manifestation and make reports promptly and comprehensively.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): Does the Solicitor General agree that the number of successful prosecutions on forced marriages, as with other offences, depends on there being a sufficient number of prosecutors with the time to make individual judgments on cases and to prepare properly for trial? Does the hon. and learned Gentleman agree that cutting the number of prosecutors in this Parliament and cutting funding for the Crown Prosecution Service is likely to be counterproductive?

The Solicitor General: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his place—another experienced lawyer. The work that has been done by the Crown Prosecution Service in the past five years in removing excessive expenditure in the back office and concentrating on the front line has yielded results. I am absolutely confident that issues of resource will never get in the way of the proper investigation and prosecution of such allegations.

Serious Fraud Office

3. **Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab):** What his future funding proposals are for the Serious Fraud Office; and if he will make a statement. [900698]

The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland): The Serious Fraud Office is a small and demand-led organisation that comprises investigators, prosecutors, accountants and other specialists. The model, which is known as the Roskill model, gives the director of the SFO the flexibility to have the right combination of expertise to tackle the most complex and large cases. The current blockbuster funding approach allows him to take on cases that are exceptionally demanding in terms of resource, such as the LIBOR case, while avoiding the need to constantly maintain high levels of permanent staff, which are not always necessary.

Nick Smith: The SFO going cap in hand to the Treasury when it wants to take on a major case could mean delaying justice. Why not let moneys recovered by the SFO be kept by it so that it has autonomy?

The Solicitor General: Attractive though that proposal sounds—I take it in the constructive spirit which I know the hon. Gentleman intends—my worry is that that is an even more uncertain means of funding the SFO. The advantage of blockbuster funding is that it allows the SFO the flexibility it needs, allows significant amounts of money to be allocated to its work, and proves the point that funding will never be a bar to the work of the SFO in investigating serious fraud.

Mr Speaker: I think the Solicitor General is telling us that he is not all that keen on the idea, if one interprets the lawyer-speak.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Installing temporary IT equipment in courts for SFO prosecutions is eye-wateringly expensive and a drain on SFO resources. Does the Solicitor General agree that we need to look again at this issue to establish whether the taxpayer is getting value for money?

The Solicitor General: Yes.

Mr Speaker: Splendid fellow!

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Solicitor General may know of my long-term interest in this matter. We all want a Serious Fraud Office that is fit for purpose; this Serious Fraud Office is not. We go back to the catastrophe that was the daft prosecution and dawn arrest of the Tchenguiz brothers. As he knows, if we have a weak SFO, it relies on other accountants, such as Grant Thornton. That is not a healthy relationship for the SFO.

The Solicitor General: The hon. Gentleman is right to refer to previous failures, but things have moved on considerably in the right direction since the appointment of the current director in 2012. It is important that we give our full-throated support to the work of the SFO because, as the hon. Gentleman says, if there are doubts about the integrity and efficacy of that important arm of the prosecutorial authorities, we are in serious trouble indeed. I hope he will recognise that progress is being made.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Progress might be being made, but why is the SFO not performing better than it is, and what international comparisons have been made to identify better examples that it could follow?

The Solicitor General: I do not have chapter and verse on international comparators today for my hon. Friend, but I am more than happy to have that discussion with him. The Roskill model, which allows prosecutors and investigators to work hand in hand, is essential when it comes to this type of offending. It works and it must continue to be supported. Whatever the framework within it, that model of investigation is very important.

Rape and Domestic Violence (Conviction Rates)

4. **Kelly Tolhurst** (Rochester and Strood) (Con): What steps the Crown Prosecution Service has taken to improve the conviction rate for rape and domestic violence in the past two years. [900699]

6. **Suella Fernandes** (Fareham) (Con): What steps the Crown Prosecution Service has taken to improve the conviction rate for rape and domestic violence in the past two years. [900703]

The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright): Over the past two years, the Crown Prosecution Service has worked with the police to increase the number of referrals for rape and domestic abuse. As a result, the number of people prosecuted for those offences last year was the highest ever. However, more is being done to increase conviction rates, particularly in rape cases, through better training and specialisation among prosecutors and better presentation of cases to juries.

Kelly Tolhurst: What factors explain the variance in conviction rates for domestic violence and rape cases? Will the Attorney General join me on a visit to Kent to meet the excellent Crown Prosecution Service staff?

The Attorney General: I welcome my hon. Friend to her place. She is absolutely right that there is variance in the statistics, but it is worth noting that there is a difference between what used to happen to bring about those unsuccessful outcomes and what happens now. A large proportion of unsuccessful outcomes in these cases are the result of jury acquittals. The proportion that results from victim issues or discontinued cases is going down. It is important that we do what we can to help juries reach the right conclusion in each case. She will know that I have visited her constituency in the past, as have many hon. Friends. We rather hoped that she would be in a position to ask questions in this House as a result, and I am glad that she is. I will be happy to visit again.

Suella Fernandes: I declare an interest as a barrister, and indeed as a member of the same chambers as the Attorney General. I welcome the recent statistics showing the highest ever conviction rate nationally for rape and domestic violence cases, but does he share my concern about the figures in Hampshire, where the conviction rate for rape fell in 2014-15? What action will he take to address that?

The Attorney General: I welcome my hon. Friend to her place—I am delighted that she has joined us. This must surely be the safest place to say that there can never be too many lawyers in the House of Commons. [Interruption.] It is the safest place, but still not entirely safe.

It is a matter of concern that the conviction rate in Hampshire is not higher. As I mentioned in my previous answer, we need to look at the factors that are bringing about unsuccessful outcomes. As my hon. Friend well understands, it is not true that acquittal is the wrong outcome in every case, but we need to do everything we can to ensure that cases are presented robustly to juries so that they can reach the right conclusions.

Colleen Fletcher (Coventry North East) (Lab): An effective way of increasing the number of referrals from the police and increasing the prosecution and conviction rates for such crimes is to ensure that victims of abuse feel confident that they will be taken seriously when reporting the crime and supported by the whole criminal justice system thereafter, bearing in mind that many of them, if not all, are extremely traumatised. What steps is the CPS taking, in conjunction with the police, to ensure that the requisite support for victims is in place throughout the process?

The Attorney General: I agree with the hon. Lady. She is entirely right that we need to ensure that victims are supported throughout the process. That starts when a report is made, which of course relies on the police adopting a sympathetic attitude. We then need to see referrals from the police to the CPS. As I mentioned, we are seeing an increasing number of referrals, which is a good sign. We then need to follow through the process, as she says, which is as much about communication as anything else. Giving evidence in court is intimidating for anyone, and even more so for the victims of this type of offending, so we need to ensure that everybody does what they can to ameliorate the process.

Rule of Law (Magna Carta)

5. **Jack Lopresti** (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure that the rule of law continues to be upheld in line with the principles of Magna Carta. [900701]

7. **Victoria Atkins** (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure the rule of law continues to be upheld in line with Magna Carta. [900704]

The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright): Last month, along with guests from many other countries, I attended the commemoration of the sealing of Magna Carta 800 years ago at Runnymede. In the centuries since, the rule of law has played a fundamental part in our national identity. The Lord Chancellor and the Law Officers share a particular responsibility to promote it in Government—one that we all take extremely seriously.

Jack Lopresti: Will my right hon. and learned Friend assure me and the House that any future Bill of Rights will contain the principles of Magna Carta? Will he also join me in paying tribute to William Marshal, who later became the Earl of Pembroke? He was one of the original signatories of Magna Carta, served five English kings loyally, saved us from the French, and then reissued Magna Carta under his own seal in 1216.

The Attorney General: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to those who brought about the original Magna Carta; we all owe them a great debt. He will know that William Marshal and others would probably not recognise the human rights landscape now; a lot has changed. We want to promote a new and modern version of a Bill of Rights that I hope maintains all the important principles of Magna Carta but recognises what has changed in the past 800 years.

Victoria Atkins: I declare that I am a barrister. The county of Lincolnshire holds one of only four copies of Magna Carta. What steps is my right hon. and learned Friend taking to ensure that the principles that have been developed in this country since 1215 are promoted abroad?

The Attorney General: I welcome my hon. Friend to her place—another lawyer; this is good news, we are heading in the right direction. She is right to point out that the rule of law is important not just in this country but across the globe, and this country has a proud record of doing what it can to promote it. We are a leading member of the United Nations Human Rights Council. She will be aware of the efforts of our former right hon. Friend, William Hague, in relation to sexual violence in conflict. We are the first state in the world to implement the UN's guiding principles on business and human rights, and there are other examples.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I do not want a situation to develop in which we have time for the questions but not for the answers. We are short of time.

Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): The Prime Minister celebrated the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta by announcing his intention to repeal the Human Rights Act 1998. The Attorney General will no doubt be aware that the European convention on human rights is enshrined in UK law through the Human Rights Act and, in Scotland, through the Scotland Act 1998. What assessment has he made of the implications of the repeal, particularly for the relationship and interactions between Scots law and the legal system of England and Wales?

The Attorney General: It is important to draw the distinction between the Human Rights Act and human rights. We are not in favour of the first; we are very much in favour of the second. As for the devolution consequences of any action we may take, the hon. Gentleman will have to be patient and see what proposals my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor brings forward. I can assure him, however, that whatever they are, we will engage in proper consultation with the devolved Administrations.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): Are there any fundamental principles, as opposed to details and modernity, which conflict between Magna Carta and the Human Rights Act?

The Attorney General: The hon. Lady will recognise that Magna Carta was far from a perfect expression of human rights. That is why I say that things have moved on in the past 800 years, and we should welcome that. On the European convention on human rights, the Government have been very clear. We have no quarrel with the wording of the convention; our quarrel is with the way in which it has been interpreted by the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. That is the problem we seek to address.

Vulnerable Victims and Witnesses

8. **Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab):** What recent discussions he has had with the Director of Public Prosecutions on dealing with vulnerable victims and witnesses. [900705]

The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright): I discuss regularly with the Director of Public Prosecutions support for vulnerable victims, including measures that the CPS can adopt or apply for in the trial process, and ongoing work between the CPS, the police and the voluntary sector.

Keir Starmer: I declare an interest as a barrister and a former DPP. Does the Attorney General agree that the time has come for a comprehensive victims' law, giving enforceable rights from the beginning of the process to the end of the process? If so, will he assure the House that there will be an early consultation on this important issue?

The Attorney General: In welcoming the hon. and learned Gentleman to his place, I think he must win the prize for the most impressive declaration of interest so far this morning. He comes at the issue from a uniquely knowledgeable perspective and we are grateful to have him here.

Whether or not the rights of victims are expressed in legislation, there is no doubt that we have more to do to make sure that they are properly supported and informed about the processes of which they are a crucial part. The hon. and learned Gentleman did a huge amount of good work as the Director of Public Prosecutions to assist that process, and as he knows, there is a good deal more to be done. One of the areas we must look at, straightforwardly, is the opportunity for prosecuting lawyers to speak to victims and witnesses before and after hearings to make sure that they are clear about what is going to happen and what has happened. I think that would be a huge step forward and we will undoubtedly wish to consult the hon. and learned Gentleman and others about what else can be done.

11. [900708] **David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con):** I have no legal qualifications whatsoever.

Two years ago, a 13-year-old girl was subjected to three weeks of intimidatory and vicious cross-examination by a team of seven barristers—a process that she described as worse than the initial crime. Will the Attorney General update the House on what he is doing to stop such incidents being repeated?

The Attorney General: On my hon. Friend's declaration of interest, I would simply say that nobody is perfect.

My hon. Friend raises a very serious point. There is no doubt that there have been bad examples of cross-examination in criminal trials. Let us be clear: intimidatory cross-examination is never appropriate. Defence counsel is entitled to put its case to prosecution witnesses, but it should never do so in an intimidatory way. Judges should intervene if that happens, and they now have the power to set ground rules before cross-examination takes place, which is a step forward. As my hon. Friend will be aware, we are in the process of making another huge improvement, namely the piloting of pre-recorded cross-examination for young and vulnerable witnesses,

which is much better for many of them. We shall look carefully at the results of those pilots, and if they are what we hope, I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor will wish to introduce the process more widely.

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): I thank the Attorney General for calling me last weekend to brief me on the DPP's decision to bring criminal proceedings against Greville Janner following the review by David Perry QC. Of course, we on this side of the House welcome that decision. It allows complainants to see the allegations aired before a jury and shows that the Crown Prosecution Service's victims' right to review scheme, which was implemented by the former DPP, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), is working as intended. I now hope that the future focus will be on ensuring that historical sex abuse cases are properly funded, so will the Attorney General give a commitment to the £50 million extra funding that the current DPP says she desperately needs to prosecute such cases?

The Attorney General: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his opening remarks, but I shall start with his last point. On the upcoming spending round, he will understand that my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor General and I will do our very best to make sure that the CPS receives the funding it needs. We should pay tribute to the way in which the CPS has made necessary savings and still maintained a good service on the front line.

On the hon. Gentleman's first point, he knows that it would be wholly wrong for me to say anything at all about the individual case of the noble Lord Janner. In any event, it would not be right for me to do so because, as the hon. Gentleman knows, the protocols for Law Officers are clear: we are not engaged in the detail of any potential prosecution against a parliamentarian.

Let me say this as a more general point: it is vital that our system has independent prosecutors—prosecutors who are independent of us as politicians—who make these difficult judgments. We should stand behind them when they do so, and the victims' right to review, which the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras introduced during his time as DPP, is a positive step to enable victims to challenge those decisions and, where appropriate, for those decisions to be changed. It seems to me that that system worked as it was designed to work in this case.

Mr Speaker: Order. Owing to an administrative error, the numbering of the questions to the Minister for Women and Equalities continues from the questions to the Attorney General, so we begin with Question 14.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

The Minister for Women and Equalities was asked—

STEM Careers

14. **Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to encourage more girls and women to take up careers in science, technology, engineering and maths. [900711]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Nicky Morgan): We want girls to be able to choose from the broadest range of careers. The new careers and enterprise company will support greater engagement between employers, schools and colleges to ensure girls get the inspiration and guidance they need to succeed in working life. Parents also have an important role to play through publications such as "Your daughter's future".

Matt Warman: I thank my right hon. Friend for her answer. In my rural constituency of Boston and Skegness, science and technology plays an ever more important part in agriculture. What opportunities are we taking to make sure that the doors opened to women and girls by studying science and technology are obvious in the rural economy in particular?

Nicky Morgan: I welcome my hon. Friend to his place; I do not think I have heard him speak in the Chamber before. He is absolutely right: rural areas contribute £210 billion to the UK economy. The Government are funding the UK Commission for Employment and Skills to work with private sector employers to support those in low-paid, low-skilled work into higher-paid, higher-skilled work. In phase 1, that funding has supported more than 200 women, who are under-represented in agriculture, land-based engineering and environmental conservation industries.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): In Northern Ireland, we have identified a number of job opportunities in engineering that young women have taken up alongside young men. That is because further education and secondary education have worked together to identify where there will be vacancies. What have this Minister and other Ministers done to identify vacancies here, and to give such people those jobs?

Nicky Morgan: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: this is about giving young people early advice and guidance on the opportunities that are available to them, and about making sure that no options are shut off. That is why I announced just before Christmas the creation of and our backing for a careers and enterprise company. I was delighted to announce in yesterday's debate that Claudia Harris will be the new chief executive.

Prison Uniform Policy

15. **Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): What recent assessment she has made of the equality implications of the way that the prison uniform policy is applied to male and female prisoners. [900712]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinenage): It has long been the case that women are not required to wear prison-issue clothing. Men can earn the opportunity to wear their own clothes under the incentive and earned privileges scheme. That reflects the understanding that the experiences that lead to imprisonment and the impact of imprisonment can be very different for men and for women.

Philip Davies: I very much welcome the Minister to her position. Female prisoners do not currently have to wear prison uniforms because it might affect their self-esteem. Research by the Ministry of Justice that was supposed to back that up was so deficient that it was

not even published. In the interests of real equality, not just the “equality but only when it suits” agenda, will she get on with ensuring that both male and female prisoners have to wear prison uniforms?

Caroline Dinéage: I am interested in equality whether it suits or not. The fact is that 95% of prisoners are men, and our entire prison system is largely designed with them in mind and to suit them. I make no apologies for the fact that I believe our prisons should be places of rehabilitation as well as punishment. If this small compromise helps to achieve that aim, it is well worth doing.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): I thank the Minister for noticing that one of the problems with the prison system is that women prisoners are too often treated as though they were “not men” prisoners. Will she tell the House how far from their children the average woman prisoner is compared with the average male prisoner who has children?

Caroline Dinéage: That is a detailed question, and I will of course write to the right hon. Lady with a full answer. We take the needs of women in our prisons very seriously. Lots of schemes are being introduced to help to build and maintain bonds for women, particularly those who have caring responsibilities, not least the use of video links so that they can keep in contact. Babies and children are allowed into some parts of our prisons, and we will keep that under review.

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): Rather than focusing on uniforms, what lessons does the Minister take from the work of the Scottish charity Families Outside to ensure that offenders, in particular mothers, can continue to play a role in their children’s lives, which reduces the likelihood that they will reoffend, and from the measures taken by the Scottish Government towards a custody in the community approach to female offenders?

Caroline Dinéage: The hon. Lady makes a very good point, and I am very happy to look at the charity that she mentions. We have to look at the individual needs of mothers, particularly if they are sole carers, because in many cases we must consider what will happen to the children if their mothers are in prison. Judges look at every case individually and take into consideration whether mothers have caring responsibilities, and we know that they will continue to do so.

Gender Pay Gap

16. **Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con):** What steps the Government are taking to reduce the gender pay gap. [900713]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Nicky Morgan): As we discussed in the House only yesterday, the gender pay gap has fallen to its lowest level ever, at 19.1%, and has been virtually eliminated among full-time workers under the age of 40. We remain determined to eliminate the gender pay gap for all, which is why we will require larger employers to publish gender pay information. We will publish an initial consultation on that soon, with a view to making regulations as soon as we can.

Suella Fernandes: We heard the views of many Members in an important debate yesterday. In my constituency, the gender pay gap is about 29.8%, which is above the national average. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we must all do more to highlight the importance of tackling the gap?

Nicky Morgan: I entirely agree that it is crucial that we continue to raise awareness of the gender pay gap among employers and employees. I am sure that as the new champion for her constituency, my hon. Friend will do that. One way is to challenge gender stereotypes in schools through the Opening Doors project, which I know Cams Hill school in her constituency is participating in.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): The gap is even larger when taken with ethnicity, particularly for Bangladeshi, Pakistani and African-origin women. How will the Minister address that?

Nicky Morgan: The right hon. Gentleman makes a good point. We need to inspire young people about career options and subject choices when they are at school, regardless of their gender or ethnicity. Often, women end up in careers in the five c’s—cleaning, catering, clerical, cashiering and caring—for which salaries tend to be lower. As we discussed yesterday, there are many complex reasons for the gender pay gap, and we will do all we can to tackle them.

28. [900725] **Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con):** As my right hon. Friend has said, the group of women who endure the largest gap in pay by comparison with their male peers is those over the age of 40. What is she doing specifically to address that? Many of those women are highly talented and highly skilled, but we as a country are not getting the best out of them.

Nicky Morgan: We are going to take forward Baroness Altmann’s recommendations on older workers, including workplace training irrespective of age, and stamping out age discrimination in the recruitment process. My right hon. Friend will be aware, as she was the Minister when it was set up, that the Women’s Business Council has a specific strand of work on older workers staying on in work. There are also the pilots for carers that I mentioned yesterday.

Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that in places where the living wage is implemented, the main beneficiaries are often women? What steps is she taking to incentivise companies to pay the living wage?

Nicky Morgan: The hon. Lady raises an important point. The Government have made it clear that we would like employers to consider paying the living wage, but it has to be the right decision for them. We have made moves to increase the minimum wage, and we have increased the level at which people start to pay income tax, which has disproportionately affected women.

32. [900729] **Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con):** In a letter from the Minister’s Department in March, I was informed that the greatest gender pay gap could be found in the finance and insurance sectors, in which it is 35.2%. Is that a problem? If so, what specifically is she doing about it with those sectors?

Nicky Morgan: My hon. Friend raised this issue in one of the last Women and Equalities questions sessions of the last Parliament. He is right that the full-time gender pay gap in financial and insurance activities is 35.2%. I refer him to the answer that I gave earlier about the need to inspire young people and make sure that girls in particular do not count themselves out of particular careers, or out of specific subject choices at school so that they cannot go into those careers later on.

Colleen Fletcher (Coventry North East) (Lab): The gender pay gap in Coventry increased to 16.2% in 2014, up from 15% the previous year. What targeted action are the Government taking to address the issue in areas such as mine where the gender pay gap has widened rather than narrowed in recent years?

Nicky Morgan: The figure that the hon. Lady gives is thankfully smaller than the overall United Kingdom figure, but that does not mean it is acceptable. I am sure she will work with employers in her constituency when the regulations are published and brought into force to ensure that employers work hard on gender pay transparency and take specific steps to tackle the gap.

Careers

17. **Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to encourage women looking for work to consider careers in all sectors of the economy. [900714]

The Secretary of State for Education (Nicky Morgan): It is vital that women can access good quality careers guidance throughout their working lives. The National Careers Service provides more than 1 million people annually with impartial and professional careers information to help them enter work or learning. Priority groups, including women returners and the low-skilled, can also receive in-depth face-to-face guidance with a qualified careers advisor.

Maria Caulfield: Does my right hon. Friend welcome the initiative from BP in schools in my constituency, such as Ancey catholic primary school and Seaford Head, to encourage girls and young women to study science, technology, engineering and maths to set them up for jobs in the future?

Nicky Morgan: I greatly welcome that initiative and I am delighted that BP has also pledged to work with schools under the Your Life campaign as part of a wider call to action for business to boost girls' participation in engineering and technology. As my hon. Friend says, inspiring young people—particularly girls—to choose STEM careers is a key challenge for our economy.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): The European Union recently decided to dictate to this country that we have too many women not in work who are staying at home to look after their children. Does the Minister think it wrong that the EU should stigmatise women who want to stay at home and work, and would she like to tell the European Union to butt out?

Mr Speaker: With particular reference to consideration of careers in all sectors of the economy—not that I wish to suggest that the hon. Gentleman is seeking to shoehorn

into this matter his own particular preoccupation with British approaches to the European Union. Far be it from me to suggest anything of the kind.

Nicky Morgan: I shall take your direction, Mr Speaker, and say that we are talking about choice of careers, and that choice of course extends to women staying at home and looking after their families. We want women to be able to make that choice, as well as fathers, as often it will be they who stay at home. I am tempted by my hon. Friend's invitation to speak to the European Union. I might change the language, but I think I will take him up on his offer.

Participation in Public Life

18. **Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to continue to ensure greater participation of women across all areas of public life. [900715]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinenage): Following the general election we now have the highest number of women in Parliament in our history, although we recognise that we still have further to go. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) who has been elected as the first chair of the Women and Equalities Select Committee. That Committee will play a pivotal role, and we are sure that it will take a close interest in increasing the number of women in public life.

Mims Davies: I thank my hon. Friend for that fine reply and look forward to seeing that work in action. I am proud to support the Government in their steps to increase the representation of women in Parliament and to give local communities more power to shape their future. What steps is the Minister taking to encourage women to stand for their local councils?

Caroline Dinenage: I welcome my hon. Friend to her place and as the new chair of the all-party group for women in Parliament. How can we get more women to be local councillors? I know that my hon. Friend served as a local councillor, as have many colleagues across the House, and she will know that women are under-represented on local councils, making up only 31.7% of members. That is why schemes such as the Be a Councillor campaign, which has been run by the Local Government Association since 2012, are important. We want to encourage new candidates from all walks of life to come forward and represent their local community.

Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): Despite the lauded progress that is apparently being made, only 26% of 110 Government posts are occupied by women. Does the Minister agree that it would be a fine time to follow the example of the Scottish Government and persuade the Prime Minister to create a gender-balanced Cabinet?

Caroline Dinenage: We have made enormous progress on that and a third of the Cabinet is now female. I do not like the idea of quotas—I may speak for myself on that—and I do not like anybody thinking that the women in Parliament or in our Cabinet are there only

because we took men out of the equation. We know that all women in Parliament and in our Cabinet are there under their own merits.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): What steps are the Government taking to promote mentoring and positive role models to encourage greater participation in public life across all sectors?

Caroline Dinenage: Mentoring can play a fantastic role in all areas of public life and business. The Meet a Mentor scheme across the UK is encouraging women into business, and I would like such schemes to be extended to other areas of public and political life.

Education (Equal Treatment)

19. **Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op):** What steps she is taking to ensure that there is equal treatment of women and girls in every school, college and university. [900716]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Nicky Morgan): The Equality Act 2010 prohibits educational institutions from treating girls as second class in the quality or choice of their education. My Department—the Department for Education—takes seriously its responsibilities under the Act. We consider equality when deciding whether to open new schools and they are held to account through a rigorous inspection once they are open.

Mr Sheerman: Does the Secretary of State not agree that there is a worrying tendency, certainly in some of the schools that I have visited up and down the country? I believe that separate is never equal, and separate education for girls in many faith schools is seen as important. I disagree. What does she think about it?

Nicky Morgan: In co-educational schools, our expectation is that boys and girls will be taught together. There may be limited practical exceptions to that, such as elements of sex and relationship education or PE, and there may be situations when there is a genuine educational benefit. I should also point out that, as we showed in Birmingham last year, we will always respond swiftly and decisively to tackle those unacceptable practices if we discover them.

Access to Jobs (Disabled People)

20. **Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab):** What assessment she has made of the effectiveness of Government policies in tackling disadvantages faced by disabled people in accessing jobs. [900717]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Justin Tomlinson): Some 3.2 million working-age disabled people are in work, an increase of 238,000 in the past year, which demonstrates the success of our policies. We are building on that by launching specialist employment ability support, expanding the Disability Confident campaign, extending Work Choice and expanding the use of our Access to Work mental health support service.

Ian Lavery: During the last Parliament, the Government callously closed the Remploy factories, casting thousands of disabled people out of work. Less than 50% of those

people are back in work—many grappling with short-time hours and low pay. What is the Minister doing to improve those horrendously unacceptable figures?

Justin Tomlinson: Some 1,190 of the 1,537 former employees have already found work; 875 are being supported by a personal case worker; and additional support will remain in place, as is the case for anybody with a disability. I celebrate the fact that 650 disabled people a day over the past 12 months were able to find work.

Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con): Does the Minister agree that we have a challenge in ensuring equality of opportunity in employment for people with mental health conditions, and that the Disability Confident campaign has made an excellent start? Will he consider attending the Disability Confident campaign roadshow that I plan to organise in my constituency?

Justin Tomlinson: My wife and I would be delighted to support my hon. Friend's event in North Devon. Mental health is incredibly important. We spent £42 million in the Budget on a series of pilot schemes for telephone, group and face-to-face support. We have provided funding for an extra 40,000 people to receive cognitive behavioural therapy. Through the Access to Work scheme, we are helping 1,500 people, with a 92% retention rate.

Women in Business

21. **Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con):** What steps she is taking to increase support for women in business. [900718]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinenage): With more women in work than ever before, it is vital that they are able to fulfil their potential in business. That is why we are making it easier to balance work and family life, and promoting flexible working and shared parental leave. From next autumn, almost 2 million families could benefit from a new tax-free childcare scheme worth up to £2,000 per child.

Nigel Huddleston: Will my hon. Friend join me in applauding the efforts being made by traditionally male-dominated business organisations such as the CBI and the Institute of Directors to champion gender equality in the workplace, and for their efforts to increase female membership?

Caroline Dinenage: We welcome the work of the Institute of Directors and others to increase female membership. I congratulate Lady Barbara Judge, who has recently been appointed as the institute's first female chair. It is vital that women are able to take their place in organisations that have traditionally been male dominated.

26. [900723] **Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con):** My constituency has many small businesses run by successful women, such as Louise Beard, who runs the Josefina gift shop, the winner of an Uckfield chamber of commerce business award, but we need to do more to encourage female entrepreneurs. It has been calculated that boosting

female entrepreneurship could add some £60 billion to our economy. Will the Minister therefore confirm that she is working with the Secretary of State for Education to ensure that girls at school who aspire to set up their own business later in life know that they will be supported in doing so?

Caroline Dinenege: Yes, I am sure my hon. Friend's local business will be very pleased with that fine plug. The Secretary of State for Education is nodding furiously at me, so I can reassure my hon. Friend that encouraging schoolgirls to become tomorrow's entrepreneurs is central to the work of the Department for Education. Last year, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education announced a new careers and enterprise company which, among other things, will develop an enterprise passport to help young people to develop their business skills.

Educational Inequalities (BAME Communities)

22. **Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to address educational inequalities experienced by BAME communities. [900719]

The Secretary of State for Education (Nicky Morgan): We are determined to ensure that every child, regardless of background, is given an education that allows them to fulfil their potential, and that includes an understanding of fundamental British values. We have invested more than £6 billion in the pupil premium to date. Disadvantaged pupil attainment has risen, including among poor pupils from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. Schools such as Whitefield infant school and nursery, which was recently rated as outstanding and which I visited with my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Andrew Stephenson), have been part of that transformation.

Imran Hussain: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. Education in Bradford is at the bottom of the league tables, but it is much worse for those from the BAME community or working-class backgrounds who have to overcome further hurdles. Does she believe that, in order to make a positive difference and address the problem of educational inequality, there needs to be a change in policy? Will she work to make Bradford a pilot for reinstating the highly successful city challenge, so that we can reduce educational inequality in the city?

Nicky Morgan: I am sorry that I missed the hon. Gentleman's maiden speech, which I think he gave in the Education and Adoption Bill debate. I understand that he expressed very clearly, as he has again today, his passion for good education for all students in Bradford. He wants exactly what I want, which is educational excellence everywhere in our country. We have some fantastic schools and fantastic teachers, but they are not yet everywhere. I take his point about the attainment of those from black and minority ethnic communities. It is possible, as we have seen in other schools, for them to achieve very highly. We have spent £36 million in pupil premium funding in the past year in Bradford. I am very happy to hear more from him about how he would like to take this forward.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State agree that to help address educational inequalities, more academics from BAME backgrounds should be present in our higher education system? Only 85 of the 18,500 professors in UK academia are black, and within that number only 17 are women. The statistics are equally damning in senior management roles, with only 15 black academics. What are the Government doing to boost BAME representation in our universities?

Nicky Morgan: The hon. Lady is absolutely right: there is a lack of diversity, and not just in higher education institutions; unfortunately, we see that in other parts of our society, too. Higher education is not within the Department for Education's remit, but I would be very happy to talk to the Minister responsible for higher education. The hon. Lady is also absolutely right to identify the importance of role models. I am sure she will join me in recognising that in the recent Queen's birthday honours list more than 51% of the recipients of honours were women.

Career Progression

23. **Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to ensure more women are appointed to boards and to help them progress in their chosen career. [900720]

The Secretary of State for Education (Nicky Morgan): The Government have been supporting Lord Davies to achieve the 25% target of women on boards of FTSE 100 companies by this year. We are improving transparency and providing more support to businesses, such as through the Women's Business Council, within and outside the corporate sector, to help them to build their talent pipeline and to utilise and develop all the talents in their female workforce.

Craig Tracey: It is great news that the Institute of Directors has appointed its first female chair in its 112-year history, but the fact remains that women still make up only about 20% of the membership of boards. Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the key ways to redress the balance is by encouraging and inspiring more female executives?

Nicky Morgan: I entirely agree. The latest published figures showed that 23.5% of FTSE 100 board appointments were female, but my hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that that relates particularly to progress made on non-executive directors, not on the executive pipeline. It is important to work with executive search firms, which is why in the previous Parliament the Government worked with them to develop their voluntary code of conduct. That has brought about real cultural change, but of course there is much more to do.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State mentions executive search firms. All too often, board appointments are made by executive search firms that do not actually conduct comprehensive searches but go for the same old candidates. What is she doing specifically to ensure gender balance on shortlists? Does she welcome the launch this evening of Harvey Nash's Inspire apprentice board programme?

Nicky Morgan: I am very happy to welcome the publication by Harvey Nash to which the hon. Lady has referred. She may be aware that in July last year the previous Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills launched the voluntary enhanced code for executive search firms, which built on the Lord Davies report of 2011. The aim was to recognise and reflect on those executive search firms that were already working to improve gender equality in British boardrooms. The hon. Lady is absolutely right to say that adverts often ask for the same old skills and do not recognise other experiences that women might have had that they could bring to the boardrooms of our top companies.

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP)
rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) has already contributed on Question 15, which we all savoured, but I am afraid that it is not possible for a Member to contribute twice in the same session. I urge the hon. Lady to store it and use it on a subsequent occasion. We look forward to that with eager anticipation. Meanwhile, I call Gloria de Piero.

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): May I take this opportunity to congratulate the England women's football team? Last night's result was gutting, but as captain Steph Houghton said, they can walk away with their heads held high—they did their country proud.

Since 2011, fewer than 10 women have been appointed to executive positions on FTSE 100 boards. Will the Secretary of State set a target?

Nicky Morgan: I entirely agree with the hon. Lady about the pride we all saw in the England women's football team playing last night. She invites me to set a target for executive appointments on boards. I am not a great fan of targets, but I agree that much more progress needs to be made.

Mr Speaker: I call Stephen Phillips.

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Question 11 plus Question 13, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Ah, the usual dexterity of a QC. We are grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman, who is also an Arsenal fan, so he has many reasons to celebrate.

Female Genital Mutilation

24. **Stephen Phillips** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): What steps she is taking to prevent girls being taken overseas to undergo female genital mutilation.
[900721]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Karen Bradley): Female genital mutilation is a barbaric act, for which there can be no excuse. It is child abuse. Girls may be particularly at risk during the summer holidays. We are introducing FGM protection orders on 17 July this year. An order could, for example, require a passport to be surrendered to prevent a girl from being taken abroad for FGM. Border Force and the police will also carry out joint operations over the summer, targeting outbound and inbound flights.

Stephen Phillips: We are coming to that time of year when girls are trafficked abroad for this barbaric practice to be undertaken. Does the Minister agree that it is critically important in this area to ensure that health care and safeguarding professionals have full and proper support to tackle FGM? What is she doing to ensure that that is the case this year?

Karen Bradley: My hon. and learned Friend makes a very good point. The Government recognise the importance of equipping those on the front line with the tools they need to tackle FGM—and that means across the board. The Department of Health has funded a £3 million FGM prevention programme to support NHS staff and the Department for Education has provided £2 million to support a national programme, backed by Barnardo's and the Local Government Association, that will create a highly specialised team of skilled social workers.

Family Courts (Equal Treatment)

25. **Mr Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight) (Con): What discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Justice on equal treatment of men and women in the family courts.
[900722]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinenage): Family law does not discriminate between men and women, and the family courts apply the law to men and women equally. Judges know that they must not discriminate on any grounds, including gender.

Mr Turner: The recent case involving a woman who ran away with her son to frustrate an order of the court is the tip of an enormous iceberg. Many children lose contact with their fathers each year, due to women willfully obstructing child arrangements orders. Will the Minister undertake research on the impact of that on the life chances of the children affected?

Caroline Dinenage: My hon. Friend speaks about an emotive subject, but the law changed last October and now requires the family court to presume that each parent's involvement will further the child's welfare unless there is evidence to the contrary. However, the child's welfare remains a paramount consideration for the court. Where either parent breaches a child arrangements order without a reasonable excuse, the court has the power to deal with it, including by imposing community sentences or even by treating the breach as a contempt of court, punishable by imprisonment or a fine.

Legal Aid (Domestic Violence)

27. **Angela Rayner** (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): What discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Justice on reviewing the eligibility test that victims of domestic violence must pass to obtain legal aid.
[900724]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinenage): Tackling domestic violence is a core priority for the Government. Following an early review of the system, we introduced a number of changes to make it easier for victims to gain access to legal aid. They include making

acceptable forms of evidence such as domestic violence protection orders, and making existing forms of evidence easier to acquire.

Angela Rayner: When criminal justice agencies fail to respond appropriately to domestic and sexual violence, women pay with their lives. What is the Government's response to the inquiry conducted by the all-party parliamentary group on domestic and sexual violence, which established that 89% of experts had found that women did not have access to justice? Were those experts wrong?

Caroline Dinéage: I shall be happy to give the hon. Lady a full response in writing, but I can tell her that the number of convictions has risen to its highest ever level under this Government. We will be reviewing the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, which transformed the legal aid landscape, and, as my right hon. Friend the Justice Secretary said last week, we will ensure that the very richest in our legal aid system do a little bit more.

STEM Careers

29. **Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to encourage more girls and women to take up careers in science, technology, engineering and maths. [900726]

The Secretary of State for Education (Nicky Morgan): I refer my hon. Friend to my earlier answers on this topic. I should add, however, that the Government support a STEM ambassadors programme involving a nationwide network of more than 30,000 volunteers employed by science, engineering and technical companies. They work with schools throughout the United Kingdom, and 40% of them are women.

Alan Mak: Oaklands Catholic school, which is in my constituency, is taking part in the Opening Doors pilot

project initiated by the Institute of Physics to tackle gender stereotyping in schools. Will my right hon. Friend update us on what the outcome of the project will be?

Nicky Morgan: I am delighted to say that the Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Caroline Dinéage), attended Oaklands. We are funding the Institute of Physics to pilot methods of addressing gender stereotyping, and the institute has enabled two regional networks of schools to work together on the project. A good practice guide will provide advice for schools on how to identify and address gender stereotyping.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Last but not least, I call Maggie Throup.

33. [900730] **Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): Since 2010, the number of female A-level entries has risen in all STEM subjects. As a former biomedical scientist, I think that that is fantastic news for the future of British industry. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that we continue to attract talented young women to STEM professions, and that females continue to study STEM subjects when they enter further education?

Nicky Morgan: I welcome my hon. Friend to the House. What has been interesting about this Question Time is the number of Members who have asked about inspiring young people, and girls in particular, to study STEM subjects. That is very encouraging. Given my hon. Friend's background, I hope that she will consider becoming a STEM ambassador, if she has not done so already, so that she can inspire the next generation.

As I have said, we support the Education and Employers Taskforce, whose Inspiring the Future programme enables volunteers to talk to young people in schools about possible future careers.

Business of the House

10.32 am

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House please give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling): Next week's business will be as follows.

MONDAY 6 JULY—Conclusion of consideration in Committee of the Scotland Bill.

TUESDAY 7 JULY—Opposition day (5th allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion; subject to be announced.

WEDNESDAY 8 JULY—My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will deliver his Budget statement.

THURSDAY 9 JULY—Continuation of the Budget debate.

FRIDAY 10 JULY—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 13 July will include the following.

MONDAY 13 JULY—Continuation of the Budget debate.

TUESDAY 14 JULY—Conclusion of the Budget debate; at 7pm, the House will be asked to agree all outstanding estimates.

WEDNESDAY 15 JULY—Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (Appropriation) Bill, followed by a debate on Standing Order changes relating to English votes for English laws.

THURSDAY 16 JULY—Matters to be raised before the forthcoming adjournment.

FRIDAY 17 JULY—The House will not be sitting.

Let me also inform the House that, in accordance with the Prime Minister's announcement on Monday, a minute's silence will be held throughout the parliamentary estate at midday tomorrow for Members and staff who wish to pay their respects following the dreadful events in Tunisia.

Ms Eagle: I thank the Leader of the House for announcing next week's business.

I commiserate with the England women's football team, who lost their World cup semi-final in the cruellest fashion last night after an heroic campaign. Does the Leader of the House agree that they did the country proud and that they have proved the worth of women's sport, which should finally be getting more resources and coverage? I also congratulate all hon. and right hon. Members who have been elected to Select Committees. They do an important job in the House scrutinising the actions of the Government and I look forward to them commencing this crucial work soon.

Next week the House will hear the Chancellor's second Budget in four months as he attempts to clear up the mess he inherited—from himself. After failing to deliver his promise to eliminate the deficit in the last Parliament, he now plans extreme spending cuts that will hit the poorest third of families hardest. According to experts, his planned cuts to social security will lead to a sharp rise in child poverty, so the Work and Pensions Secretary has decided to help him out by announcing that child poverty will no longer be defined by this Government as having too little money, and to avoid any potential for further embarrassment the Child Poverty Act 2010 is to

be repealed just as the cuts bite. So may we have a debate in Government time on what on earth the Prime Minister might have meant when he led Tory MPs into the Lobby to support the Child Poverty Act before the 2010 election?

This week the TransPennine Express revealed that, as well mobile phones, umbrellas, and even a bag of haggis, a 6-foot inflatable dinosaur was left on one of its trains. When it comes to the TransPennine Express, it seems the inflatable dinosaur is not the only thing that is full of hot air. In their manifesto the Tories promised to rebalance the economy and build what they called a "northern powerhouse". The Chancellor and the Transport Secretary then donned the highest of high-vis jackets and hard hats as they did a national photo-op tour of every project they claimed would benefit from their largesse. For good measure the Chancellor then posted a scaremongering tweet claiming Labour would cancel them. But just two months on, his northern powerhouse has become a northern power cut. He has pulled the plug himself, scrapping £2 billion of improvements on rail routes to the north that he had been posing in front of just weeks before. They have also paused the midland main line upgrade and their pledge to electrify the TransPennine route, potentially wasting hundreds of millions of pounds in the process. In fact, the only line that is now being electrified as far as I can see is the one that runs past the Prime Minister's house. Can the Leader of the House tell us why the Government cynically waited until after the election to reveal that their plans had been derailed, and may we have a debate on the fiasco of this Government's northern powerhouse project, which seems to be experiencing a Tory power cut?

Yesterday saw the publication of the Davies commission's report on airport expansion. The Prime Minister responded with his usual decisiveness; he dithered. He set up the airports commission to report back after the general election to hold his last Government together; now he is apparently allowing Tory MPs a free vote to keep this one together. After spending £20 million on this independent, expert advice, can the Leader of the House explain why even after the report's publication the Prime Minister still cannot decide? Is it because before 2010 he told a public meeting in Richmond, "No ifs, no buts, no third runway at Heathrow"?

If to govern is to choose, it is pretty clear that this Prime Minister is not governing: on airport expansion, we have a Prime Minister who is more concerned to put his party interest above the economic interests of the country; when it comes to negotiating in Europe, we see a Prime Minister pushed about by his Eurosceptic Back Benchers rather than acting in the best interests of his country; and when it comes to devolution and the important issue of English votes for English laws, this Prime Minister thinks only about how to manufacture a much larger majority for himself than the 12 he managed at the recent general election.

Finally, I can update the House on one of the Prime Minister's other key interests—something I gather he has not declared to the House. Before the 2010 election, in a moment of green enthusiasm, the Prime Minister bought a plot of land on the proposed site of the third runway and planted a tree on it. I can update the House that, just like his promise to lead the greenest Government ever, it has now withered and died.

Chris Grayling: I echo the words of the shadow Leader of the House about Select Committees: they are enormously important in holding government to account and in the effectiveness of this House. As I said last week, I have congratulated all those who were successfully elected to lead those Committees, and I congratulate all those who have subsequently been elected to serve on them. We will complete the process of forming them in the next few days and I imagine that most if not all will meet before the summer recess to plan their programme of scrutiny for the autumn.

The hon. Lady referred to this Government's economic record and the fact that we will have a Conservative—not a coalition—Budget next week. I am always baffled by the Opposition's approach to economic matters, but I would rather have our record on the economy than theirs. When they left office in 2010 unemployment was higher than when they took office in 1997; indeed I think that every single time the Labour party has been in power it has left office with unemployment higher than when it started. What it left in 2010 was an almighty mess, with an annual deficit comparable to that of Greece. We have brought the deficit back and restored stability to our economy, which is the fastest-growing in the western world, so I will take no lessons from the Opposition about economic management.

The hon. Lady referred to child poverty, which concerns all Members, but she will understand the limitations of a measure that means that, if we increased the old age pension, child poverty would increase. That cannot be a sensible statistical quirk. What matters in terms of child poverty and alleviating the challenge that deprived families face is education, helping them with their life chances and helping them to progress into work and advance in their career. It is not about raw numbers, which can create an entirely misleading situation. That is why my right hon. Friend the Work and Pensions Secretary is absolutely right to take the approach he has.

The hon. Lady mentions dinosaurs on trains, but we do not have to go as far as the Pennines to find them, as the Labour leadership hustings take place throughout the country. What we have heard this week from the Labour party, at Prime Minister's questions and in debates, is a party that has not moved on from the 1980s, so when Labour Members talk about dinosaurs they need to take a look in the mirror. That is why we are in government and they are not.

The hon. Lady talked about confusion in airports policy, but she may not have noticed the exchange that took place at a Labour mayoral hustings yesterday, when the right hon. Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan), who as far as I am aware has consistently supported a runway at Heathrow, suddenly announced that he no longer does; he now opposes it. I wonder why.

Finally, on the subject of what took place in Canada last night, we are all immensely proud, while disappointed by the result. Our women footballers did a tremendous job in Canada. They set an example to sportsmen and women, and I hope the hon. Lady is right about it encouraging more girls to take part in football and in sport generally. We are proud of them. Today, in this House, the Lionesses are still very much the pride of England.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): May I press my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to consider two-day debates on major issues that come

before the House? There is a good example today, where the Defence Secretary is going to bring to the House the possibility of reversing the vote on Syria from the previous Parliament. I have no doubt that the Executive will want to hear, in a big debate, the views from across the House before proceeding. Is it not a good example of one of the subjects—but only one—that would benefit from the House having two days to discuss big issues?

Chris Grayling: My right hon. Friend and I have spoken about that before, and I understand his point and the importance of ensuring that the House has the opportunity to debate big issues. We have a number of immensely important issues before us: the Budget next week and the debates on the Scotland and European referendum Bills. But as we get through the early stages of this Parliament and the parliamentary programme spreads out, I am very happy to continue to talk to him about it.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): May I, too, thank the Leader of the House for giving us next week's business? I shall start with a bit of consensus, as I sense a forlorn expression in the House at the fact that the English women's football team did not make it through to the final. I think I speak for all Members when I say it was a fantastic performance, which will encourage women into sport.

Monday is the last day for debating amendments to the Scotland Bill. Amendments accepted thus far: absolutely nil, zilch, zero—despite the fact that the Scottish Parliament, through its all-party devolution Committee, said the Bill had to be improved and the spirit of the Smith Commission met; that the House of Commons Library has huge reservations; and that 56 out of 59 Scottish MPs were elected to secure and achieve such an outcome.

This week, 98% of Scottish MPs voted to improve the Scotland Bill, but those improvements were voted down by English Members of Parliament. We are about to have a statement on English votes for English laws, but this seems to be about English votes for Scottish laws. The Leader of the House has to make sure that the Secretary of State comes to the House on Monday in a much more accommodating mood and that he listens to the voice of Scotland on these matters. I am not in the business of saving the Union, but Tory commentators in Scotland are saying that unless this matter is addressed, it will be as though we are being forced out. We have to have a better attitude from the Government on the way they deal with Scotland, and that has to start on Monday.

The Prime Minister hinted yesterday that he was going to revisit the reduction of the number of Members of Parliament. It will be interesting to see which of the new Tory turkeys votes for an extended Christmas. Besides that, perhaps we should start by thinking about the other place down the corridor. The plans for an additional 80 to 100 peers would make it an extraordinarily bloated and absurd place. Surely we could start by cutting the number of peers. Could the other place bring forward a measure to ensure that this House has a say in the appointment of peers to the House of Lords? Surely this House should have a say in who goes into the Lords.

The Defence Secretary has been going round the TV and radio studios this morning. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) was right to suggest

[Pete Wishart]

that there can be no move towards military action without a full debate and vote in this House. Can the Leader of the House assure me that will indeed be the case and that, if necessary—and with your permission, Mr Speaker—the House will be recalled if that decision needs to be taken during the recess?

Mr Speaker: Before the Leader of the House replies, I must say to the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) that the parliamentary rock band, MP4, was absolutely splendid in Speaker's House last night. Just in case any colleagues are unaware of this, I should also say that he is a dab hand on the keyboards.

Chris Grayling: You are absolutely right, Mr Speaker. One of the most compelling arguments against Scottish independence is that we would lose the hon. Gentleman from this House.

The hon. Gentleman asked about military action. The Prime Minister has done more than any of his predecessors to ensure that both Houses of Parliament are consulted on issues of that kind, and I see no reason why that would change in the future. These are serious matters on which Members of Parliament expect to be consulted and to express a view.

On the question of boundaries and the House of Lords, I would simply remind the hon. Gentleman that appointments to the House of Lords are made by the elected Prime Minister and independently vetted by an appointments panel. Ministers trying to get measures through the House of Lords quickly discover the level of expertise that is to be found in that Chamber. Peers bring in experience from all walks of life, and they scrutinise Bills and proposals with an intensity that is unrivalled.

The hon. Gentleman made a point about the Scotland Bill. We hear this point time and again from Scottish National party Members. They seem to want more and more, but they never actually implement or use the powers that they have. The Government are implementing the recommendations of the Smith commission. We are fulfilling the obligations that we made—[*Interruption.*] SNP Members might disagree, but independent assessments say we are implementing the Smith commission report, as we promised the people of Scotland we would. The hon. Gentleman talks about English MPs voting on the Scotland Bill, but I remind him that Scottish MPs will be able to vote on the proposals that I am going to make a statement on later this morning. This is a United Kingdom Parliament, and major constitutional changes will always be voted on by the Members of the United Kingdom Parliament.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned Conservative commentators in Scotland. I can assure him that, in the run-up to the elections next year, the Conservative party in Scotland will be making a case not only for sound right-wing policies—in contrast to what is being done by the present Scottish Administration—but for the Union.

Nicola Blackwood (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): I wish to associate myself with the arguments made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield

(Mr Mitchell). Clearly, four minutes is insufficient to address properly the most serious issues of the day. For example, although today's report by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary on child protection found pockets of excellence, it also reported worrying failures. It took three months to interview a man whose nine-year-old grandson accused him of rape. On another occasion, police and social workers agreed, without medical evidence, that the cause of vaginal bleeding in a four-year-old was eczema, despite allegations of sexual abuse against a family member. Overall, HMIC's findings are that too often responses to child abuse offences across eight forces have been inadequate and have underestimated the risks. Please may we have an urgent debate on this matter, because victims of child abuse have already been let down far too often by those who are charged with protecting them?

Chris Grayling: I pay the warmest of tributes to my hon. Friend for the work that she has done in this important area. She represents a city that has experienced some of the worst examples of child sex abuse. She and I have talked to some of those involved. The way in which she has dealt with this as a constituency MP has been absolutely exemplary. This is a matter that this House can, must and will come back to on a regular basis as we go through the process of investigating, while understanding and ensuring that such things can never happen again. There will be regular opportunities to raise the matter in the House, the next of which is when the Home Secretary appears before it in a few days' time. My hon. Friend and others must continue to raise this dreadful issue, because it must be cleared up and dealt with so that it never happens again.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): Recent events in Tunisia have illustrated once again the tragic effects of terrorism and created many more victims. We in Northern Ireland are acutely aware of the impact that that has on families and communities for decades afterwards. May we have a debate on what further help we can give to victims of terrorism and to communities, because we need to ensure that the help and support goes to those who really need it?

Chris Grayling: It is my hope that this afternoon's debate will provide an opportunity for Members from all parts of the House to address the international terrorist threat that we face. I will talk to my hon. Friends in the relevant Departments to see whether we can ensure that we return to the matter regularly. Northern Ireland has extensive and distressing experience of the consequences of terrorism. We all need to come together as a nation to support the families and victims of the most recent attacks in a way that helps them to recover from the ordeal.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): When will the Government respond to the five Presidents of the European Union institutions who have recently set out plans to accelerate progress towards controlling economies and tax systems and creating a euro Treasury? Do I take it that the Foreign Secretary and others would wish to rule out the United Kingdom joining this wild ride to political union?

Chris Grayling: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. I will ask the Foreign Secretary to reply to him directly. The likely consequence of the eurozone crisis is that we will see greater integration within the eurozone. It is therefore of paramount importance that this country can protect its own national interest, as we are outside the eurozone and have no intention of becoming part of it.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Leader of the House knows that the challenge that this country faces in raising productivity is an urgent one. We are nearly at the Budget. Is there time next week to raise the fact that being a highly skilled nation is the way to be a more productive nation? Rumours are circulating that further education colleges and adult education are for the axe in the Budget. Can we do anything in this House to stop that disgraceful move?

Chris Grayling: There will be four days of debate on the Budget to raise such issues. I remind the hon. Gentleman that it is the Government's goal to create 3 million apprenticeships during this Parliament. We have seen over the past five years how well different parts of the public sector have adapted to the straitened financial times, while managing to deliver improved services.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): As someone who is looking forward to serving on the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, may I seek my right hon. Friend's assurance that the deliberations and recommendations of the Committee will always receive responses from the Government? In the last Session, none of them did. For example, may we have a guarantee that, were the Committee to consider the role of the House of Lords on Scottish affairs, the Government would respond to the recommendations?

Chris Grayling: It is always important that the Government respond to reports from any Select Committee and, during this Parliament, I will certainly expect Ministers to ensure that that takes place.

Mr Douglas Carswell (Clacton) (UKIP): Will my right hon. Friend allow a full and comprehensive debate on the future of Network Rail? In January, UKIP MPs—[*Interruption.*] Yes, MPs. We raised concerns in Westminster Hall about Network Rail's corporate governance structure. The Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Devizes (Claire Perry), dismissed our ideas, giving assurances that turned out to be rather hollow. May we now hold that Minister to account at the Dispatch Box for her failure?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman refers to there being UKIP MPs in January, and I pay tribute to him for stoically keeping a solitary flag flying in this Chamber. When the issue arose a few days ago, the Secretary of State for Transport made an extensive statement and he will return to the House for questions shortly. Although there are no UKIP Opposition days, there are of course opportunities to raise these matters in Westminster Hall, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will do so.

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): The Leader of the House might be aware that, since yesterday, Twickenham residents have been extremely concerned

about the Davies report. They are very concerned at the thought of a third runway and 250,000 more flights over their homes. Will he make time for a debate on the report before the Government make their decision?

Chris Grayling: I know how important the issue is to my hon. Friend and her constituents, and I can assure her that the Government will study the report very carefully before taking a decision. There will be a number of opportunities to question Ministers about it. She will, of course, understand that the Government must do what we believe to be in the interests of the country, but we will seek to be as sensitive as possible in reaching this difficult decision.

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): In the previous Parliament, the Government said that they wanted to ban wild animals in circuses and to produce a Green Paper on graduated licensing for young drivers, but neither matter was progressed. Has the Leader of the House been contacted by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs or the Department for Transport to suggest that either or both measures will be introduced in this Session?

Chris Grayling: I have not had discussions about those two measures. They are commitments that we intend to fulfil when time permits. We have a packed legislative programme with important changes for this country, but I know that the hon. Gentleman's comments will have been noted by the Ministers in those Departments.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): May we have a statement on the Central African Republic and its conflict? It is a country on which the United Kingdom places great importance and to which we give great assistance, despite it being largely forgotten across the world?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point. As a result of many of the challenges faced in sub-Saharan Africa, a wave of migration across the Mediterranean is putting enormous pressures on southern European states. This is one issue I would expect to be raised in the debate this afternoon and I encourage him to take part.

Simon Danczuk (Rochdale) (Lab): The Director of Public Prosecutions has made a number of high-profile mistakes during her tenure, including on female genital mutilation and the trial of journalists. Following the decision to overturn her judgment in the Lord Janner case, may we have a statement on whether the Government continue to have full and complete confidence in the DPP?

Chris Grayling: We have just had questions to the Attorney General and I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman raised the matter then. The DPP is an independent figure, and rightly so. There have been some discussions about recent decisions, but it is important that we keep the process of deciding prosecutions independent of the political process to ensure its integrity.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): May we have a debate on sentencing for terrorist offenders? Since the horrific events in Tunisia, the Prime Minister has rightly focused on clamping down on terrorism around the world and

[Philip Davies]

punishing properly those people who want to avoid our way of life. I asked a written question about the average prison sentence served by people convicted of terrorist offences over the past 10 years and the answer was 23 months. Many of my constituents would be appalled that people convicted of such offences are getting such derisory prison sentences. May we have a debate so that this House can make clear what we think the sentences should be for such offences?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Shortly before the general election, in my previous role as Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, I lifted the limit of 10 years on a large number of terrorist offences to ensure that if a court deemed somebody to be highly dangerous, it could impose a life sentence, even for a lesser offence in the terrorism arena. I hope and believe that the courts have all the powers that they need to ensure that dangerous people are put away for a long time, and I hope and expect that judges will use those powers.

Robert Ffello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the register. Although we had a statement recently from the Home Secretary about the situation in Calais, it is getting worse. Drivers are reporting that they are being beaten up in their cabs. Only a couple of days ago, a driver was severely assaulted by four individuals with an iron bar. Drivers are reporting that they are being threatened with guns and knives. I understand that the French police, gendarmerie and other services are responding with a Gallic shrug. That is not good enough. We need a debate in Government time on this incredibly serious issue before somebody is killed.

Chris Grayling: This is clearly a matter of great importance. The Government are watching the situation closely. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is playing an active role in co-ordinating our response to the problems. The Home Secretary will be before this House next week and the hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to ask questions then. From the point of view of this country, the issue needs to be resolved quickly to keep the trade flows moving, to protect the welfare of the drivers, and to avoid the migrant situation becoming worse.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I would like to accommodate colleagues, but I express the hope that the next statement will start at or very close to 11.30, so there is a premium on extreme brevity. Questions without preamble would be appreciated.

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to Sir Nicholas Winton and the work that he did, saving hundreds of Jewish children's lives? Will my right hon. Friend remind the House of the role of this country in saving the lives of 10,000 Jewish children prior to world war two?

Chris Grayling: I gladly do that. Sir Nicholas Winton was a great figure at a difficult time for this country and for Europe. He is one of a small number of people who

performed heroic acts in saving the lives of a large number of people. His memory should always be cherished in this country.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): I noticed that last year the Minister ran out of time so this question could not be answered. May we have a statement giving information on which recruitment agencies have received the largest amount of money from the Ministry of Defence and its executive agencies and bodies over the past five years?

Chris Grayling: The next Defence questions are on Monday 13 July. If the hon. Lady puts in an early request, I am sure she will be able to put that question directly to Ministers.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): We had the good news this week that 4G is to be rolled out across Dartmoor and Exmoor. The bad news is that the second phase of this work by the BT monopoly has gone the way of the dodo in Somerset and Devon. This is happening not just there, but across Great Britain. I support the view of my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) that we need Government time in this place to debate the entire infrastructure and the monopoly that BT is holding over us.

Chris Grayling: I know that this is a matter of great concern to a number of colleagues. It was debated in Westminster Hall last week. There will be an opportunity to question Ministers in the House next Thursday. It is clearly the expectation of the Government and the country that BT and the other organisations involved will make rapid progress towards ensuring that we have a state of the art 21st century network, without gaps that leave parts of our country behind.

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): May we have a debate on broadcasting and, in particular, Welsh language broadcasting and the future of S4C? There are concerns across Wales that funding from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the BBC may be cut over the next two years.

Chris Grayling: Of course, it is important to ensure that the Welsh language and Welsh language broadcasting are able to continue effectively. There will be an opportunity at DCMS questions next week for the hon. Gentleman to seek confirmation from Ministers that they will make sure that happens.

Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): The pupils of Morley primary school in my constituency have to cross the busy A608 twice a day because there is nowhere outside the school where they can be dropped off. The county council denies that there is a problem, but cars and lorries are speeding through the lights. A child will die soon unless something is done. May we have a debate on road safety outside schools?

Chris Grayling: It is important that local authorities identify and solve such problems before there is an unpleasant accident, rather than afterwards—unfortunately, the latter is often the case, rather than the former. I encourage my hon. Friend to apply for a Westminster

Hall debate or an end-of-day Adjournment debate to raise the matter. Knowing her reputation as an effective constituency MP, I am sure that she is putting immense pressure on her local authority to ensure that the problem is solved.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): My constituency has many problems with illegal horse grazing on public and private land. The number of animals being literally dumped is so large that the local authority is having to create temporary paddocks, with obvious disruption for local residents. May we have a debate on how the Government can assist local authorities in dealing with this rising phenomenon?

Chris Grayling: That problem affects many of our constituencies; I have certainly experienced it in mine, as have a number of colleagues. It has prompted many concerns about animal welfare. I will ensure that the hon. Gentleman's concerns are drawn to the attention of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I encourage him to bring the matter forward in an Adjournment debate or in questions to ensure that it is on the desks of Ministers and civil servants.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Days after the Chancellor's Budget, world Finance Ministers will meet in Ethiopia to discuss financing for the new sustainable development goals. When will the Government announce their delegation to that conference, and how soon afterwards can we expect a statement on the outcome?

Chris Grayling: The Secretary of State for International Development will be in the House next Wednesday for questions. That is obviously an important area. As a nation, we have taken the lead in ensuring that we continue to support the existing development goals and those that we will have in future. The hon. Gentleman will no doubt use that opportunity to question her on them.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Barclays bank in Odiham in my constituency is going to be closed. It follows the closure of Barclays in Yateley and NatWest in Hartley Wintney before my time here. It is not unique to those two banks, because Lloyds and HSBC are also closing branches across the country. May we have a debate on bank closures in rural areas, because the last-bank-in-town policy is not fit for purpose and is leading to unnecessary closures?

Chris Grayling: I am very aware of what is happening, because two branches in my constituency are being closed. Mine is a relatively urban area, so the impact is less than it would be in a rural area, but none the less it has an impact on local businesses and people. I hope that the banks will think about that carefully and ensure that customers in those places have access to services, particularly those who do not use internet banking. My hon. Friend makes an important point. I suggest that he talks with the new Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, because this is an obvious subject for one of the next generation of Thursday afternoon debates.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): May we have a statement on the roadworks on the M6, particularly the closure of the slip road at junction 9? Nobody seems to be working on it, or under it. I have written to Highways England, the Secretary of State for Transport and the council. Will the Leader of the House please tell me who is in charge?

Mr Speaker: It is heartening to know that nobody is working under it.

Chris Grayling: It is immensely frustrating for motorists when they see nothing happening. I am sure that the Secretary of State and other Ministers will take note of the hon. Lady's remarks, and I will ensure that they are passed on to them. They will be in the House for questions in about 10 days' time.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): Corfe Mullen, Wimborne and Merley and Bearwood are three important areas in my constituency. Each is protected by the green belt. What they have in common is that the green belt is under threat there and in Purbeck. Will my right hon. Friend make time for an urgent debate on the matter to ensure that our green belt is protected and that Dorset remains a special place to live, work and visit?

Chris Grayling: Many of us are concerned about ensuring that the green belt is protected. Indeed, during the general election campaign the Prime Minister clearly stressed his commitment to maintaining and supporting the green belt. That is immensely important. We face development pressures and have to make additional provision for housing in this country, but that must not be at the expense of the character of the areas we live in and represent. I suggest that the matter is an obvious candidate for the Backbench Business Committee or a 90-minute Westminster Hall debate, because I suspect that many colleagues would like to speak about it.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): On Tuesday, when using English and Welsh MPs to vote down proposed amendments to the Scotland Bill, the Scottish Secretary indicated that there will be a further review of the proposals. When will he make a statement indicating which amendments will be reviewed, the timescales for doing so, and how consensus and common sense can be achieved on this?

Chris Grayling: I do understand the position of the Scottish nationalists—they wish that we did not have a United Kingdom Parliament, but we do, and on matters of constitutional change, we all vote. When we come to a Wales Bill, Scottish MPs will be able to vote on that. We take these decisions collectively as one United Kingdom, and I hope that never changes.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on Queen Elizabeth II becoming our longest reigning monarch on 9 September, the value of the monarchy, and how we might celebrate these events?

Chris Grayling: I very much share the sentiments of my hon. Friend. We are, as a nation, immensely proud of our Queen. I have had the enormous honour, first as

[Chris Grayling]

Lord Chancellor and now as Lord President of the Council, of working with the Queen over the past three years. She is a fantastic sovereign. I have no doubt that the country will want to mark the occasion appropriately. However, it should be marked in a way that she wants, and so it will be very much for the palace to indicate how she would like that to happen.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): Following privatisation of search and rescue, RAF Valley will be closing down its search and rescue location. That service was fit enough for a prince to train there. May we have a debate in Government time so that we can scrutinise the costs of transfer and future delivery of search and rescue? This is a very important issue that we did not have time to deal with in the previous Parliament.

Chris Grayling: I am sure that Ministry of Defence Ministers will have heard what the hon. Gentleman has said. Change is always difficult, particularly when it affects communities. Defence Ministers will be in the House in 10 days' time. He is also able to requisition an Adjournment debate to discuss this with Defence Ministers—[*Interruption*]—or Transport Ministers, and I am sure he will do so.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Last week was the first international day celebrating yoga, and 192 of 193 members of the United Nations joined in with those celebrations. I am pleased to say that the Prime Minister gave a strong message of support. There are clear health benefits to practising yoga, which might be introduced ahead of Prime Minister's Question Time on a Wednesday. Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate or a statement in which we can extol the virtues of practising yoga?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend has already done that very effectively. We wait with interest to see him putting his advocacy into action in the Tea Room afterwards.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop) was, on my suggestion, given a Christmas present by his brother of a book on yoga, but to date there is no evidence that he has read the first chapter.

Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP): Exploration in the North sea is at its lowest level for decades. Will the Chancellor bring forward in next week's Budget proposals to incentivise exploration for oil and gas to boost production and to protect employment?

Chris Grayling: As a Government we understand very clearly the importance of the North sea to the economy not only of north-east Scotland but the whole of Scotland. I have no doubt that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is listening carefully to representations from the hon. Gentleman's party and other people in Scotland, and from the energy industry. We will of course do everything we can to ensure that it has a strong future. I remind him, though, that this is a classic example of why the financial plans of the Scottish National party were so utterly illiterate, because had it secured independence

and the oil price had then collapsed, its putative new Government would have been bankrupt. This is why we need to be part of one United Kingdom.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): I might take up a bit of that yoga myself to calm me down every time I receive a letter from a constituent relating to rip-off fines in private car parks. Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Minister in charge to make a statement about what he is going to do to rein in these abuses?

Chris Grayling: A recent court case ruled that some of these fines are excessive and not legally enforceable, so it is now, first and foremost, for the private companies to get their legal act together. I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend the Transport Secretary will take note of what my hon. Friend says, and if the necessary action does not happen, we will have to look at what else needs to be done.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): A report this week showed that Bradford schools are missing vital targets to improve education standards across the city, and I know that that is also happening in the constituencies of several other right hon. and hon. Members. Could we therefore have a debate about reinstating the widely successful city challenge?

Chris Grayling: Inadequate education standards are never acceptable, wherever they may be, and we need to drive to improve things. That is one of the goals of the Education and Adoption Bill, which is before the House at the moment. I ask the hon. Gentleman to work with his colleagues to change their minds about some of the initiatives we have put in place, such as free schools, which are designed to ensure that standards are improved right across the country.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): Yesterday, Derbyshire County Council announced that it is planning to make further cuts to community transport, which will have a significant negative impact on a number of my constituents in Erewash, many of whom depend on it as a lifeline to the outside world. With that in mind, will my right hon. Friend consider holding an urgent debate to ensure that local authorities are making adequate provision for such vital community services?

Chris Grayling: I understand my hon. Friend's point. She is already doing an excellent job of representing her constituents as their newly elected MP. There will be an opportunity to raise local government issues in a Westminster Hall debate next Thursday afternoon, so she might consider raising this point then.

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Yesterday's extremely important Adjournment debate was on the effect of corruption on economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa, a critical issue that affects the security of this country. It is precisely the sort of issue that deserves two days of debate and I therefore wish to associate myself with the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell). Will the Leader of the House say more about how the Executive can introduce proposals to ensure that this House has a proper opportunity to debate all important issues over a two-day period, if necessary?

Chris Grayling: I have a lot of sympathy for what my hon. and learned Friend says. This is an important issue and I hope he will address it in today's debate. He will understand that this House's workload early in this Parliament is pretty intense and that about half the time available for debate is already allocated to the Backbench Business Committee and the Opposition parties, so there is perhaps less flexibility than we might wish to do what he requires. However, there is nothing to prevent the Backbench Business Committee from seeking to work with us to provide precisely that kind of opportunity.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): Could a Minister come to the Dispatch Box to explain what the Government are doing to prevent litigants in person pursuing vexatious legal cases in civil courts when they have already been struck out of criminal courts?

Chris Grayling: Everyone does and should have access to the law, so to place a hurdle in front of them before they arrive is not the right thing to do. It is very much my hope that, if a case is vexatious, the judge taking an initial look at it will rule it out and not hear it because it has no grounding.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): My constituents get excuses from Southeastern Trains that delays and cancellations are due to the wrong type of ice, the wrong type of leaves, the wrong type of rain and now the wrong type of heat. Given the amount of money that goes to these train operators, could we please have a debate in Government time about the dysfunctional nature of the London commuter train services and why, ironically, London Overground, which is run by the Mayor, seems remarkably free of such surprising obstacles?

Chris Grayling: I very much echo my hon. Friend's point. Yes, it has been a hot week, but that is not an excuse for the train service to disintegrate. Both yesterday morning and this morning, the South West Trains service that I use to come in turned from an eight-coach train into a four-coach train, which was absolutely packed. Indeed, yesterday it could not even stop at all the stations on the way. My message to the train companies is to spot the weather forecast coming up and to try to make sure that they can maintain their services even when it is a bit challenging on the weather front.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): I have now received a response from the BBC to my letter asking it to use the term "Daesh" rather than "so-called Islamic State," but it is not worth the paper it is written on. It says that using the word "Daesh" would breach its impartiality rules, which is the most bizarre logic I have seen. Given the Prime Minister's response to me yesterday that he is happy for people to use "Daesh", could we have an urgent debate on the Floor of the House about the conduct and behaviour of the BBC?

Chris Grayling: I commend my hon. Friend on the work he has done in this area. I must say that my view of what impartiality means is different from that of the BBC. During the second world war, the BBC was a beacon of fact; it was not expected to be impartial about Britain and Germany. Today, it should be a beacon of fact; it is not expected to be impartial about threats to the security and safety and to the lives and limbs of the people of this nation.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): Many local authorities have followed the spirit of the Localism Act 2011 by responding to the need for neighbourhood and local plans, but there are unlikely to be neighbourhood or local plans in my constituency of Eastleigh until November next year. May I call for a debate on the failure of local government correctly to create local plans and properly to protect the plans for their communities?

Chris Grayling: I have an awful lot of sympathy with what my hon. Friend says, and I hope that she will continue to do an effective job in holding Eastleigh Borough Council's feet to the fire over this issue. It is absolutely shocking that only about one in five local authorities have updated their local plans since the new guidelines came into effect, and that a majority of councils still do not have a plan. It is not possible for them to provide proper protection for the areas they represent without getting on and delivering the plans that will give local people the control they need.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Given the exchanges that we have just heard about the BBC, I guess it is not surprising that my private Member's Bill to privatise the BBC, which received a formal First Reading on Monday, is gaining enormous support. Will the Leader of the House arrange a debate on the BBC?

Chris Grayling: By the sound of it, my hon. Friend's Bill will provide the opportunity for just such a debate, in which a number of Members from both sides of the House with views about the future of the BBC can express their views. It will of course be a very live issue during the next couple of years as we move towards the renewal of the charter. I know that those with strong feelings will want to make their views heard, and we will make sure that there are opportunities for them to be heard.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Will the Leader of the House name the independent assessments which he says have confirmed that the Government are implementing the Smith commission?

Chris Grayling: I will certainly ask the Scottish Secretary to do so for the hon. Lady.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Prior to the election, my constituents heard that a new enterprise zone would be established in Corby. Given that other areas have had the same pledge, may we have a statement setting out the next steps, because we really need these new jobs and this new investment?

Chris Grayling: I hear what my hon. Friend says. I will make sure that the relevant Treasury Ministers, who I believe are taking the lead on enterprise zones, respond to him in the light of his comments. I commend him for the work he is doing—he has already proved to be an excellent champion for Corby—and I am sure that he will continue that work and succeed in his objectives.

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): Before the election, the Government launched a consultation on the decriminalisation of inadvertent single dispensing errors by pharmacists, which can lead to their going to prison. May we have a debate or a statement from the Secretary of State for Health to tell us exactly where all that has got to?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is very important that we in this country do not criminalise people for making honest mistakes. We criminalise when there is wilful negligence, but not when people make errors in the course of busy jobs. Health questions is next week, and I suggest that he raises that matter directly with the Secretary of State when he is in the House.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): This year marks the 120th anniversary of the sport of rugby league. May we have a debate on the contribution made by the sport, particularly in the north of England? Will the Leader of the House join me in the 120-mile walk, or in part of it, that is taking place this summer?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend represents the great northern town of Warrington. I once stood there as a candidate, and I visited the local rugby league team to watch it play. I want to take this opportunity to wish the English rugby league team the very best when it takes part in this autumn's world cup. I also wish all those involved in promoting the anniversary—including those going on the walk in a few weeks' time—the very best in celebrating a sport that has been and continues to be a really important part of our northern communities.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Does the Leader of the House share my concern that the business of the House is being delayed by Divisions taking an unnecessarily long time? It seems to me that the primary cause is the unequal length of the alphabetical queues in the voting Lobbies. A quick analysis shows that there are 199 Members in the N to Z queue and 236 in the G to M queue. Given that the Leader of the House is a G and the Chief Whip is an H, will they ensure that by the time we come back in September, the queue lengths have been equalised? The quickest and easiest way to do that would be to consign the 25 Members whose surname begins with "Mc" to the outer darkness of the N to Z queue.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman really is a most legendary anorak.

Chris Grayling: I very much value my Scottish colleagues in this Union Parliament, and I would not wish to consign them to any outer darkness.

I have every sympathy with the point that my hon. Friend makes, and when the House of Commons Commission starts meeting I intend to ask officials to look at it. As a G who stands in the queue while the other queues disappear, I have an awful lot of sympathy with him.

English Votes on English Laws

11.26 am

The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the Government's plans to provide fairness for England in our constitutional arrangements.

I am proud to be a Minister in a Conservative and Unionist Government. As an Administration we are passionate supporters of the Union, and we are taking a whole range of measures designed to strengthen it and secure its future. To achieve that goal, we are committed to delivering a balanced and fair constitutional settlement for all the people of the United Kingdom.

One of the first things that the Government did after the election was to introduce legislation to give new powers to Scotland, with legislation devolving more powers to Wales and Northern Ireland following close behind. We are giving the people of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland that stronger voice within the Union, and it is only right and fair that we do likewise for England. With the Scotland Bill already at Committee stage, it is important to make a start on that process now.

In 1977, when the then Labour Government first proposed a devolved assembly in Edinburgh, the veteran Labour MP Tam Dalyell posed what has become the great unanswered question of our constitutional arrangements: why was it right that after devolution English MPs would lose the right to vote on key issues affecting his constituency in West Lothian, while he would continue to vote on those same issues in their constituencies? Since devolution was introduced in the 1990s, the West Lothian question has been very real and has remained unanswered.

It is right that we strengthen our Union by extending the powers of the devolved Assemblies, but it is also right that we now ensure real fairness in our constitutional arrangements. It is that process that we will begin today. Our proposals build on careful consideration and debate. I am indebted to my predecessor as Leader of the House, William Hague, and Sir William McKay and his commission, for their work, and to colleagues from throughout the House who have contributed their views and expertise.

There are different views and concerns about these matters in the House. The proposals that I am setting out today are designed to make a real start in addressing those concerns. They will give English MPs, and in some cases English and Welsh MPs, a power of veto to prevent any measure from being imposed on their constituents against their wishes. No law affecting England alone will be able to be passed without the consent of English MPs. They will also give English MPs a power of veto over secondary legislation and a range of English public spending motions on matters that affect England only, and they will give the decisive vote on tax measures to MPs whose constituents are affected by those changes, once further planned devolution to Scotland takes place.

Many laws are of course common to England and Wales, which share a legal jurisdiction. The devolution settlements in Northern Ireland and Scotland are much broader than in Wales, where key areas like policing and justice are not devolved. So it is right that we extend the

principle to Wales, too: no English and Welsh law will be made on matters devolved to Scotland or Northern Ireland without the agreement of English and Welsh MPs.

Today I am circulating an explanatory note for Members to set out how the new procedure works, but in summary it is this: to establish whether a matter is covered by this new procedure, you, Mr Speaker, will be asked to certify whether a Bill, or elements of it, are devolved in Scotland, Northern Ireland or Wales, and are therefore to be treated as England only. It is very much like the way that you currently certify whether a matter is a financial one, and therefore a matter for the Commons only.

In considering such measures, we have endeavoured, where possible, to keep our proposed new process as close as possible to existing parliamentary procedures, with all Members from across the United Kingdom continuing to vote on Second Reading, in most Committees, on Report and Third Reading, and when considering Lords amendments. The key difference is that our plans provide for an English veto at different stages in the process.

There will be new stage of parliamentary consideration before Third Reading, in which English, or English and Welsh MPs will be asked to accept or veto English and Welsh provisions that meet that devolution test. For England-only bills, Committee-stage consideration will be undertaken by English MPs. That will give them a voice in shaping the content of laws that affect their constituents. All other Committees will remain unchanged.

There will be no changes to procedures in the House of Lords, which will retain the right to scrutinise and amend Bills as it does now. The two Houses will continue to agree the text of Bills, as now, through the exchange of messages, or ping-pong. The only difference is that there will be an additional veto when Lords amendments are considered in the Commons. All Members of Parliament will vote on them, but where those amendments affect England, or England and Wales only, they will need the support of a “double majority” in the House of Commons, with both English and UK MPs needing to support an England-only amendment for it to pass.

That new “double majority” system will use a new system for recording votes in the Division Lobby. In future, votes will be recorded on tablet computers, so that it will be possible to give the Tellers an immediate tally of whether a measure has a majority of English MPs as well. I am grateful to the Clerks who have arranged a demonstration for Members of the new double-majority voting system that forms part of the Government’s proposals. It can be viewed in the Lobby between 1 and 2 pm today.

Much of the important law making that we do in this House is through means other than full programme Bills. Other key votes determining the distribution of spending will also be covered by those changes, such as on the revenue support grant in England and police grants in England and Wales. Overall spending levels will remain a matter for the whole House.

The rules governing the votes and procedures that I have described are set out in the Standing Orders of this House, and we propose to make English votes a reality through changes to those. We will table a motion in the coming days, but the text of the changes that we propose

to the Standing Orders will be made available to Members in the Vote Office after this statement, and published on gov.uk.

Explanatory notes and a guide to the process will also be made available to ensure that Members and all those with an interest have the full details of what we propose. In addition to today’s statement, there will be a further opportunity to consider the proposals when they are placed before the House of Commons for full debate and decision shortly before the summer recess—as I indicated earlier, that will be on 15 July.

There will, of course, be views about the operation of the proposals in practice, and I inform the House that I have written to the newly re-elected Chair of the Procedure Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), to signal that I intend to invite his Committee to undertake a technical assessment of the operation of the new rules. We will also involve Members on all sides of the House in assessing the new system and what else we might need to do to strengthen fairness in our constitutional arrangements. I see today’s announcement as an important first step in getting that right, and we will hold a review of the new process once the first Bills subject to it have reached Royal Assent next year. There will be a clear opportunity to assess the workings of the new rules, and consider whether and in what ways they should be adapted for the future.

Today we are answering the West Lothian question and recognising the voice of England in our great union of nations. This change is only a part of the wider devolution package, but it is a vital next step in ensuring that our constitutional settlement is fair and fit for the future. I commend this statement to the House.

11.34 am

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for giving me, earlier this morning, advance sight of his statement and the draft procedural amendments he proposes.

The Leader of the House has announced in his statement the Government’s intention to rush ahead with controversial and complex changes to the procedures of this House, in an effort to ensure provision of what he likes to call English votes for English laws. The Official Opposition recognise that, in the light of the ongoing deepening of devolution in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, it is important for the views of English MPs to be expressed clearly on English matters, but we believe such changes would best be achieved by proper consultation and an attempt to reach cross-party agreement.

I am disappointed but not surprised that the Government have made no such attempt, and that they intend to rush the procedural changes through the House in the next two weeks, in a time-limited debate to change our Standing Orders. That is no way to make profound constitutional change. It is an outrage that the Government believe it is. The Opposition consider that the issue should have been properly dealt with as part of a constitutional convention to examine how our country is governed in a much more profound and holistic way than the rushed and partisan changes the right hon. Gentleman has cobbled together and put before us today. The proposals are complex and much more time will be needed to interrogate their effects, and the effect they will have in practice on our procedures in the House.

[Ms Angela Eagle]

An initial impression points to plenty of opportunities for procedural chaos, and I have some early observations, questions and profound worries.

The Leader of the House appears to have gone out of his way to ignore both the warnings and the recommendations of the McKay report, which his Government commissioned. Why has he done that? The creation of a veto rather than a voice for English MPs on England-only Bills, and on parts of other Bills, statements and statutory instruments, appears to go much further than the McKay commission envisaged in its 2013 report. Again, why has he decided to do that?

The decision to include an unprecedented double majority requirement for some Lords amendments—English MPs will get two votes and other MPs will get one—goes much further than the McKay report, which suggested a double count but no English veto. Is it not ironic that, just as the Labour party moves to one person, one vote for its leadership election, the Tory party decides to force the House to adopt multiple votes, but only for some MPs? Perhaps the Leader of the House is much more worried than he is letting on about losing important votes in the Lords.

Will the Leader of the House explain how his proposals avoid creating two classes of MPs in the House, which McKay cautioned strongly against? How does that square with the report's recommendation that

“after due provision has been made for”

England-only

“views...to be heard and taken into account, the UK majority should prevail, not least...to retain the UK Government's accountability at election time for decision-making during its time in office”?

Can the Leader of the House explain how his plans fulfil the very strong view expressed in the McKay report that we need to address feelings in England without provoking an adverse reaction outside England? Judging by the reaction in the Chamber today, he has certainly failed that test.

The proposals risk the Union rather than save it. As a self-proclaimed Unionist, why is the Leader of the House in such a rush to enact this partisan proposal that he has not even bothered to consult on, not least with the Procedure Committee? The Leader of the House is playing with fire. Why is he being so reckless? It is hard not to conclude that the proposals are not an attempt to address the West Lothian question, but rather a cynical attempt by a Government with an overall majority of just 12 to use procedural trickery to manufacture themselves a very much larger one.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady talks about rushing ahead. The West Lothian question has existed for 20 years. In 13 years of government, Labour did nothing to address it. This is something we worked on carefully in Opposition. It was a pledge in our manifesto. Last year, the former Leader of the House, William Hague, wrote to the acting leader of the Labour party inviting her to take part in cross-party talks on this very issue. Labour did not respond to that invitation, so I will take no lessons from Labour about an absence of cross-party discussion. The Labour party did not want to be involved, so we have gone ahead on righting this wrong without it.

We need to move ahead now, alongside devolution. We are delivering more powers to Scotland. We will deliver more powers to Wales. It is right that we now address the issue of fairness for England too. The hon. Lady talked about the time needed to assess to the effects. That is precisely why I have written to the Chairman of the Procedure Committee asking him to review this in action over the next 12 months and why I have said we will review its operation in 12 months' time.

The hon. Lady said she expected a voice not a veto, but what is a voice? Surely this is a simple premise. It is not right that a Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish MP should be able to decide what happens on education in my constituency, whereas I have no say whatever the other way around. I say to the Scottish nationalists and the Labour party that I think most of their constituents would judge that simple proposition as fair as well. Matters relating to schools and education in Scotland are decided in Holyrood in the Scottish Parliament. Why is it wrong for English Members of Parliament to have the ultimate say in what happens to schools in their constituency?

The hon. Lady talked about English MPs having two votes. This is not going to work like that. Everyone will walk through that same Division Lobby side by side. It is simply that an electronic system will enable us to establish in this House whether a vote is carried by both the whole House and by a majority of the MPs affected when the territorial extent of a measure is limited to either England, or to England and Wales. Again, why is that the wrong thing to do?

The hon. Lady talks about two classes of MP. The West Lothian question created two classes of MP. We are trying to restore fairness to the system. There is a central question for the Labour party. The Labour party is now a party of England and Wales. It is not a party of Scotland. Against all expectations, it has been wiped out in Scotland. In fact, the Conservatives came within 300 votes of being a larger Scottish party in this Parliament than them. Labour Members will have to explain to their constituents—if, as it appears, Labour is going to oppose these measures—why it is that they oppose fairness for England when it is okay to argue that powers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should be extended. I support the extension of powers to the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly. We are doing the right thing. It is also surely right to ensure that we can give a fair deal to the English too. That is what these measures are about.

Mr Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): I thank the Leader of the House for his statement. The Procedure Committee will do a quick and dirty technical review of the changes in the time that remains before recess, but it will take time for the procedural implications of the changes to Standing Orders to become apparent. I suspect we will need to revisit this issue at some stage within the next 12 to 18 months.

Chris Grayling: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I congratulate him on his uncontested re-election as Chair of the Procedure Committee. That shows the respect this House has for him. I ask him to see this as an ongoing task for his Committee. I have said I will

return to this in 12 months' time. In the meantime, I would like him to track the workings of this not simply over the next few weeks, but over the next few months. I would like the Procedure Committee to be absolutely central to deciding how this evolves as the months go by.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. This issue, of course, evokes very strong feeling in all parts of the House. Let me say at this early stage that colleagues can be assured that if they wish to contribute to the exchanges on this statement, they will have the opportunity—everyone will have the opportunity—to do so.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): What a lot of constitutional bilge and unworkable garbage! What this statement is creating is two classes of Members of Parliament in this House, which will have a significant impact on our ability to look after our constituents and to stand up for their interests in this House of Commons. With this double majority—the new thing introduced this morning—we would do as well to stamp the foreheads of Scottish MPs before they go into the Lobby, and I thought that the Leader of the House was quite close to suggesting or proposing it.

This is the most dramatic and important constitutional statement that we have had since the days of Gladstone. Never before has there been an assault on the rights of Members of Parliament in this House to look after the interests of their constituents. This places you, Mr Speaker, in the most intolerable and politically invidious situation where you will be dragged into a political role and you will have to decide and determine, almost on your own, whether my honourable colleagues get to vote and participate in full. I wish you all the best with that, Mr Speaker. The fact that the Government have placed you in such a situation is matter of eternal shame on them.

This is the reality of asymmetric devolution across the United Kingdom. It is never going to be tidy: there is unhappiness in England and there is most definitely unhappiness in Scotland and increasing unhappiness in Wales. The way to solve this is to have our own Parliaments. What is wrong with an English Parliament? Then we could all come to this House as equal Members and determine and decide issues such as foreign affairs, defence and international obligations. Instead, we get this cobbled-together, unworkable mess that will indeed be challenged all the way, right down the line, and it will probably end up in the courts.

Only this week, 99% of my hon. Friends voted for something that is the sovereign will of the people of Scotland, but it was voted down by English Members of Parliament. English votes for English laws? Then there is a veto, and it becomes English votes for Scottish laws. This is unacceptable, Mr Speaker.

We had a referendum last year and we lost it. By God, though, this lot are doing their best to ensure that Scotland becomes an independent nation. I almost congratulate them on the almost ham-fisted approach they are adopting on Scottish issues. All this is going to do is to make the whole movement towards independence even more irresistible. For that, I almost thank the Leader of the House.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman seems a tad on the exercised side. I simply do not accept that what he says would represent the common-sense view of the Scottish people who, after all, voted for the Union a few months ago. This is not about his constituents. It is about my constituents and the constituents of hon. Members on both sides of the House. We have a Scottish package of devolution; we have a Welsh package of devolution; and we have a Northern Irish package of devolution. The SNP has argued for 20 years and more for the Scottish people to have more control over their own destiny. We are giving the Scottish people more control over their own destiny. Why is it therefore wrong for the English people to have some additional control over their own destiny? That is the point between us. It is not about wrecking the Union; it is about ensuring that there is fairness across the Union.

If we are to have a Union in which the different component parts have greater control over what takes place in the constituencies and areas represented, why is it wrong for England to have the same? I am afraid that this is something that Scottish MPs should welcome and accept as being part of a constitutional settlement that means that there will be a stronger Parliament in Scotland—probably the strongest devolved Parliament anywhere in the world. That is what SNP Members called for and it is what the Scottish people voted for, but they cannot turn round and say to the English, “It is not okay for you to have a bit of that same control over your destiny”.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I am pleased that the Government now have an answer to the question I posed before the Scottish referendum—the question of who speaks for England. I am very glad that they are tackling the problem that devolution has posed—that Scotland could vote for a lower rate of income tax in the Scottish Parliament and then send Scottish MPs to this Parliament to impose a higher rate of income tax on England. Is it not a sign that the Opposition still do not get it—that there needs to be justice for England in this Union, as well as for Scotland?

Chris Grayling: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right, as ever. I find it difficult to understand how it is possible, in one week, for the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) and his colleagues to vote in favour of full fiscal devolution for Scotland, and then to vote against the idea of England's having greater control over tax measures that affect England. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil) must calm himself. He is an aspiring statesman. He must simmer down.

Mr MacNeil: We will let you have full fiscal autonomy.

Mr Speaker: Ah! A long time to go.

Sir Gerald Kaufman *rose*—

Mr Speaker: A lecture in calmness will be provided by the Father of the House, I feel sure.

Sir Gerald Kaufman: Even the title of the statement sounds racist. *[Interruption.]* Yes! Yes!

[*Sir Gerald Kaufman*]

The Leader of the House talked repeatedly about constitutional arrangements, but is it not a fact that the glory of this country is that we do not have a constitution, and that we are governed by the Queen in Parliament? Furthermore, is it not a glory of this House that all its Members, from those who hold the highest office to the most newly elected Member of Parliament, are equal in the Division Lobby? Is it not a fact that the Government are not just underlining whatever differences there may be between the outlooks of people from different countries within the United Kingdom, but undermining the whole basis of British democracy, all the way back to when Magna Carta was signed? I hope that there will be enough Conservative Members of Parliament who have sufficient love of this wonderful House not to co-operate in destroying it.

Chris Grayling: The right hon. Gentleman is a distinguished Member of the House, but I have to say that his opening comment about racism demeans his point, and I therefore will not respond to it. [*Interruption.*]

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): Mr Speaker— [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I have known the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray) for more than 20 years, and I have never previously detected him having any difficulty in making himself heard, but such is the noise that today may be an exception.

Mr Gray: The only occasion on which I recall having had difficulty in making myself heard, Mr Speaker, was when I was the briefest ever shadow Secretary of State for Scotland. I was sacked by Michael Howard after five days for raising some of the issues that we are trying to address today.

I warmly welcome what the Leader of the House has announced. It is a major, major step in the right direction. I foresaw it 10 years ago, but there we are: a prophet in one's own country. It does not go quite as far as I, at that time, proposed—I would much prefer some form of federal solution to our difficulties—but I take great comfort from my understanding that we will see how this thing works, and if it does not work, the door will remain open for more radical solutions to the West Lothian question.

Chris Grayling: It is important for me to stress that what we are delivering is what was voted on by the people of the United Kingdom on the basis of our manifesto, and I think it right and proper for us to deliver on that manifesto. I intentionally left the door open to Members in all parts of the House so that in 12 months' time, when we have seen how the proposals bed in and when the first Bills have received Royal Assent, we can review the whole package and decide what is working and what is not.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): The general election saw the Conservative party fall to its worst level in Scotland since the introduction of universal suffrage. The people of Scotland voted overwhelmingly for my party to strengthen the Scottish Parliament. Why do the Government have such a disregard

for the views of the Scottish people, reducing the ability of Scottish Members of Parliament to vote on matters that have an impact on the Scottish budget?

Chris Grayling: The people of Scotland voted for the Union, and we are delivering more powers for the Scottish Parliament so that we can strengthen the Union. That is what we committed ourselves to doing in our manifesto, and it is what the whole House agreed on before the general election. We are fulfilling our promise, which is the right thing to do.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): The point has been fairly made that, because of the funding system we have in the UK, many decisions that might appear solely to have an impact on England can have a UK effect, but my understanding of what my right hon. Friend was saying was that the Government fully understood that and that it would be recognised in the structures put in place. If that is the case, I have to say I find some of the arguments being advanced by the SNP to be rather synthetic. I have a great interest in all sorts of subjects, including wind farms in the Monadhliath mountains, but I have to recognise that they are not ones that I can pursue as a Member of Parliament in this Chamber.

Chris Grayling: The point that SNP Members seem to have failed to take on board is that no measure will be able to pass through this House without the consent of the whole House, and the whole House includes Members of Parliament from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. That is how it is today; that is how it will continue. It is absolutely right and proper that that should be the case. They will continue to vote in all the Divisions they vote in at the moment. They will speak in the debates and ask all their questions. This does not create a second tier of Members of Parliament. It actually addresses the existing West Lothian question, which creates a division in competence between different Members of Parliament.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman is a Member of Parliament from England. I am a Member of Parliament from Wales. Can the right hon. Gentleman tell me one additional power I have in this House because I am from Wales?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman will of course as a result of these proposals continue to vote on all UK issues. He will also have the opportunity to take decisions about matters that affect Wales and affect England and Wales, such as policing and justice, which are devolved in Northern Ireland and Scotland. This should actually strengthen his role in this House because it will give him greater control over matters that affect the country he represents.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): My constituents who have written to me about this will warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. I think it is the first important step in ensuring that the constitution is fair and is seen to be fair for everybody, and it will support the Union. Will he confirm that what he has announced is a modern-day "no taxation without representation"?

measure, and that taxation visited solely on England will have to have a majority of English MPs to get through this House?

Chris Grayling: This is an important point; it is absolutely right and fundamental. Over the next two years, we shall see, for example, the creation of a Scottish rate of income tax—the power of the Scottish Parliament to set its own rate of income tax. Is it wrong that at the same time English MPs should have a right to say no if a UK Parliament imposes a tax that will only apply to English MPs' constituents? I think they should have a say on that, and this proposal will do that.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): If there are not to be two tiers of MPs in this House after these changes, what on earth does it mean to have a double majority at Report stage? I have to say I think it is an outrage that the Government are seeking to drive ahead with a fundamental challenge to the constitutional integrity of this House as the Parliament of the UK through Standing Orders. If the Leader of the House really thinks these proposals will bear scrutiny, he should bring forward primary legislation for proper scrutiny both on the Floor of this House and in the other place. If he thinks he can do that, let him come ahead and do it.

Chris Grayling: Standing Orders can be amended and changed by hon. Members, but if it is the view of Members of this House that there should be primary legislation when we carry out the review in 12 months' time, the right hon. Gentleman should bring that forward as a proposal.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): I fully understand the mischief that my right hon. Friend is seeking to address, but he will understand the particular circumstances of north Wales, where people are heavily reliant on services provided in England, particularly health services. They are already disadvantaged by the defective devolution settlement put in place by the Labour party. Can my right hon. Friend assure the House that they will not be further disadvantaged by the measures he is now putting in place?

Chris Grayling: I am acutely aware of the issues affecting people, particularly in north Wales, where there are cross-border issues and where Manchester and Liverpool can often seem closer than Cardiff. It is none the less the case that a matter such as health in Wales is devolved and something for the Welsh Assembly, so while my right hon. Friend can vote on health matters throughout England, the same does not apply the other way around. But his position in this House will remain the same: as a Welsh Member of Parliament, he will be able to vote on and contribute to decision making about health service matters in England, as he does at the moment, but such matters cannot simply be imposed on the English against their wishes.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): Why does the House of Lords remain unreformed—a model of democratic perfection, where it is still possible, with the connivance of all three main parties, to buy places—while we stagger and stumble with ad hoc steps, now EVEL, that will lead to the certain break-up of the United

Kingdom? Why do the Government not work with all parties and have a constitutional convention to work out a federal system that will be right for all four nations?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman talks about the House of Lords, but if he is so exercised by that perhaps he will explain why, when House of Lords reform was before this House in the previous Parliament, the Labour party did not support the programme motion that would have allowed it to continue.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): The fact that the programme motion was never moved might be a reason.

The Leader of the House has half answered the West Lothian question; he has given English Members a veto. What he has not done is allow them the right to initiate legislation. That happens in Scotland. Will his review in a year's time take that into account?

Chris Grayling: The programme motion was not moved precisely because the Labour party said its Members would not support it. That is the story of the previous Parliament. They have a habit—as my hon. Friend will know—of saying one thing and doing another.

In 12 months' time, when we carry out the review, I will be very open to submissions from all parts of the House about how the process should work, the way it is working and the extent of its working.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): At the foot of page 2, the explanatory notes state:

“Any bills that the Speaker has certified as England-only in their entirety will be considered by only English MPs”.

It would help the House if the right hon. Gentleman were to identify past Bills that he considers to have been England-only in their entirety.

Chris Grayling: There will be a relatively small number of England-only Committees; most Bills are broader in extent, and in the previous Session there were only four. One example in particular is education, which is devolved to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, but I would expect most Committees to continue to be configured in exactly the same way as they are today, with representatives from throughout the United Kingdom.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): I support the rights of, and the transfer and devolution of powers to, not just the different countries in the Union but the regions in England, particularly those in the north. To me it is pretty obvious—a logical consequence—that today's announcement had to happen and to take the form it has. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the underlying principle behind it is a fair settlement for all nations in the United Kingdom?

Chris Grayling: I can absolutely confirm that. As I said at the start, I am a Minister in a Conservative and Unionist Government, and we have every wish to protect and preserve our Union. That is why we are providing far greater powers to the Scottish Parliament and the Administration in Wales, and will move to introduce corporation tax in Northern Ireland. We have stronger and stronger devolved Assemblies throughout

[Chris Grayling]

the United Kingdom, and it is absolutely right and proper to provide some degree of fairness for English constituents and English Members of Parliament. That is what we are doing.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The right hon. Gentleman talked earlier about Scotland having a stronger voice in the Union, but this week 95% of Scottish MPs voted for more powers for Scotland, and we, the 56, were vetoed. Now he wants a veto for England. Just where was Scotland's veto this week, when Scottish-only matters were being blocked? May we have, for fairness, a veto-for-veto principle?

Chris Grayling: The Scottish National party is struggling to come to terms with the fact that the Scottish people voted to be part of the Union and to have a United Kingdom Parliament. I know that that is difficult and I know that SNP Members do not like it, but I actually think they have brought value to the House and I enjoy debating with them. They make an important contribution to the House on behalf of Scotland, but they are part of a United Kingdom Parliament. Constitutional changes will be voted on by United Kingdom Members of Parliament, including Scottish MPs, as will these measures on English votes on English laws.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): I welcome this limited start on English votes for English laws, but I am intrigued as to how we will achieve an English vote on English income tax, given that only part of the tax is being devolved. The tax on employment income is being devolved, but not the tax on savings income. Will the Leader of the House explain what process will be used to achieve an English, Welsh or Northern Irish-only vote on the main rate of income tax to be paid by our constituents?

Chris Grayling: Once the devolution of tax rates has been completed, and when we are debating the Finance Bill and—as with other legislation—the House resolves into Grand Committee, the Members of Parliament affected by those tax changes will be able to vote on whether to accept them.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Leader of the House clarify the position for London MPs? As a London MP, I have no say over transport or policing in London. Those matters come under the jurisdiction of the Mayor. I therefore feel doubly disfranchised, because I cannot vote on matters that relate to my own city and I apparently will not be able to have a say on certain other issues. This is not only a West Lothian question; it is also an east London question.

Chris Grayling: The difference is that Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast have Parliaments and Assemblies that legislate. In London, there is no such separate legislative power. This House legislates for London. There is administrative devolution in London, and there will soon be greater administrative devolution in Manchester as a result of the Bill that is now going through the Lords, but the key point is that this House will continue to legislate for London.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): My constituents will warmly welcome this Bill—

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): It's not a Bill!

Martin Vickers: This statement. I can see why our Scottish colleagues fail to understand the feelings of hostility and unfairness that English voters experience, but I am surprised that Labour Members cannot understand how people in Cleethorpes and elsewhere in England feel. I welcome the statement, but may I add a caveat? I am concerned that we are stumbling towards a major realignment of our constitution without knowing what the final destination will be. Will the Leader of the House assure me that there will be adequate time to debate all our constitutional issues during the coming months and years?

Chris Grayling: We are clear about the end point, which involves a strong Parliament for Scotland, with more devolved powers than any comparable assembly in the world, and strong powers for Cardiff and Belfast, alongside a United Kingdom Parliament that legislates for and is participated in by the whole of the United Kingdom but also has provisions to ensure fairness for England as the largest country in the Union. Some degree of justice needs to be visible for the people we represent in England.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing the voice of Northern Ireland to be heard. As these proposals will affect Northern Ireland quite dramatically, I appreciate your letting me respond to the statement. We will use our eight votes and make up our minds on these kinds of issues on the basis of what will strengthen the United Kingdom and not weaken it. I have great sympathy with English Members on this matter, and I understand their arguments. I understand the problems and the challenges, but as we on these Benches have said before, we need to avoid unintended consequences. We need to think these things through properly, without rushing, and we should consider all these matters in a constitutional convention. The principle will be that no law affecting England alone will be able to be passed without the consent of English MPs, but there are matters that remain in this House that affect Northern Ireland, including the legacy of the past, parades and so on. Will the Leader of the House allow the same principle to apply to Northern Ireland MPs in regard to Northern Ireland-only matters that are not devolved?

Chris Grayling: The simple principle of these changes is that if a matter is not devolved, it will be and is a matter for the UK Parliament. If we are talking about strengthening the Union, then it should be the case that those are matters for the UK Parliament. We would weaken the Union otherwise. If a matter is devolved, it is the responsibility of the Administrations in Wales, Northern Ireland or Scotland. If it affects English-only constituencies, it will be for those who represent English-only constituencies to decide whether to accept or reject it.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): My right hon. Friend rightly referenced the fact that some Opposition Members cannot vote on education in their own constituencies, but can vote on education

in his and my constituencies. This goes further than education, as it extends to policing, health and other areas. Does he agree that the Government's proposals balance the principle of English consent for English measures with the ability of MPs from all parts of the United Kingdom to continue to deliberate and vote together?

Chris Grayling: Yes, I do, and it is important to pick up on what the leader of the Democratic Unionist party said. We need to ensure that we keep the Union strong. We are passionate Unionists. At the same time, the Union is not strengthened if English citizens feel somehow that the constitutional settlement lets them down. We need to address their concerns to strengthen the Union that we regard as so important.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): I proudly represent an English constituency, but I am also a proud Unionist. I am shocked by this nasty little measure, which has not been properly debated. Will the Leader of the House say why the House has a proper system of debating legislation when it has a simple majority on, for example, issues such as Standing Orders? Will he agree to bring legislation on this before the House, because the questions from my colleagues from Northern Ireland and Scotland—

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): And Wales.

Fiona Mactaggart: And Wales. Their questions are merely a precursor of what will happen when the right hon. Gentleman makes me a Member of an English Parliament as well as a United Kingdom Parliament.

Chris Grayling: If the right hon. Lady and others wish to come forward as part of the review and say that they now want this set in legislation, we will obviously consider it. Let me remind her of the facts: her former colleague, John Denham, who was a member of the shadow Cabinet in the previous Parliament, argued very strongly for the need to do this. Labour Members of Parliament must decide whether they want to say to their English constituents, "You should not be a part of the devolution changes that are taking place." I am happy to have that argument with them on the doorsteps of this country. I think that people in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales will think that this step is fair.

Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that fairness also extends to timing? My constituents expect that, as I vote in favour of more power for Scotland in the Scotland Bill, at the same time we should be delivering English votes for English laws. The two must be on the same timescale.

Chris Grayling: That is the key point. Whether Opposition Members accept it or not, this Parliament is currently legislating to create the strongest devolved Assembly that this country—and probably much of the world—has ever seen. We are extending significant new powers to Edinburgh. Additional powers will go to Northern Ireland in due course. It is absolutely right and proper that, as we do that, we also address the obvious question, which is raised by constituents in constituencies represented by Conservatives and Labour in England, that there has to be a part of the process that focuses on their interests.

Michelle Thomson (Edinburgh West) (SNP): The Leader of the House said: "and they will give the decisive vote on tax measures". For me, that is the nub of it. We have heard much talk today of huge new powers for the Scottish Parliament. Let us look at the facts: 70% of tax decisions and 84% of welfare decisions will remain in this House. That amounts to patsy powers. That is why we have such a contingent of Scottish National party MPs. We need to make Scotland's voice heard—on justice and on fairness. I ask the Minister: what is it he is afraid of in hearing Scotland's voice?

Chris Grayling: Well, nobody is afraid of hearing Scotland's voice. As I have said before, I welcome all the new SNP Members; they have added value to the debate in this House. The hon. Lady has just made the point that the vast majority of tax decisions will remain in this House. Those Members will continue to vote in a United Kingdom vote, without an English dimension, on all tax measures that fit within that category. We are talking about when a tax has been devolved. If there is a Scottish rate of income tax, and an English counterpart to that rate of income tax, it will be voted on in the Scottish Parliament and English MPs will have the right to say, "Well, it actually only applies to them, and they will accept it or not accept it."

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Does the Leader of the House agree that it is simply unpalatable for those living in English constituencies to see us devolve more powers to Scotland and yet not address the West Lothian question? Much is made of future threats to the Union, and does he agree that not dealing with this issue is one of them?

Chris Grayling: Absolutely, and my hon. Friend represents a large number of Scottish constituents, and he is a powerful advocate for them. It is important that he is able to take decisions on matters that affect them. It is also right and proper that, when a matter exclusively affects English constituencies, he and his English colleagues should be able to say no if it is something that their constituents do not want.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): Going back to the London question raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes), I listened carefully to the answer of the Leader of the House gave when he talked about legal jurisdictions. The logical conclusion to that is that when the police grant and transport issues in London are discussed, Welsh Members will be allowed to vote because we come under the same legal requirement as the English. Is that the case? How is it fair that elected Welsh Members will have their powers reduced when unelected Welsh peers will not?

Chris Grayling: Policing is a classic example of something that is not devolved. We do not have a separate Welsh policing system. Therefore it is right and proper that we should retain the involvement of Members of Parliament from England and Wales in voting on police matters. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, those matters are devolved. That is the key difference. The situation in London is straightforward: London does not have a devolved Assembly in the way in which Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland do. It does not legislate. This House

[Chris Grayling]

legislates for London. Therefore the decisions about new laws in London should be and will be a part of this package.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I can recommend some good breathing exercises for Opposition Members to calm them down. Many of my constituents are extremely concerned that we are legislating to devolve power to Scotland—quite rightly—as part of our manifesto commitment, but at the same time we are not taking further action to strengthen the powers of English MPs to have a veto over what happens. I warmly welcome the statement, but will my right hon. Friend undertake that, after this 12-month period, we will consider introducing legislation? As we devolve more power to Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and parts of England, we need a law to give us oversight of what happens in this place.

Chris Grayling: I have said that in 12 months' time we will be open to listening to the views of Members. I hope that my hon. Friend will make that case when the moment arises. He is right about the views of his constituents. I still do not truly understand why two Opposition parties, which support devolution, do not think that it is fair to provide England with an element of increased control in that overall devolution package. It is incongruous and strange. For the Labour party, in particular, which represents a large number of English seats, it makes no sense. I look forward to seeing its Members argue their case on the doorsteps because I do not think that they will win.

Mike Weir (Angus) (SNP): I listened carefully when the Leader of the House said that there would be no changes in the House of Lords. He went on to say that if amendments were made that affected England only, there would be a veto by English MPs. What happens if the House of Lords decides to extend the extent of a Bill to bring in Scottish matters or to change things affecting Scotland? Will Scottish MPs get a veto over that?

Chris Grayling: A Lords amendment will be subject to the same certification process whether it is UK in its extent or English only in its extent, and the votes will take place accordingly.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): Following on from what the hon. Member for Angus (Mike Weir) said, I too am very concerned about what could happen in the other place. As things currently stand, we could go forward with this particular measure and be held hostage to fortune in the other place not only because of the political persuasions in the Lords but because they would not have the same criteria applied to them. We would spend a lot of time in this place trying to figure out what are English laws for England, and down there they could spend twice as long debating what we have given to them, with all the machinations that go on.

Chris Grayling: The Lords will debate what we send to them as a House. If they send back legislation with material differences, as is the case at the moment, we will vote on whether to accept the changes or not. If the

legislation concerns matters that affect England or England and Wales and are certified as such, to be accepted and passed into law it will require the support of the whole House and also of the MPs affected, either those in England or those in England and Wales.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I must say that I think that this is one of the most ill thought through statements that I have ever heard from the Dispatch Box, and there have been quite a few recently. I want to ask about the Yorkshire problem. Given that the population of Yorkshire is greater than that of Scotland and given the Leader of the House's so-called concern for English votes, particularly, obviously, English votes in the south, will he give Yorkshire MPs a veto on those matters that directly affect Yorkshire, such as last week's decision to pause the electrification of the TransPennine Express route?

Chris Grayling: I gently remind the hon. Lady that this proposal was part of a manifesto on which we were elected and on which her party was not, so it has hardly arrived new. It has been studied and supported. In Yorkshire there is no assembly that legislates. The difference is that we as a Parliament are passing additional responsibilities that would previously have been dealt with here to the Assemblies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, so this is simply a compensatory mechanism for the rest of the country.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): The Leader of the House states that today he is answering the West Lothian question and recognising the voice of England in our great Union of nations. There are 56 SNP MPs who have been given a strong mandate to speak up for Scotland. When will the voices of the people of Scotland be not only recognised but heard? All the powers we seek are given to us without any vetoes attached. We have just had three Committee days to discuss the Scotland Bill and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) stated, each and every amendment was voted down by the Government. The content of this statement is indeed "evil".

Chris Grayling: I do not think that with the SNP there is any danger of Scotland's voice not being heard. I simply remind SNP MPs that we are passing to Scotland more power for the Scottish Parliament than it has ever had before, as we promised the Scottish people. That is right and proper.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House ponder for a moment on the fact that had his proposals been in place over the past hundred years, Alec Douglas-Home, Andrew Bonar Law, James Callaghan, Lloyd George and Gordon Brown would not have been able to vote on their own Governments' proposals in this House of Commons? Does that not strike him as incongruous, coming as it does from a Conservative and Unionist party?

Chris Grayling: That is simply not true. They would have been able to vote. As I said earlier, every Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish MP will continue to vote in the same Divisions except on the very small number of Bills for which there is an English-only Committee.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): The Leader of the House has already shown his disdain for Welsh MPs by timetabling the debate on this matter for 15 July, when there will be a Welsh Grand Committee. Without simply saying that it will be up to the Speaker, will he tell us his view of what will happen to legislation on matters of economic or other importance to the whole of the UK that are geographically situated in England, such as Crossrail or a potential third runway at Heathrow? Would that legislation be subject to a veto by English MPs?

Chris Grayling: The test is that if a matter is devolved to the Welsh Assembly, the Scottish Parliament or the Northern Ireland Assembly, it is covered by these measures.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): It is something of an irony that this announcement is made today when the first item of business was the Transport for London Bill. Under the new proposals, who would vote on that? Would my hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith) be precluded from doing so while the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris), whose constituency is rather further away, could vote on it? Why would my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) and the hon. Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams) not be of equal status with other Members of this House under these proposals while their predecessors, now in the House of Lords, would be?

Chris Grayling: The answer is that they would all vote on the proposals. The difference is that if there is a legislative measure on transport in north Wales, it is voted on by the Assembly in Cardiff and Members of Parliament in this House have no say on it. Under these proposals, every Member of the House will take part in Divisions, but a Division that affects only one of the four nations of the United Kingdom will need the support of the Members from that country.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Will the Leader of the House recognise that although 95% of the MPs in Scotland are from the SNP, 100% of the MPs of Kent are Conservative and their constituents voted for this measure?

Chris Grayling: That is absolutely correct. This is a United Kingdom Parliament. We have a majority in the United Kingdom Parliament and we are fulfilling our manifesto commitments. We are doing so not simply on this issue but by delivering more powers than ever to the Scottish Parliament.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I am not sure whether we are hearing proposals for English votes for English laws or for Tory votes for Tory laws. It is interesting to hear the words “double majority” in the statement because, of course, that principle was ruled out for the European referendum. May I build on the question asked by my hon. Friend from Plaid Cymru, the hon. Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams)? He asked for worked examples of legislation from history, about how they would have worked, and about how this would apply to other procedures in the House, such as private Members’ Bills, ten-minute rule Bills, Opposition day debates and so on. Are we going to get detail on that?

Chris Grayling: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that for now we will not apply this to private Members’ Bills. It will not apply to ten-minute rule Bills and the intention is that all Members of this House will continue to participate in all Divisions that affect the United Kingdom in general. The only change will be that Members of Parliament representing England or England and Wales will have a decisive say on matters that affect only their constituencies.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I am concerned that these proposals mean that Scots MPs will be ceding power over matters that have a financial impact on our constituents. Part of the role of the Speaker is to certify money Bills with the aid of an extensive guidance note. Will the Leader of the House commit to ensuring that the guidance note on England-only laws receives the scrutiny of and debate by this House before the provision is put into Standing Orders?

Chris Grayling: As I said, there will be a full day’s debate in which all these matters can be raised. The Speaker will have the job of certifying whether a Bill is England-only, England and Wales-only or UK-wide in its entirety or in part. This will ensure that when we have devolved a tax rate to the Scottish Parliament and decisions are being taken by MSPs, if an equivalent tax rate applies only to England, rightly and properly the decisive vote will be decided by those people who are directly affected by it and not those who are not.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): The House should reflect that when the Leader of the House rose to make his statement at 11.30 this morning he was probably signalling the end of the Union that he wants to preserve. The people of my constituency and of Scotland will reflect on the fact that in this proposal he is creating two classes of MP in the House of Commons and that is a disgrace. If he wants an English Parliament, why not make proposals for it?

Chris Grayling: I am afraid I think that that is nonsense. The SNP seems to believe that it is fine to have more devolution for Scotland and additional powers for the Scottish Parliament, but that England and England and Wales should not get any fairness in that mix. I disagree.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): As devolution to the nations continues apace, we need to find a solution to the English question. The Liberal Democrats remain of the view that a constitutional convention must be part of that solution. The Leader of the House has proposed a novel process, but will he confirm that he will engage with all the parties over the next few weeks and will not proceed with these changes to Standing Orders if they will have severe consequences for the future of the Union?

Chris Grayling: I think that these changes are essential to the future of the Union, but we will consult extensively across the House. That is why I have said that the Procedure Committee will review the matter over the next 12 months and we will have a review in 12 months’ time. We will, of course, continue to discuss it, as I already have, with Members on both sides of the House.

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): The West Lothian question is as of nothing compared with the utter shambles in the House today. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), I think that the Speaker of this House is being put in an utterly invidious position. Will you pass on the message to Mr Speaker, Madam Deputy Speaker, that, with the utmost goodwill, I shall be the arbiter of what is in the interests of my constituency? Nobody in this House speaks for my constituency other than me.

Chris Grayling: That is not strictly true. The hon. Gentleman does not speak for his constituents on education. It is the Member of the Scottish Parliament for his constituency who speaks on education. That is why these changes are necessary. The situation in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is different, and it is right and proper that when a matter that relates to schools in my constituency and affects schools in constituencies across England, ultimately English Members of Parliament can say, "That is not what we want."

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I want to extend a hand of friendship somewhat to the Leader of the House, who is proposing to introduce the use of tablets to ensure that English MPs' votes count twice, but what will that cost? Does he agree that in this time of Tory austerity cuts, simply to tattoo the foreheads of Scottish MPs would be cheaper and would underline their status as second-class MPs?

Chris Grayling: I have no idea if any of the new intake of Scottish MPs have any tattoos, but personally I prefer to spend perhaps a couple of thousand pounds on six iPads that can do the recording for us.

George Kerevan (East Lothian) (SNP): The Minister woefully misunderstands the essence of the West Lothian question. I say this as a close friend for 30 years of the former Member for West Lothian, Tam Dalyell. He has sat in my kitchen and we have discussed this ad nauseam. The essence of the West Lothian question is that if the Government introduce and continue to introduce multiple competences for the different Members in this House, that will end this House, cause confusion, create political chaos and end the Union. It is better, therefore, to have separate Parliaments with separate jurisdictions, whose Members are clear about what they do and the role they have with their constituents, or to have a unitary Parliament, which is what Tam Dalyell always wanted. The Government cannot have something in the middle—a dog's breakfast. I put it to the Minister that simply saying—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. Will the hon. Gentleman please be seated? I think he would like to come to a question for the Leader of the House now.

George Kerevan: Does the right hon. Gentleman understand the West Lothian question?

Chris Grayling: I absolutely understand the West Lothian question. The people who did not understand the West Lothian question were Labour Members when they introduced a new approach to the constitutional structure of this country without giving any consideration

to the views of and impacts on electors in England. As we take a further step down the road towards devolution, we are ensuring that we do not forget the English, unlike Labour did 20 years ago.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): The comments that we have heard from Government Members show a remarkable ignorance or that Ministers are trying, as we say in Scotland, to be sleekit. The double majority issue surely now extends to the rest of the discussion of the Scotland Bill and what powers are transferred to Scotland, and to other UK legislation, such as the European Union Referendum Bill, where a majority of Scottish MPs or Welsh MPs may decide that we do not want that referendum on the EU. Surely this is a morass and must be taken away. Will he go back and consider the entire document?

Chris Grayling: I say again to the SNP and in particular to the hon. Members for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) and for East Lothian (George Kerevan), that one of the great ironies is that they can vote on education in my constituency, but they cannot vote on education in their constituencies. Such constitutional arrangements do not pass muster. We are putting in place changes that I think are right. They are necessary to hold the Union together and to provide fairness in this Parliament; they are right and proper, and their time has come.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Will the Leader of the House answer this question on the specifics of voting in this House and not try to dodge the issue? He says in his statement: "The key difference is that our plans provide for an English veto at different stages in the process." Does he not recognise the rank hypocrisy of this position when his MPs flooded in to veto the proposals of Scotland's MPs on the Scotland Bill?

Chris Grayling: No, I do not because constitutional matters—[*Interruption.*] I say to the Scottish nationalists that this is a Union Parliament that will vote collectively across the United Kingdom on constitutional change. That is true of the Scotland Bill and it will be true of the Wales Bill, as well as changes in respect of Northern Ireland and the Standing Orders on English votes. It is a Union Parliament and it will vote together on those issues.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I think this is a case of last and least, given the fine contributions from my hon. Friends. We on the Opposition Benches know that over the years the House has been resistant to change. I find it incredible that a form of electronic voting is to be brought in simply to downgrade the Scottish MPs, although it had been resisted before. As I am the last to speak, I will try to help the Leader of the House understand what we have been trying to say in the numerous questions that we have asked. Our concern is that if Parliament passes English votes for English laws on matters that are devolved, we might not be able to vote on matters that affect the budget consequentials for our Parliament and our constituents, so the Government must make it clear that the double majority will not apply to matters relating to budget consequentials.

Chris Grayling: All Members of Parliament from all parts of the United Kingdom will continue to vote on budget matters. All Members of Parliament will vote on the Budget. If tax changes have been devolved to Scotland and an equivalent rate that does not apply in Scotland applies in England, it is right and proper that English Members of Parliament have the right to say yea or nay to those changes. What the Scottish National party seems to be saying is that devolution and increased powers for Scotland are fine, but the English should not be allowed any fairness at all. That is not acceptable.

Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con): The Scottish National party Members here wisely and honourably make a vow of abstinence that they will not vote on what they perceive to be English matters. However, that was not the case with Scottish Labour Members of Parliament before the general election. On many occasions they voted on matters to do with education and health that affected my constituents and made my constituents, rightly, angry about how things were being dealt with in this House. I welcome the statement, although I do not think it goes far enough. I also welcome the review, but would like to be assured that it will take into account the views of all Members of this House, including English Members.

Chris Grayling: I can absolutely give that assurance. It is right and proper. These changes are necessary because, as I said earlier, all Opposition Members are, to say the least, in the strange position of being able to vote on education in my constituency but not in their own. That suggests that there is something wrong with our constitutional arrangements. As part of our plans to strengthen the Union and to provide more powers to England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, there has to be an English dimension. That is what this is all about. I am disappointed that the SNP and the Labour party support devolution for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but seem to oppose the English having anything as part of that change.

Points of Order

12.38 pm

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Some time ago I tabled a question to the Attorney General to ask what steps the Crown Prosecution Service had taken to prosecute people more effectively for illegal littering. It might sound like a trivial matter, but it follows incidents of glass being found in feedstock on farms, so it raises animal welfare issues. The question was accepted by the Table Office and pulled out of the shuffle for today's Question Time as Question 6, so I was surprised and disappointed to learn that the Department has decided to transfer my question to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, despite the fact that it was willing to accept similarly worded questions on what steps the CPS was taking to ensure successful prosecution for the criminal offence of forced marriage, for example. Forced marriage is obviously much more serious than littering, but they are both serious issues.

I seek your guidance on whether it is in order for a question that has been accepted as being perfectly in order by the Table Office, and which appears to be worded in exactly the same way as other questions that have been accepted by the Department, then to be rejected at such short notice by a Department.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): I thank the hon. Gentleman for advance notice of his intention to make a point of order. As I am sure he is aware, departmental matters are the responsibility of the Government, so it is not for the Chair to make decisions on them. The Leader of the House is in his place and will have heard what the hon. Gentleman has said, and he has put the matter on the record.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Yesterday we had an excellent debate on equal pay and gender inequality. You might recall that many women Members made the point that they were very uncomfortable with how they are addressed in the House. I do not think that can be ignored. Will you and the Speaker look into the matter and perhaps consider making the language more gender neutral in order to address those concerns?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I will certainly take the matter back to the Speaker. The hon. Gentleman might also like to take it to the Backbench Business Committee as a matter for debate and discussion with the rest of the House.

Britain and International Security

12.40 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Britain and international security.

Last Friday a terrorist carrying a Kalashnikov murdered 38 tourists on a beach in Tunisia and injured many more. Thirty of those who lost their lives were British, in the worst terrorist incident we have faced since 7/7. Several hundred miles away in Kuwait, a suicide bomber blew himself up at a Shi'ite mosque, murdering 27 worshippers. Across the channel, on the same day, the boss of a company in Chassieu in France was beheaded by an Islamist extremist. It was a day of terror. It offers a chilling reminder that the world we are living in has become a darker, more dangerous place, and that we are engaged in a fight that will last a generation. Today's debate on international security could not be more timely.

I want to take this opportunity to do three things: first, to update the House on our response to Tunisia and how we are confronting Islamist extremism in the middle east; secondly, to explain how we are acting to tackle the wider state and non-state threats we face; and thirdly, with the strategic defence and security review now under way, to give hon. Members an early insight into our thinking.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State accept that those terrible events are part of a deliberate ploy by ISIS to change what is a regional conflict between Sunnis and Shi'as, and between nations in the middle east, into a world conflict between what they see as the Christian west and the Muslim east? Would it not be a terrible mistake to react to that provocation by having mission creep that would make a world war more likely?

Michael Fallon: I will reflect on that analysis, but I certainly hope that the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that we should not react to the events that took place last Friday and the murder of our constituents. I will set out how we are reacting.

As Tunisian security forces investigate accomplices in what looks like an ISIL-inspired plot, RAF aircraft have been bringing home the seriously injured and have started repatriating the bodies of those who died. Our thoughts and prayers are with their families at this time, as well as with those who have lost loved ones in France and Kuwait. Tomorrow we will hold a national minute's silence to remember them.

The Government continue to work with our operators to ensure that all those who want to come back from Tunisia can do so. Extra flights have been organised and several hundred counter-terrorism officers are at our airports, supporting travellers and gathering evidence. The UK national police response will be one of the largest counter-terrorism operations in a decade. Here at home, the threat level from international terrorism remains unchanged—severe. That means an attack is highly likely. Our police, security services and armed forces are working day and night to protect us. This year we have increased funding for our police and intelligence services, and we are legislating to give them stronger powers to seize passports and prevent travel.

Disrupting violent threats to the UK mainland and our interests overseas is just one element of our broader strategy to counter ISIL. I want to assure the House that Britain is playing a full part in the international coalition to defeat ISIL by targeting the financiers, disrupting supplies of weapons and discrediting its poisonous ideology.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State will be aware of the very concerning incidents in my constituency of individuals travelling to fight for ISIL. Will he say a little about what is being done to step up the co-ordination between agencies in order to prevent travel? We need to ensure that passport agencies, airlines, security services, police and community organisations are all working together to share information on vulnerable individuals who might be considering travel. We are still seeing cases every week, which is deeply worrying.

Michael Fallon: Absolutely; it is worrying. I will explain exactly what we are doing shortly.

Since September RAF planes, with the agreement of this House, have carried out nearly 1,000 missions in Iraq and 300 strikes against ISIL bases. Last month we sent another 125 troops to train Iraqi forces and help them counter roadside and vehicle-borne bombs. Our surveillance aircraft are already assisting other coalition countries with their operations over Syria, and British forces are helping to train the moderate Syrian opposition. Overall, we now have more than 900 British personnel in the region. Last year we spent £45 million in the fight against ISIL. This financial year we plan to spend at least £75 million.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): Last year the Defence Committee visited Iraq and Jordan. We were briefed by the King of Jordan about his ambition, shared by other players in the region, for what he called "Arabising" the narrative and taking control of the strategy. How far is that going, and what more can be done to ensure that it is their strategy we are supporting, so that nobody can label us as somehow imposing our views on the region? We are supporting a serious attempt to deal with this cancer of Daesh in the region.

Michael Fallon: I discussed exactly that with His Majesty the King of Jordan when he was here last week. I assure my hon. Friend that we are doing everything we can to encourage the region itself to assist the legitimate Government of Iraq. For example, we are taking the lead in the strategic communications group, which is a smaller group of nations helping to battle that ideology. It is a fight in which the region itself must be fully engaged.

Several hon. Members rose—

Michael Fallon: I will give way in a moment.

As the Prime Minister said on Monday, there must be a full-spectrum response to deal with ISIL at its source in places such as Syria, Iraq and Libya. We know that ISIL is organised and directed from northern Syria. That is why the Prime Minister said during last September's debate on taking military action in Iraq that "there is a strong case for us to do more in Syria".—[*Official Report*, 26 September 2014; Vol. 585, c. 1259.]

However, he recognised the reservations that some Members had, and we will not bring a motion to the House on which there is not some consensus. However, this is a new Parliament and it is for all Members to consider carefully how best to tackle ISIL, an evil caliphate that does not respect state boundaries.

Therefore, our position remains that we would return to the House for approval before conducting air strikes in Syria. The exception, as the House knows, is if a critical British national interest was at stake, or if there was the need to act to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe. We are also clear that any action we take must not provide any succour to Assad or his regime.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): In 2013, the Government wanted to remove Assad without helping al-Qaeda or similar groups that later became Daesh. Now we apparently want to remove Daesh but without helping Assad. Those two things are incompatible. It is a choice of two evils. Which does my right hon. Friend think is the lesser of those two evils?

Michael Fallon: We do not want to give any succour to Assad. I do not think that anybody in this House wants the Assad regime to continue for a day longer than is necessary; we want Assad to go. But we are equally clear that ISIL operations in Iraq and elsewhere, probably including Libya, are being directed from northern Syria. We already have American air strikes being carried out in northern Syria and air strikes being carried out from other Gulf countries. We have air strikes being carried out by Canadian aircraft that are helping to keep our streets safe as well.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): The Tunisian Government have today arrested 12 Daesh suspects whom they believe were trained, along with the gunman himself, in jihadist camps in Libya. Why, then, is the Secretary of State not proposing to bomb jihadist camps in Libya as opposed to extending the bombing campaign to Syria?

Michael Fallon: We have to deal with ISIL extremism right across the board. We are working with the Tunisian authorities to find out exactly how the outrage last Friday was carried out, how it was planned, and who was involved in it. Let the House be in absolutely no doubt: the people who perpetrated the murders of our constituents are going to be tracked down, whether they are in Libya, in Syria, or anywhere else.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): If we have a Daesh terrorist plotting murders in the United Kingdom, we arrest them, prosecute them, and put them in prison. If that same terrorist goes to Iraq, we try to hunt them down and kill them and blow up the building they are living in. How does that help create a rule of law or democratic pressures in Iraq? Is not the most important thing to try to impose a rule of law and diplomacy and work away to get some solution?

Michael Fallon: I recognise my right hon. Friend's view, which he has honourably held for a long time and advocated very eloquently in the debate two years ago. However, I am afraid that the people we are dealing with—ISIL—do not respect the rule of law, do not respect our system of prosecution, and do not respect

international boundaries. Everything we are doing in Iraq is at the request of, and with the authority of, the legitimate Government of Iraq, and any action that we are supporting in Syria is in aid of our operations to assist the Government of Iraq.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): In one sense, the Secretary of State's desire to get consensus across the House is laudable, but many of us have been calling for these air strikes to go on across the border, which is not recognised by the extremists, since the action in Iraq began. He has a majority now. If he wants to do this, he should make the case, put it to a vote, and get his own side in order.

Michael Fallon: I am laying out some of the case today. However, the Prime Minister has made it clear that we will not return to the House for parliamentary authority to conduct air strikes in Syria unless there is a sufficient consensus behind it. It may be that opinion in this Parliament is rather different from opinion in the previous Parliament. A number of things have changed, not least the attacks that have multiplied and the spread of ISIS itself.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State knows that in the absence of an effective Iraqi Government response, the people who have been fighting bravely on the ground are the Kurds—the peshmerga from the Kurdistan Regional Government. At the same time, Kurds in Syria have been fighting bravely against the same forces. Is it not the case that those Kurdish forces have been calling out for heavier weaponry and for military support from this country, as well as from other countries? Why are our Government not giving the Kurds the weaponry and the support that they need?

Michael Fallon: As I think the hon. Gentleman knows, we have supplied heavy machine guns to the Kurds. I have seen the training on those weapons for myself. As I have told the House, we are stepping up the counter-IED—improvised explosive device—training that we are offering to the Iraqi and the Kurdish forces. We are now doing that training in all four of the so-called building partner capacity centres.

Let me turn to the domestic front—

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): Will the Secretary of State give way before he moves on?

Michael Fallon: Of course, but I am conscious that a lot of hon. Members want to speak in this debate.

Mark Pritchard: The Secretary of State mentioned a full-spectrum response, whether at home or abroad. Does he agree that electronic surveillance is a key part of that response? As our enemies move ahead in technology, we need to move ahead of them to have the technological advantage to keep us safe in this country, as well as our armed forces abroad.

Michael Fallon: Yes, we are playing our full part in the intelligence and surveillance efforts. Some 30% of the intelligence effort that the coalition is mounting is British. It is being flown by our aircraft—Sentinel, Sentry, and Rivet Joint—and utilising our other assets.

Several hon. Members rose—

Michael Fallon: I have been generous in giving way and I will do so again in a moment.

I want to deal with the particular issues on the domestic front. We are preventing those who have been radicalised from travelling. Last year, the Home Secretary removed or refused, under the public interest criteria, 24 passports of individuals intending to travel for terrorism-related activity. We have given the police new powers to temporarily seize passports at the border. We have put our no-fly list on a statutory footing. The police have issued new guidance to airlines to ensure that vulnerable children travelling on high-risk routes are identified and referred. I accept that, as the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) said, this needs to be fully co-ordinated across Government, and that is the case. Our world-class security services work day and night to disrupt terrorist plots, and we will continue to give them the investment they need. We will introduce new investigatory powers legislation to ensure that law enforcement, security and intelligence agencies have the capabilities they need to keep us safe from those who would do us harm.

At the same time, we are challenging the extremist narrative, using strategic communications to get out a faster truth to counter the malicious misinformation of our adversaries; joining with internet companies to take down more than 90,000 pieces of extremist material; training over 300,000 people since 2011, including front-line public sector workers, to ensure that they can identify and prevent radicalisation; and excluding nearly 100 preachers of hate—more than any other Government. We are using moderate voices across the middle east and north Africa, and in the United Kingdom, to air a counter-narrative. We spend about £10 million a year with social media and local journalists to encourage millions to reject ISIL's recruiting slogans. The terrorists should know that every cowardly attack will only harden our resolve. We are in this for the long term and we are determined to win this fight.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): On the protection of the UK as a whole and border security, the Secretary of State will be aware that the border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic—the land frontier between the United Kingdom and another member state of the European Union—is very open. What measures are in place to ensure that people are not exiting and getting into the United Kingdom there for nefarious purposes? We do not have the kinds of border controls that are present in relation to, for instance, people crossing from France into England.

Michael Fallon: I shall certainly look at the right hon. Gentleman's specific point about the border. We now have a very strong defence relationship with the Government in the south. I recently signed a defence co-operation agreement with my counterpart. There needs to be a north-south partnership as well as an east-west partnership, if I may put it like that.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): One of the most striking images of the terrorist attacks in Tunisia last week was of Muslim hotel workers who lined up to prevent Daesh terrorists from slaughtering more guests in a neighbouring hotel. Would it not be

more appropriate, for the purposes of this debate and beyond, that we refer to the perpetrators of these attacks as Daesh rather than granting them the legitimacy and association with Islam that the term "ISIL" or "Islamic State" provides?

Michael Fallon: I have a lot of sympathy with that view. Of course, our interlocutors in the Gulf and our coalition allies refer to it as Daesh, and as the Prime Minister reported on Monday, we have now got the BBC to move away from calling it any kind of state. I have referred to it in shorthand as ISIL, and it may be too late to replace "ISIL" with "Daesh", but the hon. Lady is right to say that we need to reflect on it and not to confer any further legitimacy on ISIL.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): My right hon. Friend says that the BBC has been persuaded to drop the term "Islamic State", but is he aware of reports that the BBC has in fact said that it

"must be fair with Islamic State...on the ground that its coverage of the terrorist group must be impartial"?

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the BBC need not be impartial with murderous scumbags such as ISIL and that calling them Daesh is perfectly correct?

Michael Fallon: I agree with my hon. Friend. The BBC needs to be impartial about the facts, but we cannot be impartial on terrorism and the rules by which the rest of us live.

Let me move on to my second point regarding state and non-state threats. ISIL/Daesh is not the only danger we face. Russia is sabre-rattling in eastern Europe and has followed up its illegal annexation of Crimea by backing rebels in Ukraine and repeatedly entering Baltic and, indeed, British air traffic regions. Russia is continuing to modernise its military capability, and by 2020 it will have spent some \$380 billion upgrading or replacing 70% to 100% of its equipment. It has brought into service new missile systems, aircraft, submarines and surface vessels and armoured vehicles, as well as modernising its nuclear capability. It has chosen a path of competition with the west rather than partnership.

In Africa, failing states are falling prey to insurgency and triggering large-scale migration. These crises threaten not just our national security and interests, but the whole international rules-based system on which our values of freedom, tolerance, and the rule of law rely.

From Defence, we make a threefold contribution to protecting national security and upholding the international system. First, we protect and deter. All day, every day, our aircraft, ships and bomb disposal teams are employed in and around the UK, supporting counter-terrorism efforts and ensuring the integrity of our territorial waters and airspace and demonstrating our resolve to those who would threaten us.

Secondly, our defence personnel, ships and planes are out in the rest of the world, helping us to understand the challenges we face, as well as building the capacity of our partners and shaping events to prevent the spread of conflict and instability which could threaten our interests.

Thirdly, when our efforts to deter adversaries are not enough, we will respond with all the military force at our disposal, working with our allies and partners, to defeat aggressors, contain instability and sustain the rules-based system which is the key to our prosperity.

That is why today 4,000 brave and capable men and women of our three armed forces are working around the clock on 21 different joint operations in 19 countries—double the number of operations five years ago.

Stephen Doughty *rose*—

Martin John Docherty (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP) *rose*—

Michael Fallon: I have already given way to the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), so I must give way to the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin John Docherty).

Martin John Docherty: I am grateful that the Secretary of State has mentioned the threat posed by the Russian Federation, especially its recent manoeuvres on the borders of NATO allies Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Given that we have already spent more than £900 million on redundancies in our combat-ready forces over the past four years, how are we going to be capable of invigorating our combat forces and ensuring that they will be ready to deal with any threat from the east?

Michael Fallon: We are invigorating our forces. It is because we have the defence budget in order now and have dealt with the mess that we inherited in 2010 that we are able to reinvest. We are one of the very few countries in the world that is now building aircraft carriers and hunter-killer submarines and ordering new armoured vehicles for the Army. We are reinvigorating our forces and I shall come in a moment to how exactly we are doing that.

Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): The Secretary of State will know that during the cold war our and NATO's defence and security policy was shaped by our assessment of the threat. In the current circumstances, what is the Ministry of Defence and the Secretary of State's view of the threat today?

Michael Fallon: I have started to describe some of the principal threats today from state and non-state actors.

Mr Spellar: Not threats—the threat.

Michael Fallon: We face a number of threats—that is obvious to everybody. We cannot choose between them. They are out there, and this year, because we are conducting our strategic defence and security review, which I will come to in a moment, we are able to look at them in the round. That is the answer to the right hon. Gentleman's question.

As far as NATO's immediate assurance measures are concerned, our Typhoons are protecting Baltic airspace and will be back next year to continue their mission for the third year running. Our warships have been patrolling the Baltic sea, and our ground troops have exercised this year alongside their counterparts in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Romania. We are also doubling spending on the training of Ukrainian forces to about £6 million and providing additional training tasks in medical evacuation, winter survival and reconnaissance skills. We have already trained about 650 members of the Ukrainian armed forces, and by this autumn we expect to have trained nearly 1,000. We have increased our contribution to

NATO's new very high readiness joint taskforce, and we will augment it with 1,000 troops each year into the next decade. At the same time, we have been playing a leading role in helping to address the migrant issue, with HMS Bulwark rescuing literally thousands from the Mediterranean.

We are not just tackling the symptoms of instability; we are working on its causes, too. We plan to deploy some 130 military personnel to Nigeria between now and the end of September. They will assist the new Government in a range of tasks, including training those Nigerian units deploying on counter-Boko Haram operations. That is a significant increase on the numbers previously deployed. We are continuing to mentor the next generation of Afghan army officers, and we are supporting the people of Sierra Leone in their struggle against the scourge of Ebola and bringing humanitarian help to those affected by the Nepalese earthquake.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): My right hon. Friend has mentioned a number of operations on which I had the honour to serve. Although he is identifying military options for these problems, he will be more than aware that most of them do not really have a military solution. For example, in Nigeria, where we are helping against Boko Haram, the fundamental problem is the huge corruption in the Nigerian armed forces and the destructive element in the Nigerian Government. What can we possibly do with our Foreign Office colleagues to address the real problem rather than just the military fix?

Michael Fallon: I welcome my hon. Friend and parliamentary neighbour to his place in this House. He brings a wealth of experience from the armed forces and, indeed, the Ministry of Defence to debates such as this one. His question allows me to emphasise the importance of the work of other Departments. These cannot just be military solutions.

The work of the Department for International Development is extremely important and I have always seen development and defence as two sides of the same coin. The money we can spend up-front on capacity building helps to avoid a bigger financial outlay downstream. That money and the work by DFID and the Foreign Office can help prevent crises and conflicts. By strengthening countries in Africa, we can do more to discourage people from leaving them, and because today's aid budget is much better focused, with fewer countries receiving it, it has greater impact.

We are spending some £60 million on supporting millions of people who have been displaced by ISIL/Daesh, and we have pledged £900 million to answer the specific humanitarian crisis in Syria—the biggest ever UK response to any crisis anywhere.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The OECD is this month considering whether to re-categorise official development assistance so that it includes elements of the military, particularly peacekeeping. Would my right hon. Friend welcome that?

Michael Fallon: There are a number of measurements, including the OECD one and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute one. The return that I have filed on behalf of the United Kingdom is to NATO,

[Michael Fallon]

and it complies with NATO guidelines. The House will want to know that, on the basis of that guidance, we spent 2.2% last year and expect to spend more than 2% again this year.

As well as the 4,000 service personnel committed to the operations I have described, more than 10,000 people working in defence are stationed overseas—from Brunei to the Falklands, and from Cyprus to Kenya. They delivered courses in some 15 countries last year, and we have helped to train representatives from 90 countries in our military academies. More than 1,200 naval personnel are deployed in the middle east, helping to keep our energy supplies flowing and to counter terror.

Stephen Doughty: Given the breadth and scale of the operations that the Secretary of State is describing and the fact that they involve service personnel from the Army in particular, what progress has been made on the reserve recruitment targets, and does the Army 2020 strategy still hold? Given the scale of those operations, we must ensure that we can resource them with personnel.

Michael Fallon: I can confirm that Future Force 2020 is still our strategy. Reserve recruitment is now increasing rapidly—up by more than 60% on last year, with some 6,000 people having stepped forward to join the Army Reserve. We will continue to look at how to make the process of encouraging more people to join faster and simpler as the target becomes more challenging in its latter years, but that is still our ambition.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the sensible and pragmatic way in which he is dealing with all the problems around the world. He is talking about planes and ships, and about men and women doing various good things all around the world, as no doubt they are. As an ex-member of the armed forces, I am fully aware of the top quality of our men and women, and I cannot praise them enough. However, in my day those would have been called out-of-area operations, and we do not have the volume to meet a major threat. The Secretary of State has already said that we face many potential major threats. Surely we need to spend a lot more than 2% on defence to meet that awful inevitability.

Michael Fallon: I hope that my hon. Friend will recognise that we are rebuilding our forces, not least our reserves, which were shamefully neglected for years. We are continuing to work at that. In the 2010 review, we set out the aim of being able to put a division into the field—obviously with notice, as in any other major operation—and we are still able to field a brigade at much shorter notice. This year's strategic defence and security review will give us the opportunity to look at exactly those points all over again.

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP) *rose*—

Michael Fallon: I am in the hands of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker. I know that other Members want to speak, but I will give way to my hon. Friend.

Nusrat Ghani: As a proud new recruit of the armed forces parliamentary scheme, I look forward to gaining first-hand experience of the work done by our fantastic servicemen and women. Does my right hon. Friend agree, however, that our national security is not just about armies, but about individuals? That is why it is vital that the Government's proposed extremism Bill is developed alongside our wider defence strategy.

Michael Fallon: I absolutely agree. That is what the Prime Minister calls a "full spectrum" effect. We have to deal with these things right across the board—with diplomacy and tackling radicalisation, as well as the harder power that we are charged with. I wish my hon. Friend well in her experiences with the armed forces parliamentary scheme.

In describing the personnel who serve this country across the globe, it would be wrong not to mention those who work in our nuclear submarines. In those submarines, unseen and undetected, we have an ultimate deterrent that has now been maintained for more than 46 years. It is right to pay tribute to the men and women of that service, whose work is unseen but never out of our minds.

Apart from the United States, no other country has our global reach or defence footprint, which I have described. In a world where global problems demand global solutions, we are leveraging that influence to strengthen our international partnerships. At the multilateral level, we have encouraged NATO, the cornerstone of our defence, to upgrade its capabilities and increase allies' defence spending. Bilaterally, we have worked with the French to form the combined joint expeditionary force, with some 1,000 British and French personnel taking part in an exercise this year to bring us up to full operating capacity next year. Our relationship with the United States remains as strong as ever. We are working together not just in Europe and the Baltic, but in the Gulf, the Red sea and the Indian ocean. The United States Defence Secretary, Ash Carter, emphasised the importance of that relationship when I met him at NATO ministerial meetings last week.

We have been able to maintain this vast range of activity only because of the reforms we have implemented. We cannot have strong defence without a strong economy, so we had to take some tough decisions. We are now on course to deliver more than £5 billion of savings since 2010. We are making efficiency part of the culture of the Ministry of Defence and of our armed forces by making the drive to seek savings a habit. That approach has allowed us to protect the front line better, to maintain the existing size of our regular and reserve forces and to ensure that our personnel have the high-end capability they need, as well as to spend £160 billion over the next 10 years on the new hunter-killer submarines, helicopters, armoured vehicles and joint strike fighters that are needed.

Brendan O'Hara: Does the Secretary of State accept that there is a large defence capability gap, and does he now regret the ill-advised and short-sighted decision to abandon the maritime patrol aircraft that were chopped up and left to rot after the 2010 SDSR?

Michael Fallon: Tough decisions were taken back in 2010, but let me tell the hon. Gentleman that the maritime patrol aircraft, which were supposed to have

been delivered some 10 years previously, did not exist. Not a single aircraft had been handed over to the RAF. The programme was years behind schedule. The Conservative Government ordered them, but in their 13 years the Labour Government did not deliver them. There was not an aircraft on the tarmac, so we had to take a tough decision to organise our maritime patrol capability differently. That will of course be one of the areas that will be considered in the 2015 review, which is now under way.

Let me turn to that review. We have to deal not just with the challenges of today, but with those of tomorrow, which I think was the point made by the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes). I know that the strategic defence and security review has generated high levels of interest in this House, and I am grateful to the Defence Select Committee of the last Parliament for its reports, which are certainly informing our work.

The 2015 review will build on the 2010 review. Much of its analysis still holds good. We were right to identify counter-terrorism and cyber as key areas for investment, to start reshaping the Army for a post-Afghanistan future and to reform our defence structures. The 2010 review was the first forward-looking review of national security policy, plans and capabilities to cover all national security departments, not just defence. It established the National Security Council, ensuring strategic decision making at the top of Government, and it underlined the need for more agile forces in an era that is placing a greater number of more diverse demands on defence, which we are meeting through our Future Force. We are therefore far better placed for a review today than we were five years ago.

The review that is under way must reflect a world that now looks darker and more dangerous than at any time since the end of the cold war. It will consider the full range of threats that we face now and in the future, examine the capabilities that we need to handle those threats, and help us to judge how to resource those capabilities. Underpinned by a strong evidence base, the review will unite diplomacy, defence, development and homeland security. It will recognise that our security and prosperity at home and abroad are interlinked. It will also focus on opportunity and innovation—on getting the most out of our whole national security workforce, not just the uniformed services; on strengthening the defence and security industries to harness their technological know-how; on promoting the prosperity agenda; and on cementing key international partnerships.

We expect the review to be completed before the end of the year, but today is a good chance for me to listen to colleagues' views as well as to speak. The House has huge expertise in defence, development and national security, and I invite Members, whether they are going to speak today or not, to make submissions on the defence aspects of the review directly to me at the Ministry of Defence. We would welcome those submissions.

I say to those who are worried about the events of last Friday that we have highly capable armed forces, respected the world over, and we are putting in one of the biggest defence efforts of any nation in the world, with the fifth biggest defence budget. We are doing that right around the world, and for all the right reasons—to defend the values of freedom, tolerance and the rule of law that we hold dear. To the terrorists in Tunisia and extremists wherever they are, that is the best possible answer.

1.21 pm

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): I start by welcoming the new Chair of the Defence Committee, the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), to his role. I hope it goes well for him.

Today's debate is of great importance. As the Secretary of State said, it has taken on even greater significance after the harrowing events in Tunisia and the separate attacks in Kuwait and France last week. Like him, I extend our heartfelt sympathies to the family and friends of all those killed or injured. This must be a truly desperate time for them, and they deserve our full and unstinting support. I also pay tribute to the consular staff, police, Foreign Office officials, service personnel and others who assisted in the highly professional multi-agency response to the appalling tragedy and horror in Tunisia. I am sure I speak for the whole House in expressing our deep gratitude for their effectiveness in the face of a highly challenging and dynamic situation.

As if we needed reminding, the events of the past few days have shown that the security of British citizens does not begin and end at the border. The interconnected nature of the modern world is such that the radicalisation of a graduate in Tunisia can have consequences as profound for the safety of British citizens as if that graduate lived here in the UK. Last week's tragedy again emphasised the fact that the fight against Islamic extremism will be gruelling and enduring. It would be easy to conclude, as some already have, that taking on such a poisonous ideology is all too difficult and we cannot win. That is a counsel of despair, and we should have no truck with it. This has to be the time when the democratic nations of the world come together with those battling the threat wherever it occurs. Terrorism cannot be allowed to succeed, and the terrorists have to know that our will to defeat them remains undiminished.

I wish to respond directly to the Secretary of State's comments about the possibility of further action against ISIL. We are all horrified by what has happened in Tunisia and by the growing threat that ISIL poses. We must tackle that threat to our citizens both at home and abroad. We stand ready to work with the Government to defeat ISIL and will carefully consider any proposals that they decide to bring forward. We all need to be clear about what difference any action would make to our objective of defeating ISIL, the nature of that action, its objectives and its legal basis. Any potential action must command the support of other nations in the region, including Iraq, and the coalition that is already taking action in Syria.

This is a time for a considered assessment of the best course of action that we can take to defeat this deadly threat to the UK—an objective that unites all of us throughout the House. In redoubling our efforts to tackle extremism in the middle east, north Africa and beyond, we need to be honest not only about the scale of the challenge but about where we may have gone wrong. Despite the hundreds of billions of dollars spent over the past decade, a territory controlled by jihadis, spanning northern Iraq and Syria, is hundreds of times larger and better organised than anything al-Qaeda ever conceived of. The fall of Mosul was a victory of 1,300 men over a 60,000-strong force of Iraqi army and police. The United States has said that five of 18 army and police divisions disintegrated completely in the fall of northern Iraq last year.

[Vernon Coaker]

The Syrian crisis comprises five different conflicts that cross-infect and exacerbate each other. It started with a popular revolt against Assad, which soon became intertwined with the struggle between Sunnis and the Alawites. That then fed into the wider Sunni-Shi'a conflict, with a standoff between the US, Saudi Arabia and other Sunni states on one side and Iran, Iraq and the Lebanese Shi'a on the other.

That all demonstrates that it is essential that the Government and all of us recognise that, given the ever closer relationship between development, foreign policy and defence, political solutions are essential in order to ensure long-term stability. That is the crucial point at the heart of this afternoon's debate. Military activity can create the conditions for politics to succeed, but there have to be strong alliances and clear objectives. That is the strategic challenge that will have to be met in the coming years if the threat to us both at home and abroad is to be tackled successfully.

I acknowledge that there are no easy solutions, but is it not crucial that the Government work with our allies to bridge the sectarian divide and bring together what seem, at least from the outside, implacable enemies to fight ISIL? Will the Minister who winds up the debate say what more the Government propose to do to tackle the threat of ISIL and how we can improve Iraqi resilience on the ground? How can we better empower and work with our regional allies and build up the relationships that are so crucial to the success we need? Similarly, what role are the armed forces playing here at home to support operations by the police and the security services to prevent Islamic extremist terrorism here in the UK?

Today's debate is one of the most crucial of our time—not the debate in the House, although that is important, but the debate in our country about what our future global role should be. Many hon. Members have participated in that debate. Our belief is that the country stands at a crossroads. Which path should we take? Our view is that withdrawing from the world is not just undesirable but impossible. Britain can and must play a positive role in securing and improving international security. Our allies look to us to take up that mantle, and in short we have a responsibility to do so.

Mr Spellar: Before my hon. Friend moves on to the more general issue, will he clarify the fact that the House's refusal in 2013 to become involved in a brief bombing campaign against Assad—Members of all parties were involved in that decision—has absolutely no logical connection with taking military action against Daesh? Linking the two does not serve the interests of developing a proper national policy.

Vernon Coaker: My right hon. Friend's well made point is crucial to the debates that we will have in the House. The decision about whether we should take action in 2013 was related to Assad and his use of chemical weapons. The House as a whole took the view that it was not convinced that the motion before it would help us deal with that problem.

The Defence Secretary has not put a proposal before the House today, but he suggested that we may need to consider what further action can be taken, and how we

should deal with Islamic extremism and with Daesh or ISIL. The situation is totally different today compared with 2013, and we do no service to the country—or to anyone—if we are not clear about the difference between 2013 and 2015. We must all consider how we tackle Islamic extremism and terrorism, and keep our country and citizens safe. There will be debate and discussion on that, and people will have different views, but if we conflate 2013 with 2015, or whenever, we will not do the country a service, let alone anyone else.

Alex Salmond: Unless I am very much mistaken, the hon. Gentleman is preparing the ground to move the Labour party's position potentially to support air strikes in Syria. Given the complexities of the Syrian situation that he has described, and given that terrorist targets in Syria are already being bombed by our allies, what exactly can he or the Government identify regarding the participation of UK forces that will make any vital difference in this situation?

Vernon Coaker: The right hon. Gentleman asks a fair question, but he should also reflect on what I have tried to say, which is that we will consider the Government's proposals. As yet, the Government have made no proposals. This is not about preparing the ground; it is about saying what action we will take. The right hon. Gentleman will unite with everyone in the House in asking what we must do to tackle extremism and terrorism, and we must consider any proposals that the Government may bring forward.

Neither the right hon. Gentleman nor I have access to the intelligence or military advice that is available to the Defence Secretary, and we must consider what that advice might include. If military or intelligence advice suggests that a headquarters is directing terrorism across the world from parts of Syria, and that those who are conducting terrorist activities and killing British citizens who are on holiday do so on the directions of people in northern Syria—[*Interruption.*] UK citizens—English, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish or whatever: all citizens who are under threat from terrorism. All I say is that it would be right and proper to consider that information, and take whatever action is felt appropriate to deal with it. That is not the same as saying to the Government, "It does not matter what you say. We will support you". It means that we will be responsible—as will the right hon. Gentleman—and consider what advice the Government have received and what action we should or should not take.

Alex Salmond: We both know that the Defence Secretary, for some considerable time—as long as he has been Secretary of State—has wanted to extend the bombing campaign into Syria. If we examine the anguished debate that is taking place in America, does the hon. Gentleman agree that in Syria it is difficult to define targets, and to know who is who, which organisation is being struck, and what the effect will be of such airstrikes? Syria provides incredible complexity in such a campaign.

Vernon Coaker: I accept that point. Of course the situation in Syria is complex, as I stated earlier. All I say to the House is that we will consider any proposals that the Defence Secretary brings forward and, like the right hon. Gentleman, we are united in tackling Islamic extremism and terrorism. There is no difference between

us on that. When the Defence Secretary comes forward with proposals—if he does—we must consider them and see whether we can support any such action. That is all I am saying.

I was speaking about Britain's global role and how we cannot remove ourselves from that responsibility. We are uniquely placed: a P5 member, a leading EU country, the second largest contributor to NATO, a founding member of the G7 and—this is often missed out—a central partner in the Commonwealth. We are the only country that is part of all those things. That is not overblown rhetoric, jingoism or national chauvinism. We must be confident in the role that we could, should and will play. By the end of the decade we will have taken the decision to renew the nuclear deterrent, which we support, delivered new attack submarines, and be close to the regeneration of carrier strike. We are still a significant military force, and that is allied to our considerable political influence in the decision-making bodies of the world, and the defence engagement that we undertake in all regions by advising, supporting and training our friends. Such work is often unrecognised but it is crucial none the less. We must also accept that our armed forces have been shaped by more than a decade of conflict, and the British public have become far more sceptical about the use of military force. The case for our military must be made by us all.

Our highly capable armed forces are vital to the UK and its interests. Indeed, military power is not an alternative to, but acts as a support for, political solutions. Our armed forces project power on a global scale and deter potential enemies. The lesson of history is that deterrence, alongside politics, is the best course of action. In the modern world we must treat defence and security as separate sides of the same coin because we must do all we can to prevent a latent threat from becoming a patent one. We must ensure that we have responsive, high-tech armed forces with the capability to respond to emerging interconnected threats in an unpredictable security landscape, including hybrid warfare.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): As well as top-quality armed forces we also need the best security services, both at home and abroad, so that we can build up vital intelligence and utilise our armed forces to their best ability.

Vernon Coaker: My hon. Friend makes an important point about intelligence. We in this House are proud that our intelligence services are some of the best in the world, and the Defence Secretary will know about the much work that our intelligence services are doing across the world to keep us all safe—the rest of us will not know so much, but no doubt attacks and various other terrorist outrages across the world are being thwarted. We must ensure that our intelligence services have the best possible support and resources.

This is a time of multiple and complex global challenges—a far more uncertain security landscape than was envisaged in 2010 by the coalition Government in their national security strategy. Countries such as Syria, Iraq, Nigeria, Yemen and Libya are being torn apart by internal conflict, helping to incubate groups such as ISIL and other ideologically affiliated groups from whom we face a growing terrorist threat. From Vladimir Putin's Russia comes growing hostility, with military breaches

of sovereign territory that we hoped had been consigned to Europe's brutal past. Who among us believed that we would ever see the day when once again actions appropriate to the cold war era would be taking place within eastern Europe?

Alongside that, humanitarian crises are causing death and human misery with growing regularity and increasing scale, with migration not only a result of instability but a cause of it. We are all aware of the threat that climate change and resource scarcity will play in the coming years in causing instability and potentially sparking conflict, and new emerging threats such as those involving cyber seem to grow at an exponential pace. Our defence and security policies need to navigate that unpredictable and changing landscape by offering certainty and stability.

One part of the debate that gets little coverage or discussion is the renewal of the 2010 national security strategy, which is critical. I do not criticise the Government for failing to see into the future, but that the 2010 strategy fails to mention many of the threats that we are now discussing shows the difficulty of this situation. For example, Russia and ISIL are not mentioned in the 2010 strategy, and the concept of hybrid warfare is not addressed either.

Let us be clear: the process must identify the threats the country faces. From that, we should identify the military capabilities needed to defend us from such threats. The debate is crucial but the Government need urgently to address the lack of transparency and sense of importance. The relationship between the national security strategy and the SDSR is vital. The strategy was a welcome innovation, but it is time to build on it.

In 2010, the Government trumpeted their rejection of strategic shrinkage, yet in the past five years it is said that Britain has lost influence in Europe and the wider world. The Defence Secretary argued just a few weeks ago that we are more engaged than we were in 2010, but we all know that, wherever we go and whatever the reason, it has seemed to our friends and allies that we are less globally relevant than we were five years ago.

The argument barely needs rehearsing, but the previous Government presided over a strategic defence and security review that was strategic in name only. They began by asking what could be cut instead of focusing on ensuring that we have a strong, high-tech armed force equipped for the many emerging and interconnected threats of the 21st century. This time, we should ensure that there are no last-minute deals or rushed decision making based on inadequate thinking. We should not be afraid to debate the future of our country in an open and inclusive way. We might not agree, but the argument is important. I believe there is a great deal of consensus about our global role.

We should ask the important questions on the regeneration of the carrier strike, and the operation of the two carriers and what that means. We should ask questions about the regeneration of the maritime patrol aircraft, which is essential; and the need to refresh Army 2020 and Future Force 2020. It will be interesting to hear what the Defence Secretary says over the next week or two about the future of the reserves, and whether there has been a change of policy. Is the policy on the integration of the reserves with the regulars the same as it was a year ago? Army 2020, Future Force 2020 and the upgrading of our ISTAR capability are major issues that we will need to address, alongside

[Vernon Coaker]

recruitment to 77 Brigade and the need for forces who are able to combat new forms of hybrid warfare. In short, we need to fill the strategic vacuum at the heart of the Government.

The Government have put us on the road to an EU referendum and we need to have a debate about the security aspects of that vital relationship. How can we ensure that NATO not only remains relevant in European security in the 21st century, but develops a coherent and effective response to Russian aggression on our continent? In that regard, the stakes could not be higher. With Russia's recent actions in Ukraine, its upgrade of its nuclear arsenal and its bellicose rhetoric towards NATO, we have seen a dramatic shift in the strategic balance on the continent of Europe. Let us be clear: we must convince our allies to do more. The debate has mainly been about resources, but it should also be about our willingness to defend one another and to live up to our treaty obligations, especially article 5—and, yes, that means having a frank discussion about our country's commitment to the 2% NATO target.

The MOD is scrabbling around Whitehall this year looking for pots of cash to include in our defence spending. It is redefining £800 million of war pensions. The Defence Secretary said on Monday, as he has said many times in the past, that spending plans will be set out in the autumn. Can he guarantee that, this year, the reductions he has been asked to make by the Chancellor will not result in any reductions in the training activity of our armed forces? Where threats are identified, they need to be addressed and appropriately resourced. That is how we expect an SDSR to be run.

Briefly on other parts of the world, I recently visited Japan, where there are growing concerns. Do we need to consider our strategic interests in that area? How do we build on our burgeoning relationships with Japan and how do we renew our deep links with Australia, New Zealand and Canada?

On Monday, the Prime Minister mentioned that the G7 wanted to create a kind of clearing house to ensure that countries that need assistance receive help from the nation most able to give it effectively. How will that work? What role can the UK play to ensure its success?

At the end of the previous Parliament, the Defence Committee produced a series of excellent reports on the SDSR. The third report came up with more than 70 questions that the SDSR should address. That would be an excellent starting place for a more wide-ranging debate.

In 1998, Robin Cook and George Robertson toured the country, holding in-depth seminars with expert panels, where the public could engage. The process may have taken longer and might have been more unwieldy from a Whitehall perspective, but it produced a piece of work that is unrivalled as an assessment of the UK's role in a global context. So far, we have not seen that ambition from the Government. I call on them today to open up a wide-ranging dialogue with the British people about the future defence of our country.

I said that we stand once again at a crossroads as a nation. A few weeks ago, the *Washington Post* wrote that Britain had resigned as a world power. The Defence Secretary claims we are doing more than we did five years

ago, but it is not good enough just to assert it—we need to demonstrate it. The Prime Minister has called ISIL an existential threat to the UK. The Government need to live up to their rhetoric. Britain remains a global power. The SDSR is a chance for us to refresh, renew and rethink our strategy as a nation. We should and must take that chance.

1.46 pm

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): It has been touching to receive so many messages of congratulations on my becoming Chair of the Defence Committee. It is a great responsibility and I will endeavour to live up to it. I pay tribute to the work of my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), for the reports he produced in short order, some of which were slightly overshadowed by the advent of the election campaign and deserve further scrutiny. There was a lot of very interesting material in them.

If I may, I will begin by addressing the excellent interventions made by the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh) and my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray) relating to questions of terminology. In that connection, I pay tribute in his absence to my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti) for his achievement. He attracted support from every part of the House—he gathered 125 right hon. and hon. Members' signatures—and petitioned the BBC to stop playing the propaganda game of Daesh and to describe it correctly.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): I am a former member of the Defence Committee. The right hon. Gentleman will recall a report from back in January that mentions the word "Daesh". The Committee was ahead of its time.

Dr Lewis: I hope to be able to continue that degree of far-sightedness in future.

Mr James Gray: I am sorry to interrupt my right hon. Friend to make such a tiny point. It is most kind of him to describe me as "gallant", but I was only ever a private soldier in the Territorial Army. Surrounded as I am by brave soldiers who truly deserve the title, I should say that I am not in any shape, size or form "gallant".

Dr Lewis: My hon. Friend is, in my eyes, as gallant as they come.

In my hon. Friend's intervention, he drew attention—he was kind enough to give me the copy of the news article to which he referred—to what the head of the BBC had said. According to today's edition of *The Times*:

"The head of the BBC has refused demands from 120 MPs to drop the term Islamic State on the ground that its coverage of the terrorist group must be impartial. Lord Hall of Birkenhead, the director-general, warned that an alternative name for the militants was 'pejorative' and said that the broadcaster needed to 'preserve the BBC's impartiality'."

I have news for Lord Hall. I am well familiar with the concept of impartiality that applies to the BBC and independent television. I used to look into it decades ago. It is not absolute impartiality. The example that is always given is that there is no need for the media to be impartial between the arsonist and the fire brigade.

The BBC is required to show due impartiality, which does not mean that it has to be impartial between terrorists and constitutionally constituted Governments and their armed forces. Lord Hall would do well to reflect on how he would react if somebody from his ranks of well-paid BBC executives said that the corporation needs to be impartial between the Nazis and the forces that fought them. He would not stand up for that suggestion for a moment.

Alex Salmond: Far be it for me to defend the BBC, since it has done so little in Scotland recently to merit defence, but does the right hon. Gentleman not allow that perhaps we should unite across the Chamber in the expression of the term Daesh and the wisdom of using it? Once we do that, we can then reflect on whether the broadcasting organisations would follow, as opposed to just turning this into a bash the BBC session.

Dr Lewis: I am extremely grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who anticipates the very next point I was going to make. If we use the term Daesh, eventually, with luck, the BBC will be the only organisation left not doing so. At that point, even the BBC might see sense.

I wish to paint a brief picture of the sort of problems we face that lead to the strange paradox that I alluded to when I intervened briefly on the Secretary of State. As I said, two years ago we were proposing to intervene on behalf of one side in a civil war and against the other. Now, it is being proposed that we do exactly the opposite. There are people in the House who are far more expert in these matters than I—

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I seem to recall that the vote was actually not to intervene, but to keep the option of intervention on the menu in negotiations. It was not an option for us to intervene.

Dr Lewis: I am afraid I have to disagree with my hon. and gallant Friend. If the vote had been carried, intervention would have taken place the very next weekend. The vote was defeated in this House and the Americans, as a result of that defeat, wisely followed suit, and we did not go down that dangerous road.

As I was starting to say, my interpretation of the situation we face in the world—it may be over-simple, but here it is for what it is worth—is that the western world is being caught up in a terrible recrudescence of the age-old battle between the Shi'as and the Sunnis, a point made by the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) in an earlier intervention. The complexity is that the Shi'a and the Sunni militants have a selection of powerful allies. On the Shi'a side, the Syrian Government two years ago posed the threat of chemical weapons, and the Iranian regime has the potential to acquire nuclear weapons. As part of that particular little gang, we also see our old friend President Putin, who has been flexing his muscles, in a way that we all strongly condemn, by taking unilateral action in Ukraine.

On the Sunni side, we see al-Qaeda and the Daesh militants. Behind them, we see strong elements at least of ideological support in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Qatar, who are supposed to be our friends and allies. The problem we face is that there are no good outcomes to be had, whatever course of action we take. What we therefore have to do is to choose between, at any one

time, and adopt a policy that is the lesser of two evils. What we have to decide at any one time is: which is the greater danger posed by one element or another in those two unlovely collections of hostile regimes and terrorist organisations?

I wish today simply to sow the seed of the idea that, where we cannot get a wonderfully satisfactory outcome, and we know the only outcome we will get is to try to minimise the damage and that that will have to be done over an extended period, we should adopt a policy that stood us in good stead for half a century in relation to Soviet Communist Russia and its empire: the policy of containment. We cannot force countries that are not ready yet for democracy to become democracies at the point of a gun barrel, unless one goes to the same extent as at the end of the second world war when there was the total defeat and occupation of countries at the cost of millions of lives.

The idea of containment is not passive; it is an active containment. I spoke earlier today with Lord West, whom I greatly respect. He combines much knowledge with a great deal of practical common sense, and I consulted him two years ago before going ahead and deciding to vote against the proposed intervention then. I said to him today that I was minded to think that if we intervened on this occasion, we would be intervening in a very different way from the one that was proposed two years ago. We would not be intervening to bring down another dreadful Arab dictator and replace him with another failed state run by Islamist extremist terrorists. His response was interesting. He said it is a policy of deciding, at any one time, which of the crocodiles is swimming nearest to the boat. Of course, there is no way of permanently taking the crocodiles out of the scene and sailing blissfully out of danger. When dangerous organisations and deadly regimes wield their weapons in ways that are most threatening to us, we must constantly, over a period of time, try to contain the threat by active measures.

What we are seeing with Daesh and its activity is new. It requires containment, but it requires active containment. Daesh is seizing large areas of territory. By doing so, it is giving up the one great advantage that insurgencies and terrorist groups generally have: the advantage of invisibility. A policy of active containment will, from time to time, certainly require the step of military intervention to prevent the enemy on that particular side of the two-sided threat that I have been trying to describe from becoming over-dominant.

We must not fool ourselves into believing that any steps we take will result in a decisive solution. As the Secretary of State said, we are in this for the long haul. At any given time, we will have to intervene to keep whichever particular set of enemies is becoming too dominant, under control. In a way, that is nothing different from what was traditionally the role of the balance of power, when Britain looked after its national interests by ensuring that no one potential enemy power became overwhelmingly strong on the continent.

That leads me, very briefly, to the question of NATO and European defence. We have seen the concept of article 5—the guarantee whereby NATO ensures that none of its members is attacked without the potential aggressor knowing in advance that, if it does that, it will immediately be at war with all other NATO members—stretched to its limit. We have a long and honourable

[Dr Julian Lewis]

tradition of supporting the independence of the Baltic states. It goes back at least to the time of our intervention in the Russian civil war in 1919-20. I must say to the House, however, that the decision NATO took to extend its protection to the Baltic states is, realistically, as far as we can go. It is simply not fair to countries further east to hold out the false hope of NATO membership, which, if granted, would be totally incredible. If a potential enemy believes that it is not credible that all NATO members would, in fact, declare war upon the aggressor if there were an attack on one of these eastern states, we will have destroyed the whole foundation and the whole reason for having NATO in the first place. That does not do anyone any favours. It just takes us back to the scenarios of the 1930s, when an aggressor thought that it could pick off one state after another without larger states coming to their rescue.

Finally, I want to say this. The Government keep saying that defence is the first duty of Government. I agree: it is the first duty of Government. It is more important than any other duty of Government. If that is the case, there can be no coherent or rational case for safeguarding and ring-fencing the budgets of other Government Departments, thus increasing the pressure on the unprotected Departments, which include Defence. Something has gone awry with the Government's sense of defence as the top national priority. We constantly hear talk about Britain punching above its weight, but in reality, the weight of the punch depends on the resources allocated to the armed forces. The stronger the armed forces in peacetime, the more likely it is that we will not have to engage in warfare, because anyone who is likely to attack us will be forced to think again.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Before I call the next speaker, it may be helpful to know that I hope not to impose a time limit on speeches this afternoon, if I gain the co-operation of Members who, out of courtesy for their colleagues, will hopefully keep their speeches to some seven or eight minutes. If everyone were to do that, there would be no need for a formal time limit and we would have more flexibility and a better-flowing debate. This stricture, of course, does not apply to the Front-Bench spokesmen, such as the next speaker, Mr Alex Salmond.

2.2 pm

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. You have no idea how joyful it is to hear those words spoken and, after so many years in this House, to be in a position where those time strictures do not apply. I know it is not democratic and is unfair to other Members, but I must confess a feeling of real joy and anticipation. You will be delighted to know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that despite the invitation to proceed at some considerable length, I intend to be quite brief. I have enough feeling regarding previous occasions to remember just how frustrating it is to Members not to be able to avail themselves of an opportunity to speak.

I am delighted to follow the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), the new Chairman of the Select Committee. I have a fellow feeling for much of what he said, although perhaps not the last part. I know

that my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline and West Fife (Douglas Chapman), who represents Rosyth, is looking forward to serving under his chairmanship.

I want to re-emphasise my condolences and those of my hon. Friends and our allies in Plaid Cymru, the Green party and the Social and Democratic Labour party to the friends and relatives of those who suffered in the atrocity in Tunisia. It is really important that we emphasise that point across the Chamber—without any ambiguity whatever.

My own feeling is that we did the House a disservice last Monday by combining the statement on Tunisia with the statement on the European Council. If we look at Monday's *Hansard*, we see that hon. Members were alternating between asking questions about their potentially dead or missing constituents in Tunisia and asking questions, which were legitimate in themselves, about the Prime Minister's renegotiation stance on the European Union. When something such as the Tunisia outrage happens, I feel it is worthy of a statement on its own to be considered on its own. As I say, we did a disservice in not doing that.

There is some element of a disservice, albeit not to the same extent, in the Secretary of State for Defence claiming in his advance publicity that this afternoon's debate relates to extending military action into Syria. If there were a military reaction to the atrocity in Tunisia, it would be important for it to be considered on its own merits and to be judged on that line of responsibility in terms of the justification and efficacy of such military action.

I have known the Secretary of State for Defence for a long time—perhaps too long for both of us—but I was struck by an interview he gave which said:

“The Ministry of Defence is like a sauna on Sunday. The air circulation system has been switched off and the place is hot—and deserted. Yet when you reach the Secretary of State's floor, a small team is hard at work. As you enter Michael Fallon's office, you see the reason why. On an easel sits a map of Iraq and Syria.”

Despite the weather conditions, this interview was conducted not last week but on 23 September last year. The Secretary of State has always believed—it is a perfectly honourable belief—that the United Kingdom should participate in the air actions in Syria. That has been his belief and statement. I do not think it is correct, however, to suggest, without specific understanding and without revealing to the House the reasons why—and in more than vague and general terms—that we should frame and publicise this afternoon's debate in relation to extending military action into Syria.

As I mentioned in an intervention, the Tunisian Government have conducted a number of arrests today. They claim and believe that the terrorist cell responsible for the atrocity was trained in a terrorist camp in Libya. Logically, if there were a military response, people would understandably ask why it did not extend to where the Tunisian Government believe the responsible gunman was trained.

Mr James Gray: I very much agree with the right hon. Gentleman that if there were to be a military strike against Syria, the matter would have to come back to this House. I commend to him my recently published book “Who Takes Britain to War?” on this very subject. If ISIL or Daesh is operating from Syria as well as from Iraq—there is no real border between the two

countries; the border is entirely porous—does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it would be perfectly logical to strike against Daesh in Syria as well as in Iraq?

Alex Salmond: I am coming on to explain exactly why I am sceptical about that argument. I would be delighted, however, to receive a signed copy of the hon. Gentleman's book if he would care to provide one; in return, I shall give him a copy of my recently published book, which is nothing like as useful or informed as the hon. Gentleman's. None the less, he might find it of some interest.

I particularly support the words of the Chairman of the Defence Select Committee on the question of the description of the terrorist organisation as Daesh, as opposed to the variety of other acronyms and descriptions that have been widely used. It is fundamental. It is not a matter just of semantics or language; it is fundamental to the campaign of ideas that we should be conducting. This is, fundamentally, a campaign that is going to be decided by whose ideas and whose vision of society and the world have the most attraction to generations of young people across the planet.

I would like to compliment both my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh) and the hon. Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti) who have been taking this matter forward so avidly over recent days. I have done a lot more thinking about this over the last few weeks than I have previously, and the more one looks at the arguments, the more sensible, rational and substantial they become.

There is in the Library an article written by Alice Guthrie, who is an expert on these matters and a translator of Arabic. I was struck by the logic and the coherence of the argument she advanced in the article. As I say, it is available in the Library and it is entitled "Decoding Daesh: Why is the new name for ISIS so hard to understand?". She quotes a number of important sources—for example, al-Haj Saleh, the Syrian activist, writer and influential figure, who impressively said:

"If an organisation wants to call itself 'the light', but in fact they are 'the darkness', would you comply and call them 'the light'?"

Clearly, the answer is no. Alice Guthrie herself goes on to say:

"All of this is why some Syrian activists therefore see it as so important that use of the word 'Daesh' spreads, and have been working hard to make that happen – so effectively in fact, as we know, that the word has been taken on by several global heads of state and their associated media, who have a limited grasp of the specifics behind the term. Originally hailing from the city of Raqqa, Daesh's current Syrian headquarters, al-Haj Salih says his main goal in making a new name for Daesh was to avoid people getting used to referring to a tyrannical and despotic movement as a 'state'... In terms of its use by global heads of state and media, he feels that this is only natural, and right, as 'The people who suffer most at the hands of Daesh should decide what they are called'."

This is much more than a matter of semantics. It is at the very heart of the need to remove from a terrorist organisation the legitimacy of its aspiration to statehood and a new caliphate, and of its claim—a misleading, wrongful and hurtful claim—to represent one of the world's great religions. I think that that is absolutely fundamental to the question of how we deal with this matter.

I intervened on the right hon. Member for New Forest East to make the point that, as he later acknowledged, it is crucial for us to unite as a Chamber if we believe this

issue to be important, as I do, and as my hon. Friends do. I think that the Secretary of State himself was sympathetic to that when, in response to an intervention, he said it was something that we must reflect on. I think we should reflect on it very soon. I am sure that if we unite, as a Chamber and as a House, in recognising the importance of the war of ideas that behind the words, then the broadcasting organisations in this country will follow, as broadcasting organisations have followed in other countries. If we have the confidence to state something which is, at its heart, of fundamental importance, then let us do so. If the broadcasting organisations do not see the wisdom of it, then, and only then, will perhaps be the time for us to open up the full fusillade and barrage of gunfire against the BBC that the right hon. Member for New Forest East suggested.

My second major point is this. I am sceptical about the basis for the extension of the United Kingdom's participation in an air campaign in Syria. There are questions that I think should be considered, and considered profoundly. The first relates to the legal basis. I have here a summary note which was presented by the Attorney General on 25 September last year and laid in the Library, and which provided the legal basis for the UK's participation in the air campaign in Iraq. It is a one-page note, and it leans heavily—almost exclusively—on the argument that such action was beyond reproach in international law, because it constituted reaction to a request from a legitimate Government in Iraq.

The Secretary of State suggested that, by extension, it could be said that the Government in Iraq were requesting an intervention in Syria, but it is difficult to see how that could be justified on exactly the same legal basis as the one on which the Attorney General relied last September for participation in the air campaign in Iraq. Let me say to the Secretary of State, and to the Minister who will sum up the debate, that if that is to be the legal basis, we must be given, and presumably will be given, a further summary note explaining the legal basis for participation in Syria. Does the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) wish to intervene?

Vernon Coaker: No. I am just listening.

Alex Salmond: I am glad that I have captured the attention of the Labour Front Bench, and I hope what I have said will receive wide support in the House.

Another reason for my scepticism is my experience—an experience that I have shared with a number of Members over the last 12 years—of successive military interventions in a range of Islamic countries. At each stage it was argued, and we were assured, that the next intervention would be the absolute key, or at least would deliver progress towards the objectives of this country. I think it must be said that, on each and every occasion, exactly the reverse has come about.

According to the House of Commons Library, 2,047 days have passed since Sir John Chilcot made his opening statement in the Iraq inquiry. By contrast, the first world war lasted 1,561 days, and the second world war lasted only slightly longer than the Chilcot inquiry, at 2,075 days. I am told that a trip to Mars and back would take 520 days. We are also reminded that the Franks inquiry into the Falklands war took a little over six months.

[Alex Salmond]

I think it very important—and I would apply this, with great respect, to those who voted for intervention in Iraq, including the present Prime Minister, the present Chancellor of the Exchequer and the present Secretary of State for Defence—for us to reflect on the lessons of that intervention, and also the wider interventions which have, in my view removed despotic tyrants only to create political vacuums from which unspeakable horrors have now emerged. I think that we should reflect on the wisdom of what we are doing before embarking on another extension of military intervention without at least establishing a specific line of causality between the latest atrocity carried out against United Kingdom citizens and the way in which military intervention would affect it. My view of this matter is tempered by experience, and that experience has not been helpful to those who advocate military intervention.

The third reason for my scepticism is one of practicality. I hope that I shall be able to type in my eight-numeral password so that I can find something that I read a few minutes ago on this iPad. I had looked up the derivation of the dictum “My enemy’s enemy is my friend”. I was once told that it had originated from Sandhurst—that it was the Sandhurst view of diplomacy—but further examination reveals that it is much, much more ancient than that. In fact, the original dictum came not from Sandhurst but from Sanskrit. It is as old as recorded history itself. Having consulted my iPad, I now understand that there is a Bedouin Arabic version of the proverb which reads “Me and my brother against my cousin, but me and my cousin against the stranger”.

The dictum about “my enemy’s enemy” no doubt applies to many situations in many countries in the world, but I think that one country where it certainly does not apply—or where it is not easy to fathom—is Syria. In Syria, your enemy’s enemy is just as likely, perhaps more likely, to be your enemy than to be your friend. It is a country of extraordinary complexity. We read of the anguished debates about Syria that are taking place in the United States at the moment about the wisdom of specific air strikes on specific targets, and whether the allied air force will end up bombing the wrong people in Syria and undercutting the aims that the campaign is meant to engender. For that third reason, practicality, we remain to be convinced that this is a wise course of action.

Brendan O’Hara: I entirely agree that with my right hon. Friend that the situation is extremely complex. Every Member who has spoken in the debate seems to have accepted the complex and ever-changing nature of the threat that we now face. The response to that threat must be flexible and innovative. Does my right hon. Friend agree that nuclear weapons cannot be used to combat terrorism, and are, in fact, useless at protecting citizens against senseless atrocities? Does he agree that the Government’s plan to spend £100,000 million on renewing Trident, while at the same time making swingeing cuts in the conventional forces on which we shall rely more and more, is an extremely worrying development?

Alex Salmond: I do agree with my hon. Friend. I could, if I wished, spend a great deal of time talking about Trident to Conservative Members, but I shall try

to confine myself specifically to the issue that the Secretary of State has cast as the issue under discussion. Nevertheless, I think that there is a connection between these issues. The Secretary of State talked about a number of threats that the United Kingdom faced. To remarkably few of those threats would anyone present the Trident nuclear system or its renewal as an effective answer, and it could certainly not be presented as an answer to the threat that we face from terrorism.

In summary, I say to the House that we could achieve something together by accepting the wisdom of so many of our Arabic friends and so many of our allies that “Daesh” is the right term to describe terrorists. Is a terrorist by any other name still a terrorist? Most certainly. Does it matter that they are called “terrorist” and not accorded the respectability of being referred to as a state or representing a religion? I think it matters a very great deal, and I think we are on the point of a consensus on the matter—and I hope the Secretary of State for Defence will, perhaps, be able to go further in summing up this debate.

We are sceptical and opposed in the current circumstances to extending the air campaign into Syria. We would have to see the legal basis, and the practicality would have to be much better understood. In particular, a great deal of my experience in this House, and our experience collectively as a country over past years, tells us that interventions can have unforeseen consequences. Many of our interventions and extensions of military action could at best be described as counter-productive and at worst have helped to replenish the dark well from which terrorism is now springing.

2.21 pm

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) and to take part in this important debate. I say to the Government that the House will have to return to many of these issues in the coming months and years, and they would do well to secure a two-day debate on the next occasion so that they have the chance to hear the views of Members from across the House and answer their concerns. That way, we will avoid the problems that have arisen in the past.

It is a truism to say that we face a very threatening international situation that is incomparably worse than it was five years ago. To the erudite list the Secretary of State for Defence gave at the beginning, I would add what is happening in the China sea and underline the catastrophe—the tide of human misery—that has taken place in the middle east, centred on Syria. When I first went to the Zaatari refugee camp as Secretary of State for International Development in 2012 and pledged a great deal of British money to help those fleeing Syria, I had no idea that the whole region would be convulsed by the subsequent refugee crisis and tragedy.

There is, however, some good news. The important innovation of the National Security Council is very valuable, representing a huge improvement in the way we weld together defence, diplomacy and development. After all, a third of the development budget now goes to conflict resolution and tackling conflict. We should not forget that the purpose of Britain’s intervention in Libya was to stop a bloody massacre in Benghazi in which thousands of people would have been killed.

In the election campaign, it was suggested that the Government had not learned the lessons of Iraq in respect of stabilisation. I was on the NSC at that time and we certainly learned the lessons of Iraq, but if we are to stabilise a country after a conflict, there must be some degree of stability. We had well co-ordinated international plans on stabilisation, which unfortunately were destroyed by the complete lack of stability and security in Libya at that time.

This autumn, the strategic defence and security review will be completed. That is the time when we will need to assess whether 2% is enough for defence, because we will then be able to match the resources to the tasks which we require of our great armed services. That is an important equation; there must be sufficient resources for those brave men and women to carry out their tasks.

I pay tribute to the exceptional work that is done by UK development in pursuing Britain's national interests. I had the privilege of leading DFID in the first half of the last Parliament, and the men and women of that Department do an excellent job of boosting prosperity, tackling—often successfully—conflict and disorder, and building on the good foundations, I readily concede, of the Labour years. Although those three aspects should encourage us, there is much we can still do better.

On Daesh, or ISIL, we must have a strategy that splits off the hardliners from those who hear with some sympathy the drumbeat of the terrorist message. It is another truism that in Ireland at one point there were perhaps 200 active terrorists, but thousands of sympathisers. As Chairman Mao once said, fishes need water to swim in. Splitting off the hardliners from those who are more biddable is extremely important and we do that in a number of ways. In the longer term, we need to support development. That is the way, over the longer term, that we will attack the desperate poverty and deep unfairness in the distribution of resources that we see, in particular, in north Africa and the middle east. By focusing on clean water, education, schools, health and family planning, and by offering desperately poor people those basic ingredients of life that we in the west take for granted, international development helps to bind people into a system and a country.

We need a long-term, coherent political strategy to defeat the brutal thugs and anarchists of Daesh that involves all the regional powers and is backed by the international powers outside the region that have influence. Those with influence over the protagonists must exert it for political progress to be made.

In the short term, there is great concern that a more coherent plan needs to emerge. There has been a dearth of leadership from the United States in the recent past; Europe is facing inwards, addressing substantial problems over Greece and migrants crossing the Mediterranean; and the UN, which ought to be the means of progress, is hamstrung by its structure. If there is to be greater military involvement by Britain, colleagues who were not convinced that there was an overarching strategy at the time of the Syria vote must be persuaded that this time there is.

We should also go after ISIL's funding with greater vigour. We should seek to destroy the oil sales and the means of delivery. We should do more to train and arm the peshmerga, and we should do the same for other Gulf forces once they get their act together. We should also make far more co-ordinated use of international

and Gulf special forces on the ground. There are good guys on the ground in Syria; we need to work more closely with them.

In north Africa, we need to give specific help to Tunisia. We need more public information campaigns to stop the very brave migrants coming across the sea in leaky boats, seeking a better life on a European shore. We need to consider the use of blockading and military action against the horrendous trafficker gangs, and we need to find all possible ways of diminishing and ending this huge humanitarian tragedy.

Longer-term economic progress in north Africa is essential. The southern European Mediterranean states need to understand that, in the end, they will either take the people or the goods and services that those people can produce in north Africa. I freely concede that that is a long-term objective, but it is essential nevertheless.

Alex Salmond *rose*—

Mr Mitchell: I have almost finished.

May I end on this point? On Sunday night, I shall attend an Iftar at the Birmingham mosque—the biggest mosque in Europe, I think—with a community every bit as horrified by, and condemnatory of, what happened in Tunisia as all of us here. We in this country need to condemn Islamophobia with every bit as much force and conviction as we condemn anti-Semitism. We need to stand up for human rights, recognising that human rights are not just for nice middle-class people in the royal town of Sutton Coldfield, but for some very unpleasant people who populate our world as well.

We must never compromise our standards of justice and integrity in this ideological battle. Again, I make a plea to the US Government to release for transfer from Guantanamo the last British detainee held there as rapidly as they can. We must not allow terrorists to bully us into abandoning the long-cherished liberties that Britain has stood by. This House eventually stopped the absurd idea of the Executive that we should incarcerate people for up to 90 days without charge. I cannot think of any better recruiting sergeant for terrorist fanatics than the colossal mistake that that would have been. We stopped identity cards. We are now wrestling with the issue of secret courts and the information that has come out of the first secret trial, which is enormously discouraging. This is a generational battle against a threat that is a clear and present danger not only to all of us in Britain, but to many of the poorest Muslim people in the world.

2.30 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): I add my voice to those of other Members who have said that it is time for all of us, including our national media, to start to categorise this organisation, which we are against in a wide-ranging international struggle, as what it is: a criminal caliphate; murderous monsters; homophobic horrors; and people who have nothing to do with a state.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): A death cult.

Mike Gapes: It is more than a death cult. It is worse than that, because its members are interested not just in themselves dying, but in trying to kill people of all faiths and none throughout the world. There can be no

[Mike Gapes]

negotiation with such organisations, and that means we have to rethink—sadly—some approaches we have taken in recent years.

In Syria we also have to recognise, as we look back to a century ago, that the system of nation states established as a result of Sykes and Picot after world war one is coming under serious strain. The states that exist in the middle east, many drawn simply as lines on a map by British and French diplomats, are now seriously in question. Arab nationalism was for many years the dominant force in the region, but since the events of 2011—the so-called, misnamed Arab Spring—it is now questionable whether Humpty Dumpty can be put back together again.

In the past few days an embryonic Kurdish autonomous region, Rojava, in northern Syria next to the Turkish border, has come about. The town that was taken the other day, Tal Abyad, by the PYD/YPG, the Syrian Kurdish organisation, has for the first time given it a contiguous series of enclaves.

On the other side, since the justified and welcome decision by John Major's Government to introduce a no-fly zone in northern Iraq, to protect the Kurds from the murderous Ba'athist, fascist regime of Saddam Hussein, we have had for many years the Kurdish regional Government, with their own flag and armed forces, the peshmerga. The Syrian Kurds and Iraqi Kurds have been fighting Daesh. They have had setbacks, lost many people, and been poorly equipped and outgunned by the most well funded and best armed terrorist organisation that has ever existed. That is mainly because the Iraqi army ran away and handed over American-donated weaponry, but it is not simply for that reason. It is also because that organisation pays people to join it. I heard a story the other day of people leaving republics of the former Soviet Union, having been recruited—young Muslim men, paid thousands of US dollars and recruited to that organisation.

Daesh has an appeal to some disaffected groups and, sadly, within our own society. There is the horrific story of the family of three generations from Luton, of Bangladeshi heritage, who on their way back from Bangladesh via Turkey have apparently disappeared. It is suggested that one of the women was influenced and radicalised, and the whole family—three generations, grandparents and young children, 12 people—have disappeared and are thought to be in Syria.

Stephen Pound: My hon. Friend rightly mentions the quality of the weaponry that the peshmerga and the Kurdish forces use. Is he aware of the statement they have just made, to the effect that they are fighting people who have the most modern American equipment while they have to use Soviet-era matériel? Does he feel that we in this country could do more to assist the people who are actually there, on the ground, fighting that murderous, brutal band, which he so accurately describes?

Mike Gapes: I agree entirely. That was the point of my intervention on the Secretary of State earlier.

The German Government have provided far more weaponry than we have to the KRG in Iraq, but the United States and our Government are still reluctant to

directly provide weaponry. The Syrian Kurds may be getting some limited support, but because of Turkey's concerns and Baghdad's objections, the Kurds in Syria and in Iraq are not getting what they absolutely need. These are brave people, and they are putting themselves on the line in defence, in the case of the Iraqi Kurds, of a democratic, pluralistic society that welcomes those internally displaced from the rest of Iraq and refugees from Syria.

I, like the former Secretary of State for International Development, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), visited a refugee camp in Kurdistan in 2013. At that point there were only 250,000 Syrian Kurdish refugees inside the KRG. The KRG has a population of about 4 million, but now 1 million people have gone there to seek refuge and survive. They need humanitarian help, but they also need military assistance, which we should be giving directly to help the Iraqi Kurds in their existential fight against Daesh.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): I was in Iraq on Friday. I had an opportunity to speak to the Deputy Prime Minister of Kurdistan, and we are upgrading our military contribution. We have to bear in mind that this is not a competition with NATO allies. We are working together on providing important assistance to the peshmerga, an incredible fighting force, but there are requests for Warsaw pact-calibre capabilities. We obviously provide NATO ones, and we have to be careful about what we provide them.

Mike Gapes: I look forward to seeing the details. No doubt, as a Select Committee member in future, I will be able to question the Minister on those matters more directly.

Libya is partly our creation. Members of this House overwhelmingly—I was one of those Members—supported military intervention in 2011 to stop the prospect of mass slaughter in Benghazi. An indirect consequence was the downfall of the Gaddafi regime. There was a democratic process and an election, but it all went wrong, and the weaponry that left Libya can now be found throughout north Africa. I saw that myself when I went to Mali.

Libya has played a major role in the destabilisation of democratic, pluralist, modern Tunisia, and the Egyptians are also facing concerns. We have a responsibility to deal with the situation in Libya and to eliminate the potential for Daesh to use it as a safe area. The former leader of the Scottish National party, the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), was absolutely right to say that we need to look at Libya. I am not sure whether he was advocating military intervention, but that is one interpretation of what he said. I agree that if we are going to do something in Syria, we should also be considering how we can combat Daesh in Libya.

Alex Salmond: As the hon. Gentleman suspected, I was not arguing for military action. I was merely saying that, to justify any such action, we have to identify and be sure about who we are taking action against, and to justify giving support—I am sympathetic to his points about the Kurdish forces—we need to identify and be confident about the people we are supporting.

Mike Gapes: That is true, although we can never be certain about anything. As we have seen throughout history, Governments change from time to time and bad people come to power. I will not go down that route now, however.

We have major responsibilities, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) pointed out when he referred to our global reach and our international alliances. Major threats are going to arise in other parts of the world, and we need to maintain those alliances and work with our partners, whether in NATO or the European Union, or more globally through the United Nations system. We have responsibilities, and they include the responsibility to defend our country, our values, our ideas and the world system, because that is in our interests.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I know that hon. Members are better at arithmetic than this. Seven or eight minutes is not the same as 11 minutes. Let us see whether they can prove that, so that we do not have to have a time limit. I know that I can trust a former colonel to do his best, and I call Bob Stewart.

2.41 pm

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will be bang on time.

Nobody should underestimate the seriousness of the current international situation. In particular, the security threats we now face have changed massively and fast over the last few years. Five years ago the so-called Arab spring had yet to happen, but boy, when it did, the ripples had an impact on the whole of the middle east, especially on Libya, Egypt, Syria and Iraq. At the same time, there has been a massive resurgence of Russian military power, and it is on this, rather than on the consequences of the Arab spring, that I wish to concentrate.

Russia has rapidly increased its defence budget. In 2013, it spent more on armaments than the United States. Its defence spending increased by 4.8%. Moscow plans to allocate more than \$700 billion to replace 70% of the country's military equipment by 2020, and 45% of its naval ships are new. This represents a massive change in Russia's military posture.

At the same time, we in western Europe much prefer spending on social rather than military security. The inconvenient truth is that defence too often takes a back seat, well behind not just social security priorities but other worthy concerns such as education. Are we sleep-walking? The west won the cold war, but maybe it is starting to simmer again. Burying our heads in the sand to avoid the obvious military facts of life will not diminish the problem. In defence, a wishbone is never a substitute for a backbone.

I dislike having to pin my colours to an exact figure of 2% of gross national income to be spent on defence. For me, such a number is simply a symbol to help people to understand our minimum defence requirements.

Nusrat Ghani: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Bob Stewart: I will give way, but I am not a right hon. Friend.

Nusrat Ghani: The maintenance of international security depends to a great extent on countries working together to ensure that extremists and terrorist organisations are unable to use the internet to spread their propaganda and conflict, particularly if we want to prevent British citizens from joining the death cult, Daesh. Does my hon. Friend agree that internet security and cyber-defence must be at the heart of the strategic defence and security review?

Bob Stewart: I thank my very hon. Friend for her intervention, and I entirely agree with everything she says. Those matters are now considered very seriously in the SDSR.

Of course I support the military being given what it requires to defend our country properly. I remind the House that, at the height of the cold war, we were normally spending as much as 4.6% of our national income on defence. Although I understand and support the need for targeted overseas aid, I am none the less absolutely shocked that we spend the equivalent of a third of the defence budget on it each year. And I am afraid I do not subscribe to the argument that providing international aid can be a proper substitute for sufficient military power. Defence is too serious a matter to be fiddled.

John Nicolson (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Bob Stewart: Forgive me, but I am really up against the time and I want others to have time to speak. Because of you!

Defence is too serious a matter to be fiddled, yet NATO members, particularly in Europe, do so year in and year out. They most certainly do not pay their NATO club dues and we must give them no excuse not to do so. Surely what is happening in Ukraine is a wake-up call. The situation there is a total disaster. Militarily, the Foreign Secretary has already ruled out armed action by our Army, Navy or Air Force, but surely there are some measures we could take to help Ukraine, in addition to the military training we are already providing. Perhaps we could gift-aid non-lethal equipment such as night vision devices and range-finders, which would greatly help Ukraine's military to see at night. Right now, Ukraine's armed forces are almost blind after dark. At the same time I cannot see why we should not give Ukraine some of our vast reserve pool of military transport trucks and Land Rovers.

John Nicolson *rose*—

Bob Stewart: I will give way, as the hon. Gentleman is a very old friend of mine.

John Nicolson: I thank the hon. and gallant Gentleman for giving way. We have identified cybercrime and terrorism as two of the things that threaten us today. Does he therefore agree that it is an absurdity to spend £100 billion on our nuclear so-called deterrent? It is a cold war defence system that is utterly unsuited to dealing with today's problems.

Bob Stewart: He was my very old friend. [*Laughter.*] Of course I disagree with him. The point is that, when we are talking about nuclear weapons, deterrence works, whether in a cold war or a hot war.

[Bob Stewart]

I know that we provide aircraft to the Baltic patrols, but should we not also position British ground troops permanently in rotation in eastern Latvia, Estonia or Poland? Since 2010, Russian troop numbers around the Baltic have increased from 9,000 to around 100,000 today. Is it too late, colleagues, to stop the redeployment, back to the United Kingdom, of our last armoured brigade in Germany? It may even be cheaper to leave it there anyway—the Germans will be very happy with that. If we reversed that decision, surely it would send a strong signal to the Kremlin that its actions do have consequences. Many of us here will recall the wrong message that we sent to Argentina in 1982 when we withdrew HMS Endurance just before the Falklands war. Keeping an armoured brigade in Germany might be the right message to send today.

Russia would denounce such a move, but so what? Mr Putin and his cohorts have hardly paid any attention to our protests about what he has been doing in eastern Ukraine, the Crimea, or the Baltic. President Putin might protest long and hard, but at least it would prove that NATO still has teeth. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am finished in time.

2.49 pm

Stuart Donaldson (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (SNP): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to address the House today. May I start by reassuring Members that, despite my youthful appearance, I have not got lost from my school group and wandered into this Chamber? In my first few weeks, I think that members of staff thought that that was the case. It is also getting on a bit, but it is not quite past my bedtime. Indeed at the tender age of 23, in any normal Parliament I would be the baby of the House. However, due to the election of my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Ms Black), I feel positively middle-aged. Being the second youngest Member, I have missed out on much of the press coverage, because nobody cares about the middle child. I am sure my colleague has been delighted with how much attention she has received. For the benefit of the media here, I have some potential stories. I too have spent some of my salary on fast food. I have not eaten a chip butty on the Terrace, but I have eaten a salad—I do not know whether that counts. I await the articles with interest.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, Sir Robert Smith, who served the constituency of West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine tirelessly for 18 years. Sir Robert had a reputation of working hard for his constituents and of championing issues that were important to them. That is something that I hope to emulate and excel at over the course of this Parliament. I wish Sir Robert well for the future.

Members may not be aware of my family history in this place. My late grandfather, Hamish Watt, served as the MP for Banffshire from 1974 to 1979. I understand that, due to his use of the north-east dialect of the Doric, *Hansard* often had a job deciphering exactly what he said. I assure *Hansard* that my grasp of the Doric is not as assured as that of my grandfather, so it will always ken fit ah mean.

It was my grandfather who first suggested that I should stand for Parliament, although his suggestion was for the constituency of Gordon. However, I felt

that my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) had done enough to earn a free shotty at that seat.

I will, if I may, quote from my grandfather's maiden speech. He said that

"I have been given to understand that it is the tradition for a new Member to speak about his constituency. Were this not a tradition, I would do it anyway."—[*Official Report*, 14 March 1974; Vol. 870, c. 467.]

West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine is a diverse and geographically large constituency. From farming to oil and gas to tourism, the constituency is both prosperous and pioneering. Although many of my colleagues have claimed the title of most beautiful constituency, I think that we will all find that West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine is the most beautiful. Indeed I am sure that is endorsed by my constituents who live on the Balmoral estate. With visits from no fewer than four Members of the coalition Government's Front Bench, including the former Deputy Prime Minister and the Chancellor, during the election campaign, they were obviously all very keen to see for themselves its sheer beauty.

It is the royal family who gave the area in which I grew up the name Royal Deeside. The gateway to Royal Deeside is Banchory, right in the heart of West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine. Banchory has well known features such as Scolty Hill with its tower monument and the beautiful Falls of Feugh. Banchory is also the birth place of the famous fiddler, James Scott Skinner, who was asked by Queen Victoria to teach callisthenics to the royal household.

My former high school, Banchory Academy, is one of the highest achieving in Scotland. Wikipedia notes that notable alumni include top-flight footballers, the founder of the website, Mashable, and an Olympic snowboarder. I am sure that Members will agree that that is a prestigious and high-quality list, although it is somewhat diminished by my name, being elected as an honourable Member to this place. Banchory also has the most 4x4s per head of population anywhere in the UK. But at least the people actually need them, unlike the previous titleholder, Chelsea. Despite the obvious affluence, there is a food bank in Banchory. I have no doubt that this is due to the austerity agenda of the previous Government and this one, and the punitive measures inflicted on some of the most vulnerable in our society.

Moving up Royal Deeside, we come to Ballater. In the week following my election, there was the shocking news that the historic Ballater royal station, used by Queen Victoria, had burned down. The station was very much a focal point for the village and for tourists coming to the area. I am pleased to say that the station will be rebuilt, and would like to reassure Members and the public that Ballater is still very much open for business—and I should think so for a village with more royal warrant holders than any other.

In the southern part of my constituency we have Stonehaven and the Mearns. Stonehaven is famous for its art deco Olympic-sized heated saltwater outdoor swimming pool, the northernmost lido in the UK. It is also famous for its magnificent Hogmanay fireball celebration, which is truly a sight to behold. It is also the birthplace of Robert William Thomson who, at 23, patented the pneumatic tyre.

The Mearns is an area immortalised by Lewis Grassie Gibbon in his book "Sunset Song". Visitors to the Grassie Gibbon Centre are occasionally disappointed

to find out that it has nothing to do with monkeys—I believe that that applies to my hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Philip Boswell)—but it is still very much worth a visit.

Where my constituency meets Aberdeen sits Westhill, the global centre of excellence in subsea engineering. The companies based there are the best in the world and export their expertise and skills around the globe. However, even they have been affected by the recent downturn in the oil price. That is why I have pushed and will continue to push the Government to work with the industry to ensure stability and long-term employment in this important industry.

Alford, in the north of my constituency, hosts a statue of a bull to symbolise the historic connection between the celebrated Aberdeen Angus breed and the town. In fact, one of my predecessors, William McCombie, MP for West Aberdeenshire between 1868 and 1876, is credited as one of the original breeders of Aberdeen Angus cattle. The breed is said to have many good characteristics. The cattle are resistant to harsh weather, adaptable and good natured, and they mature extremely early. I think that I share some of those characteristics, although in the past couple of days I have found that I am not so resistant to harsh weather. However, Aberdeen Angus cattle are also said to be undemanding. I am sorry to tell those on the Government Benches that they will not find that from me.

I could go on for quite a while about all that West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine has to offer. With many fantastic castles from Craigievar to Dunnottar and spectacular mountains such as Lochnagar in the Cairngorms national park, there is much that makes West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine a wonderful place to live, work and, of course, visit. However, I want to touch briefly on the topic of today's debate.

Recently, some of my colleagues in the SNP, along with other Members from across the Chamber, backed moves to refer to the so-called Islamic State as Daesh. That group is arguably one of the biggest threats to British security, but it is clear that Trident is not the best way to combat that threat. The UK Government need to realise that it is neither justifiable nor appropriate to continue to spend billions of pounds of public money on an outdated nuclear weapons system. It is the wrong priority for defence spending and this money could be better spent on our NHS, our education system and ending austerity. We on the SNP Benches oppose Trident with the understanding of the new challenges we face in international security, but these challenges do not require and would only ever be exacerbated by the threat and use of nuclear weapons.

I look forward to the presentation of the strategic defence and security review, and can only hope that it will reflect the need to prioritise new and evolving security threats and will include provisions to ensure that the Ministry of Defence engages with the Scottish Government to take account of security concerns affecting Scottish people.

Like my stature, I have tried to keep this speech short. It has been an honour to be called to make my maiden speech today, and I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the constituents of West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine for giving me the opportunity to speak in this place.

2.57 pm

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech during this important debate on Britain and international security. I congratulate the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Stuart Donaldson) on his excellent speech.

Britain has the finest armed forces in the world but, as always, there is a huge challenge in anticipating the nature of the changing threat and preparing for it. As we prepare for an increased cyber-threat and the increasingly asymmetric nature of conflict, we must also understand that a strong deterrent is vital, as showing a weakness will only serve to encourage our enemies. We must never forget that the first duty of any Government is national security, and it is important that the Government continue to invest in our defence industry.

A world-leading defence company, MBDA, has a manufacturing facility in the centre of my constituency, Bolton West, that produces missiles for our defence. It does high-skill, high-value work on cutting-edge technology. MBDA is investing in the building of a new state-of-the-art facility, which shows its commitment to Bolton for decades to come. As a contribution to defence, MBDA's missiles were used to protect key sites during the London Olympics. Another contribution to the Olympics from Bolton West is Britain's largest piece of public art, the ArcelorMittal Orbit, designed by Sir Anish Kapoor. The steel structures were made at the Severfield plant in Lostock because only the highest level of precision engineering would do.

Having listened to the recent debate on the legacy of the Olympic venues, I suggest that we again look to Bolton West, this time to see how the Bolton arena from 2002 Commonwealth games continues to be an excellent centre for sport all these years later. The Bolton arena has also been the venue for Bolton West resident Amir Khan's home fights, as well as for the general election counts. I still have not come to a conclusion about which is the more exciting.

Our economy needs to continue to rebalance, with an increased emphasis on high-skilled, high-value industry and manufacturing, which we have in Bolton West, but we must recognise that we need a mixed economy and that the service sector also has a huge contribution to make. When I visited Axa Insurance to see its facility, we discussed not just the jobs and opportunities it offers, but the vision of driverless cars and the insurance implications. We need to recognise that innovations in one industry require complementary innovations in others.

Only a couple of weeks ago, I was delighted to open the newly refurbished A.G. Barr regional office in my constituency. This shows the confidence that businesses have locally and what a great place Bolton West is to invest in. The unemployment rate has nearly halved since May 2010 and the youth unemployment rate has more than halved. While I was visiting A.G. Barr, I was delighted to visit its quality control laboratory where I had a reminder of the industry I so recently left. One of the aims I have as a new Member of Parliament is to promote science, technology, engineering and maths, which increasingly offer fantastic career opportunities. As an engineer, I had the opportunity to work from California to Cuba and Israel to Taiwan, and I met some amazing people on my travels.

[Chris Green]

As a member of the Science and Technology Committee, I will use my background and experience to champion science and technology, for the advanced jobs and manufacturing of the future and for our graduates and apprentices. Politicians always talk about STEM subjects, science at university and apprenticeships, but it is important to ensure that we have the high-skilled research, industry and manufacturing jobs available for them to apply their skills. We need to be better at taking advantage of Britain's genius and turning it into the high-tech products of the future.

I come from Liverpool. My dad worked in catering after his 22 years' service in the Army, and my mum worked as a school dinner lady. I was an engineer in the mass spectrometry industry for nearly 20 years. When considering which political party I would join, there could be only one choice—to join the workers' party, which is why I am now a Conservative.

Bolton West, as a constituency, takes in the western edge of Bolton and the towns and villages on the western side of the borough. Atherton was a new addition to the constituency in 2010, and this means that this is the first time any part of the Wigan borough has been represented in the House of Commons by anyone other than Labour. I am the first Conservative to represent Bolton West since in 1997.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, Julie Hilling, for her great passion for social justice, although with a belief in the central importance of Government in its delivery. In December 1910, there was a disaster at the Pretoria pit which was located halfway between Atherton and Westhoughton; 343 men and boys were killed. Last December, I attended events to mark the tragedy and heard Julie Hilling speak with such passion, not just about the tragedy itself, but about the treatment and conditions suffered afterwards. A lesson for me was that often we will agree on how to deal with social injustice but, when we do disagree, we should have respect for how others desire to deal with it.

As an engineer, I find that people's perception of modern industry has not always kept pace with what is now so often the reality in Britain. The expectation, when people hear of manufacturing, is of mills and huge factories like the now-closed Horwich Locomotive Works. There is the expectation of smoke stacks and grime. Although this is sometimes still the case, more often modern industry in Britain takes place in business parks where, from the outside, one could not guess whether the building is an office block or a new high-tech venture. This is what we, as a country, need to continue to focus on. We should not be trying to compete with the mass production of China, but we should continue to lead with our innovative industries.

One of the best aspects of being a parliamentary candidate, and now a Member of Parliament, is the opportunity to see and get involved with so many wonderful community groups, clubs and events. That was perfectly illustrated by the Horwich Communities Working Together event, which brought together over 50 different voluntary groups from across Horwich to share ideas and offer each other support. I am looking forward to next Saturday's Blackrod scarecrow festival, and to being a judge for the Westhoughton yarn bombing—I had best learn the difference between a

plain and a fancy French weave pretty quickly. I am delighted to say that there are so many other wonderful events and community groups across the constituency—from Atherton, through to Daisy Hill and over to Heaton, Lostock and Smithills—which I am looking forward to supporting.

Bolton West is well served culturally. We will all know of Bolton Wanderers football club, whose renamed Macron stadium is at the heart of the constituency. I live in Wingates, which has a famous and award-winning brass band, and I am looking forward to Bolton symphony orchestra's performance of Sibelius's fifth symphony at the Victoria hall in a few weeks' time. I believe that a shared culture is fundamental to a strong community and healthy society, underpinned by education, industry and innovation. I am deeply honoured to represent the people of Bolton West in this place.

3.6 pm

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bolton West (Chris Green). I was elected at the same time as his predecessor, who is a passionate champion for social justice and a great friend, so I am glad that he mentioned her in such glowing terms in his maiden speech. We also heard a maiden speech from the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Stuart Donaldson). I started thinking of myself at the age of 23. I am amazed that he was able to make such a speech. At that age, I was lucky to string a sentence together.

At the weekend, the world, our country and my constituency were rocked by the evil attack in Tunisia. The community of Blackwood has lost one of its own, a person who placed others before herself all her life. She worked tirelessly for her family, her friends and her community. She was quite rightly described as an angel. Throughout this difficult time my thoughts and prayers are with the family and friends of Trudy Jones, who was needlessly taken away from them.

We now know much about the attack: we know the man who carried it out; we know the people who supported him; and we know the evil that was in their hearts as they planned and then killed innocent people. But we also know that the gunman and his accomplices were not born wanting to kill. They were not born wanting to do evil. In fact, just five years ago the gunman was break-dancing in YouTube videos and posting online about his love of the beautiful game, football. It was a twisted ideology, pushed by brainwashers and demagogues, that made them see innocent holidaymakers as deserving of death. I do not believe that anyone is born believing that. It was a death cult, and their sympathisers around the world have pushed those beliefs to make them see fellow human beings as enemies. No one is born believing that.

We cannot allow this to become about one man and one attack, no matter how horrific. Our response must be to ensure that we deal with the twisted and evil ideology that led to the attack and to the attacks before it. We must challenge it abroad and here at home. The UK is currently second only to France in the number of its citizens fighting in Iraq and Syria. This ideology is on our streets and in our communities, and we must challenge it here.

In 2010, Demos's report "The Edge of Violence: a radical approach to extremism" examined radical and young Muslims, terrorists and others across five countries, interviewing over 100 people. Its recommendations, although now five years old, still hold true. To tackle domestic extremism we must take four actions. First, we must distinguish between the radical and the violent. Holding radical views is not always the first step on the path to violence. Although radical views might represent a social threat, they should be tackled as a social problem, not as part of our campaign against violent extremism. We must debate and defeat ideas, not shut them down; doing so often turns radicals to violence.

Secondly, we must demystify and de-glamorise Islamic extremism. For many young Muslims, ISIL, Daesh and similar groups represent an anti-establishment counter-culture that they find appealing. The concepts of jihad, the caliphate or struggle against perceived oppression are appealing to many people across the world. Their views have nothing to do with Islam; their views are bent and twisted evil. It is our duty to strip Daesh's brand of its glamour. The Prime Minister says of our using the phrase "Islamic State" that it is not Islamic and not a state, and we should support him in that. At the community level, we must demystify and de-stigmatise these flawed ideas with a series of local debates to allow them to be challenged, because challenging them proves how shallow they really are. All communications from Government must emphasise the terrorists' shallow and weird concept of religion. Above all, our language must be about engaging with the people we are talking to. The Demos study found that the slogan "Islam is peace" did not really resonate, but "Islam is just" did. The arguments and actions of terrorists are not just.

Thirdly, we must focus more on prevention. Prevention work is absolutely vital in our security strategy, but it must be targeted. It should be limited to interventions where there is a clear, identified danger of groups or individuals undergoing a movement towards violence. Broader engagement with the UK's Islamic community on issues such as discrimination, integration or socioeconomic disadvantages cannot be part of our security strategy, as it only isolates communities. The prevention work that does take place must be multi-agency and copy from the successful counter-gang techniques of the past.

Fourthly, we must choose diverse partners. Government and policing agencies should work with partners from religious communities but also non-religious ones. Some of the most important figures in people's lives are their teachers, social workers and sports coaches. We must harness those relationships to help prevent violence. Beyond this, the Government cannot avoid working with radicals in some situations where there are specific tactical benefits. For example, when working with individuals who believe that violence is a religious obligation, non-violent radicals can sometimes have the credibility needed to convince them otherwise.

We can and must tackle the twisted ideology pushed by Daesh and its ilk right here in Britain, but we must also tackle it at source in Syria and in Iraq. That will not be easy, but it is absolutely vital. The right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) made a pertinent comment early in the debate when he said that if someone is caught in a terrorist action in this country, they are charged, tried and locked up, but if it happens in Syria

or Iraq, we bomb the house where they live and bomb their communities, and then all that does is perpetuate more and more violence. We have to change that approach and understand that the rule of law applies in this country as it does in the middle east.

Where Daesh exists, our citizens are seduced by its draw. Where Daesh exists, thousands, if not millions, of people in the middle east are under direct threat. While Daesh exists, our streets and our citizens across the world cannot be safe. But Daesh is only the most recent example of this twisted and evil ideology, which stretches back decades. We must defeat this ideology wherever it is found. We have that duty to our constituents, to our country, and to the world.

I want to end by saying something about the community that I represent. Over the past few months, we have seen tragedy in a number of forms, but we have come together as a close-knit community. I want to say to the family of Trudy Jones that if they need help, our community is there for them, and I am there for them. My thoughts are with them now.

3.13 pm

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans). My heartfelt sympathies go out to the family also. It is a case of one Evans following another.

It was a pleasure to listen to two maiden speeches. The hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Stuart Donaldson) is carrying on his dynasty, it would appear. I congratulate him on his speech and on representing the second most beautiful constituency in the United Kingdom. I look forward to working with my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) on promoting the northern powerhouse.

I remember making my maiden speech when I was 34. I made it at 1 o'clock in the morning and it was rubbish. I sometimes wake up at night thinking about it. This is not self-deprecating humour: it is on the record and it was awful. I congratulate both hon. Members.

I want to pick up on a couple of points that have been raised. The first is about the term "Daesh". What is the BBC playing at, for goodness' sake? It cannot be neutral when it comes to terrorism. I am amazed it is still known as the British Broadcasting Corporation; I suspect I will wake up one day to find it has changed its name to simply the Broadcasting Corporation, because in its desire to show neutrality throughout the world it will want to claim that it is not really British. It should remember that it is on the receiving end of £3.7 billion of British taxpayers' money. I do not expect it to be neutral when talking about terrorism.

I was delighted to hear what the Secretary of State had to say about tomorrow's national one minute's silence, which I will observe. In another shot at the BBC, I hope that it and every other TV channel will observe the one minute's silence at midday. It will bring the whole nation together in condemning what was an absolute atrocity. Many families and a nation are grieving about what happened in Tunisia.

I recently took over the chairmanship of the British group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and I will write to the Tunisian ambassador, as well as to the Kuwaiti and French ambassadors, to show our solidarity with their countries at this awful time.

[Mr Nigel Evans]

Many find it difficult to get to terms with the concept of Daesh, their ambitions and the destructive horror of what it does. Its actions, including the beheading of people and what it did to that Jordanian pilot, are barbaric. Is that in the name of religion? I am a Christian and I simply cannot get my head around what it is doing, and the fact that it is doing it in the name of religion makes it even more bewildering to me. As many Members have said, this has got nothing to do with religion. What Daesh doing is barbaric. It has been said that it is not Islamic and that it is not a state—no, it is not. It may well try to hijack a religion, but I am sure that Muslims will not allow it to do so, and neither will I.

The Chair of the Defence Committee has said that this is a most dangerous time. We have heard that time and again, but on this occasion he is absolutely right. Yesterday the Turkish President changed his country's policy on what it may now do as far as attacks on Syria and Daesh there are concerned. I visited a Turkish refugee camp where there were thousands of Syrians. We know the impact that this conflict has had on Turkey, as well as on Jordan, one of whose camps I have also seen. Dozens of soldiers were killed in another attack on Egypt this week, so it will be interesting to see what Egypt's reaction will be.

This is an enormously dangerous time and we have to make it absolutely certain that we have the right defences for the challenges we face. Just before election, I voted to keep defence spending at 2% of GDP. I am proud of the 0.7% spent on international development. If we can do it for that, we can do it for defence. By 2%, I mean a minimum of 2%, because if it takes more, we will need to spend it. This is a most dangerous time for us.

I am not saying that simply because BAE Systems Sarnesbury is in my constituency—I am proud of the work it does—but because we need to ensure that not only do we have the right level of servicemen and women, but that they have the right kit to defend us. I hope the Minister will visit BAE Systems to look at the new apprentice academy, which will open next year. I am proud to say that, in response to a question I asked just before the general election, the Prime Minister agreed to open it.

Russia, which has been mentioned, is clearly hugely disturbing. When I went to Georgia a couple of years ago, I stared at the Russian flag in South Ossetia, one of the two areas that the Russians have invaded and in which they now have troops. What they have done in Crimea is awful. It is the occupation of another country. The one thing we can say about President Putin is that there are fairly well no limits to what he might do in the future. Again, we must make it absolutely certain that we have the right defences to meet the challenges that Russia might present.

I have just been elected to the Select Committee on International Development. It is a return visit, because I was on it just before I became Deputy Speaker, and it is one of the most fulfilling things that I have done. I believe that there is so much we can do, but if we are to spend 0.7% of GDP on international development, we must make sure that it is spent effectively. There have recently been newspaper reports of it not perhaps being spent effectively, and that does us no service whatsoever. It does not matter that 98% of it is incredibly well spent; people pick up on the other 2%. We need to ensure that

the money is spent effectively. It is hugely ironic that some people who have been radicalised can terrorise us within our own borders while, at the same time, we are trying in France to protect our borders against people who want to come to live in the United Kingdom. If we spend our international development money effectively, particularly in Africa—to mitigate the reasons why so many people want to leave the countries in which they live to come here—we can do incredibly well.

On the international development front, I want to pay tribute to the many young people who are doing their bit in schools or universities in our constituencies. They have projects in which schools work out where they want to provide help, and then they provide help. I have many such projects in schools in my constituency, and I am sure that other hon. Members have equally good examples of projects done by schools and young people. We should pay tribute to them for what they do.

Yes, this is an incredibly worrying time. The Secretary of State asked for our views about the strategic defence and security review. When he reads my speech, I hope that he will see that my view is simply this: we need to spend the money that will properly defend our country. The 2% figure is a minimum, and if there is another vote in this Chamber during this Session, I will go through the Lobby to vote for 2%.

3.22 pm

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me this wonderful opportunity to make my maiden speech. It has been truly a privilege today to listen to the range, depth and quality of the speeches in this debate, and of course to the eloquence and excellence of the recent maiden speeches. I am trying to tone down my voice after yesterday's Prime Minister's screaming match, at which I was, of course, a little louder.

I thank all the staff here in Westminster for being both welcoming and warm. I am truly humbled to be here, and it is with honour and respect that I intend to serve the people of Dundee West.

This is a momentous Parliament, is it not? To this House, I extend the warmth of celebration at Scotland having elected a team dedicated to work to deliver a better, fairer deal for the people of Scotland. In every sense, the SNP is now the national party of Scotland. As we have seen in this House over the last few weeks, however, there is a deficit in terms of the Scottish democratic will being fully realised. The key to resolving such issues is, of course, to increase the powers at Holyrood.

I want to take this opportunity to pay my respects to my predecessor, Jim McGovern. Representing Dundee West for the last 10 years, he served my constituency with diligence and conviction. He had the courage to oppose his own party by refusing to support the renewal of Trident, which is costing over £100 billion. It has been very sobering to listen to today's pressing debate, which is particularly appropriate because Trident does absolutely nothing to protect us from the threats coming from north Africa and the middle east. I wish Jim and his family the very best for the future.

Dundee is a city of diversity, steeped in history, culture and industry. In fact, one of our bards, Hugh MacDiarmid, once called the city that "great industrial cul-de-sac". He was right that its industry was great.

It was a world centre for linen and jute, and we built ships and furnished engineering needs. Paddington Bear would be interested to know that the Dundonians, James Keiller and Son, invented marmalade. We have given pleasure to generations of children across Britain through the work of the newspaper firm D. C. Thomson, with its many famous publications, which Members will recognise, from *The Dandy* to *The Beano* and, of course, *The Broons*.

MacDiarmid was wrong, however, to suggest that Dundee was a cul-de-sac. The wealth of the city has long been used to reach out to the world, from the Americas to Australia and Asia. There has long been a tradition of welcoming migrants, and in recent years we have built up vibrant Irish, Italian, Polish and Asian communities—something to be proud of and celebrate. This cuts to the heart of who we are in Scotland; we are a' Jock Tamson's bairns.

Dundee is also a city of discovery, and importantly it has always been a radical city, ahead of the political curve. Dundonians, whether they were Chartists in the 1820s and '30s campaigning on Magdalen Green or suffragettes setting fire to Leuchars railway station and Farington hall, have long taken an interest in constitutional affairs. Winston Churchill—I wonder what ever became of that Member—was treated, as the Member of Parliament from 1908, to a few raucous meetings by the suffragettes, later losing his seat to the lively and charismatic Edwin Scrymgeour.

Last year, 57% in Dundee voted yes in the referendum on Scottish independence, setting it again at the vanguard of Scottish politics. This House would do well to acknowledge the democratic will of Dundonians, because believe me when I tell you that Dundonians are proudly forthright, feisty and formidable.

Today, Dundee is an extraordinary city. It has been reborn and stands as a cultural beacon in Scotland. It has been named the first UK UNESCO city of design for its cutting-edge games industry, biomedical research and development of cancer treatments. It boasts two universities, Dundee and Abertay; a fantastic art school, Duncan of Jordanstone; a further education college; and cultural landmarks such as the Dundee Rep, the Gardyne theatre and Dundee Contemporary Arts. Ninewells is one of the largest teaching hospitals in Europe.

In the centre of Dundee stands the Law—it is a hill, no relation to myself. At the waterfront is the £1-billion redevelopment, where the first V&A museum outside London will be opened in 2017. Next year, we will open the new school at the Harris academy. If people are looking for innovation either in the arts or sciences, Dundee is the place to be. When Members come to Dundee, which of course I invite all of them to do, they can arrive at our own wonderful airport on the banks of the silvery Tay estuary.

However, as is the case with many constituencies, mine is a game of two halves, as the local teams Dundee and Dundee United will understand. It runs from rich and affluent areas to others that are struggling in this austerity-driven climate. Children are the world's most valuable resource, and in my constituency one in four lives in poverty. In some areas, it is one in three. Inequality is the political mountain for this generation to conquer.

Every child in my constituency of Dundee West, and in your constituency, Madam Deputy Speaker, and in all constituencies, deserves to maximise their potential,

and it is our job to make sure that happens. It appears to too many outside the House that this Parliament is, at times, distant and disconnected from the misery and suffering of its citizens. It is cold comfort to struggling families in Dundee West to be told that “we're all in it together” and that they must be “aspirational” when, at the same time, a low-wage economy is being built in a world of permanent austerity, driven by ideology. Estimates for the next five years are that 100,000 more children will be plunged into poverty in Scotland.

I understand that only too well, as a child who grew up in a single-parent family. My mother lived with multiple sclerosis. I pay tribute to her memory—she was one of the most indomitable, strong women I have ever known. She relied on the welfare state to enable her to achieve the quality of life that she deserved. Without the safety net of the welfare state, the most vulnerable in our society are under attack by the very apparatus that should look after them. This Government are abolishing disability living allowance in a way that is committing harm on our citizens. In addition, the independent living fund became a postcode lottery only yesterday in the rest of the UK. The exception is Scotland, where the Scottish Government have had the good sense and compassion to protect those who wish to live as normal a life as possible in their own home.

I urge the House to safeguard each and every citizen who resides on these isles. We are yet to have full view of the Government's plans for welfare cuts, but Dundee is already dubbed “sanctions city” for the sheer number of withdrawn payments of benefits such as jobseeker's allowance from those who we know should be in receipt of them. Poverty is not a choice that people can be scared or starved out of. That takes me back to Mary Brooksbank, one of the political activists at the turn of the century when Churchill was in Dundee. She was a jute mill worker and also a songwriter. She wrote a song, two lines of which stand out clearly for me:

“Oh dear me, the world is ill-divided.

Them that work the hardest, are the least provided.”

On a lighter note, it has come to my attention that since my election I have apparently attracted some media headlines for my striking and handsome appearance, notably my ponytail. I follow in a good tradition of Scottish nationals critiqued for such matters. The last man to solicit such a level of attention was the great Keir Hardie, another progressive Member of this House who attracted negative comments about his working man's garb—in his case a deer stalker of all things! It has not gone without notice, however, that such attention is generally reserved by the media for my female colleagues, so not only am I happy to take up that mantle for the male contingent of the House, but I am proud to do so on behalf of all my female colleagues. I am, of course, delighted to represent a party that, by following a wholly democratic process of candidate selection and then election, has enabled the return of 19 excellent and formidable female MPs to this House.

I have always returned in life to one quote from the social anthropologist Margaret Mead—I studied social anthropology many years ago. She stated:

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

That was the slogan of the Spirit of Independence, which was a campaign that I ran throughout the Scottish referendum. Now that we are writing a new chapter in

[Chris Law]

Scotland and the UK, that has never been more relevant, and I hope over the next five years to ensure that the distance we travel together can be a journey that we are collectively proud of.

3.31 pm

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): What a privilege it is to follow the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) and his excellent maiden speech. I congratulate him and wish him well in his future career and his service in this place. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans), I do not think back much to my maiden speech—it was not a happy moment and it is something I like to forget. Making speeches is something that we do, and people tell me it gets easier—ask me in about five minutes and I will say whether it does or not.

This important debate is on a vast and complex subject, so I shall endeavour to make just a few points, mainly on NATO, foreign aid and defence spending. I agree with the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) who said we must decide what sort of country we are in our attitude to defence and security—that conversation came up at a defence event last night, and there was some consensus.

Are we just another northern European power with armed forces that are broadly defensive and engage in a limited fashion in UN peacekeeping missions or—dare I say it?—on EU missions? Or are we, as I and I perhaps the majority of British people think, a global force for good with the sovereign capability to defend ourselves robustly and to project power globally in the national interest, keeping our people and streets safe wherever the next threat may come from? Even if we are the former, we must accept that such things come at a financial cost. History demonstrates time and again that our wars choose us; we do not choose them.

A myth promulgated by certain sections of the liberal media is that somehow our engagements and operations in Iraq and Afghanistan were merely wars of choice. I would disagree strongly with that and say that they were undertaken with the highest, most decent and honourable motivations to protect our national security, keep our people safe, and improve world security. In my view, in order to maintain our contribution to international security, keep our people safe and maintain our place in the world, we must be prepared to invest more in our defence capability. As Denis Healey—not someone I quote often or agree with much—said in 1969:

“Once we cut defence expenditure to the extent where our security is imperilled, we have no houses, we have no hospitals, we have no schools. We have a heap of cinders.”—[*Official Report*, 5 March 1969; Vol. 779, c. 551.]

He was absolutely right.

The cornerstone of our defence and security policy, and our place in the world, is our membership of NATO. Let me refer to the most up-to-date figures that NATO published last week on estimated defence spending by member states in 2015. Happily, this year we will comply with our treaty obligations and spend 2.1% of GDP on defence. Astonishingly, however, the only other countries in Europe that it is estimated will spend the agreed 2% of GDP on defence to be members of NATO are Estonia, Greece and Poland.

Poland has made a big improvement on last year, stepping up to the plate having been spending only 1.8%. France spends 1.8% and Germany 1.2% of GDP, which is the same as last year. Turkey is getting close with 1.7% of GDP, but Luxembourg is expected to spend only 0.5% of GDP on defence, the lowest in NATO. The other NATO members that will spend less than 1% of GDP alongside Luxembourg are Belgium, Hungary and Spain.

We have led by example. I agree with points the Prime Minister made last September at the NATO summit in Newport when he called on NATO members that are not making their 2% of GDP contribution to spend more. The UK and the US account for almost four fifths of the total NATO defence spend. The US will pay practically 73% of NATO's total estimated budget for 2015. The European nations cannot keep relying on the Americans to write the cheques to provide them with the personnel, kit and manpower to protect them. We are next on the list, paying 6.6%, followed by France with 4.7% and Germany with 4.2%. It is estimated that Germany is planning to spend nearly £14 billion less than us on defence. France will spend £10 billion less than us. The US is spending around £300 billion more than the UK, Germany and France put together.

The home country of the President of the European Commission, Juncker, is Luxembourg. As well as spending the smallest percentage of GDP, as I have mentioned, Luxembourg provides 0.3% of the NATO budget in real terms, less than any other NATO member apart from Albania. No wonder he is constantly calling for a European army, so that other people can write the cheques and provide the manpower to protect his country.

Dr Murrison: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that if countries want the cover, they have to be prepared to pay the premium, but does he agree that, rather than insist on 0.7% or 2% imposed by supranational organisations, we should instead focus on outputs? In other words, we should focus on effectiveness—be that international development or defence. In those respects, this country does pretty well.

Jack Lopresti: They are not mutually exclusive. We need a benchmark figure to show we are serious and that we are maintaining a commitment. That does not diminish the other things we do, looking for value for money and finding other avenues for defence and security, which I will come to. It is an important commitment for a nation state to say, “I belong to NATO. I get the benefits of the protection. I am prepared to make the right contribution.”

The relatively rich countries of Europe cannot expect the United States and the UK to continue to look at their defence needs. On kit, NATO already has an over-reliance on the US for the provision of essential capabilities, including intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, air-to-air refuelling, ballistic missile defence, airborne electronic warfare and carrier strike. That is completely unsustainable.

Obviously, the use of soft power, including the Foreign Office, the Department for International Development and the BBC World Service, is key to our national security, but they must be backed up by hard power. I was shocked and surprised when I looked at the Library figures for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, MOD and DFID. According to Treasury figures on expenditure

for 2015-16, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office spend is £1.3 billion; DFID spend is £11.2 billion; and MOD spend is £42.5 billion. It seems to me that, if we are looking at soft power, influence, defence, security and our place in the world, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is woefully underfunded. Obviously, the MOD spend needs to be increased. DFID does excellent work, but we ought to consider returning to the previous model, when a large degree of that excellent work was carried out under the FCO and MOD. That would help to focus what we are doing, save the taxpayer money, avoid potential duplication and waste, and be more concentrated. We should perhaps look at getting rid of DFID as a Department and going back to having ministerial representation in the FCO and MOD.

We are still a great nation and one of the biggest defence spenders. We are one of the largest economies in the world. Owing to our history, our contribution and our unique relationship with the United States, we are a global power. We are also a nation with moral authority, recognised around the world for our rule of law, parliamentary democracy, basic freedoms and common decency. However, to remain a global force in the world, we must accept that we cannot continue to do it on the cheap. Freedom is not free, and the Government's refusal to commit to 2% of GDP for the duration of this Parliament is troubling to say the least. Two per cent. should be not an aspiration or the maximum but the absolute line that we will not fall behind. If we did so, it would send a terrible message to our allies and our enemies.

Finally, in the words of Donald Rumsfeld, the former US Defence Secretary: "Weakness is provocative. Time and again weakness has invited adventures which strength might well have deterred."

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): We are stretching over the seven minutes now. If we can do up to seven minutes, everybody will get equal time and the Front Benchers will be able to respond accordingly.

3.40 pm

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): If you will allow me, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to mention the extremely dignified behaviour of the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), at Brize Norton yesterday. He brought great credit to this House and to this country. It must have been poignant and painful for him to be present, bearing in mind his family circumstances and his own service. I hope I speak for everyone here when I say how much we admired his demeanour yesterday.

The hon. Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti) quoted a former US Defence Secretary. In West Point in 1962, another former US Defence Secretary, this time from Truman's Cabinet, Dean Acheson, made the famous remark:

"Great Britain has lost an Empire and has not yet found a role"

In his extremely wide-ranging speech at the beginning of this afternoon's debate, that was very much the sense of what the Secretary of State was saying: what is Britain's role in terms of international security? We have

tended to see it through the prism of military force and we have tended to see that as a military defensive process.

In terms of Britain's military posture world wide, no one can deny the quality of our armed forces, our servicemen and women. However, we have to accept that the Royal Navy—the branch that I perhaps know most about, and which has been experiencing lean manning for many years—has been doing as much as it can with a diminishing resource decade after decade, year after year, month after month. There comes a time when we have to evaluate our role in terms of our capability on the global stage and in the wider global theatres. Where I may slightly disagree with most of those on my party's Front Bench and with the official policy of my party—but, slightly worryingly, agree with the hon. Members for East Dunbartonshire (John Nicolson) and for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Stuart Donaldson); I sincerely hope that I do not blight their political careers forever by supporting their comments—is that I am simply unconvinced that the Trident nuclear system, which is not an independent missile system, is the answer to the problems we face today. When we are talking about international security, I simply cannot understand how the Vanguard boat system, a system predicated on the cold war and vast Russian tank divisions rolling through Poland and on to the north German plains, has any relevance in a modern asymmetric civilian warfare.

What we have talked about this afternoon proves to me that there may well have been a time for that system, but it is not today and we have to look at different ways. I appreciate that the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), the Chairman of the Defence Committee, is writhing in agony upon his Bench. I would not deny him four Vanguard boats in his bath to play with, but I am not entirely sure they should be the major financial component of our Royal Navy. Despite how few assets it has, the Royal Navy is not just combat ready and does not just interdict drug smugglers; it rewires cities after natural disasters and is a great maritime rescue agency. We all know the work that HMS Bulwark is doing in the Mediterranean. Let us credit the Royal Navy for all the things it does so well, but not at the same time automatically fall victim to the shibboleth that there is something wonderful about the Trident nuclear weapons system, which somehow informs everything the Royal Navy it does. We can do much more than that.

If there is one thing I have learned from this afternoon's debate, it is the absolute and utter primacy of the United Kingdom remaining part of the European Union. If we are to be that one lonely nation fighting our corner across the world and doing all the things we want to do so well, how much better and how much stronger would we be as part of the wider organisation of the European Union and as part of NATO? Anyone who may be harbouring any thoughts of being tempted by the seductive words that sometimes drift across the Chamber even to think about voting to leave the European Union will have heard this afternoon's debate and said, "No. For this nation's security, for international security and for strength, we are part of Europe—and we should continue to be so."

In terms of youth and hair, I intend to challenge neither the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine nor the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law), but I repeat my earlier comments and say

[Stephen Pound]

I agree with their statements about the nuclear weapons system. We are talking here about international security—not just international military security.

We have to be smart. What is this country really good at? It has the intelligence; it has the global expertise. We know about Iraq because we created Iraq. We know about much of the world because we were there at the beginning. We have the expertise and intelligence, so let us be a smarter country and work on that basis.

Let us pause for a moment. Last Friday everyone was talking about Tunisia. What did we do to support Tunisia, which should have been a beacon of hope in the Maghreb? It should have been one of the few countries resulting from the Arab spring that was actually taking the right route and going forward. We should have done more. It cannot be only when disaster strikes that we suddenly discover the importance of these countries.

We heard earlier about Russian expansionism. Let us look at some countries that we do not talk about except in crisis. I make no apologies for mentioning Armenia yet again on the Floor of the House. Armenia is a beacon of stability in the south Caucasus. It is a country that we should be supporting, endorsing and working with. We should be looking to our friends. We should not be waiting until disaster strikes before we start talking about countries, sending them resources and devoting our attention to them. There are many terrifying places in the world and it is inevitable that we look at where the blood is flowing fastest and where the sound of gunfire is loudest, but let us also look at those places that are not in crisis, but which can add massively to the peace of the world.

We can do so much more in this country. I profoundly hope we can. This afternoon's debate has been incredibly important. I apologise if I have offended my Front-Bench team by my slightly traditional and old-fashioned Labour views on nuclear weapons. Let us please remember that this is about international security—not just international military security.

3.47 pm

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): The Trident-sceptic and Europhile hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) has the ability to say completely and utterly unacceptable things—total twaddle—but to do so with such charm that we do not realise he has said such unacceptable things. It is a great pleasure to follow him.

I do not intend to take up more time than I need, partly because this afternoon's debate has been superb, with some very fine speeches covering an enormous amount of ground in relation to our defence policy. I shall not repeat much of what has been said before. It is also right that the debate has focused significantly on Tunisia and the consequences with regard to Syria. In that context, I pay tribute to my constituents, Eileen Swannack from Biddestone who was killed in Tunisia last week, along with her partner John Welch from Pickwick in the neighbouring constituency. We think of them at this difficult time.

It is right for us to find a solution to what happened last Saturday. I spoke strongly against the airstrikes against Assad in Syria two or three years ago, but I now feel that extending our airstrikes from Iraq into Syria

would make nothing but logical sense. These people are easily moving back from Iraq into Syria, so if the Prime Minister were to ask us to support targeted airstrikes against Daesh targets in Syria, it would be only logical to support him in that ambition. It is entirely different from what we were asked to do two or three years ago.

At the risk of being technical, I intend to talk not about the broad sweep of defence policy but to focus on one thing. For five years, I have argued that we should have regular defence debates in this place. They should be Government defence debates in Government time and called by the Government on significant issues. For the last five years, we have had only Backbench Business Committee debates, in which the important issues of defence and international security have competed with such worthwhile things as animals, zoos and other such issues. I think that the Government should set out to provide a reasonable number of proper, full-day defence debates—probably six—during this Parliament. I hope that they will agree to do that, and will not leave it to the Backbench Business Committee.

If the Government are seeking topics for those debates—apart from the Army, the Navy and the Air Force; we used to have one debate on each—I would say that the three topics on which they ought to focus are why, how and what. Those three questions are central to defence. “Why” is the topic we are discussing this afternoon. Why should we be doing anything internationally? “What” concerns how we do it, and the strategic defence and security review that will be held later in the year. “How” is the question of the amount we spend on it, and the issue of the comprehensive spending review.

Those are the three main debates that I propose. “Why” is the topic covered by the national security strategy. The strategy has worked well, and it was a good document five years ago. However, when the Defence Committee—I am proud to serve on it, and to have been re-elected to do so—addressed the issue recently, the Prime Minister was quoted as having said that the 2010 national security strategy needed some tweaks, although he may have changed his mind by now. In other words, the document ought to be reasonably fit for purpose today.

That may well have changed in recent days, and I hope that it has, because the world has changed entirely since 2010. We did not know anything about Daesh in 2010. We did not know anything about what is happening in Russia, Ukraine and so forth. We did not know of the threat to the European Union in the form of the Baltic states and Poland. Those things were unknown to us then. In the 2010 national security strategy, state-on-state warfare was downgraded to third or fourth least likely risk. It was said that all we needed to worry about was terrorism. Now, the whole picture has completely and utterly changed, and the first thing we must do is fundamentally redraft the national security strategy.

That must be dealt with at a different time from the security and defence review, which is planned for later this year. What would be the purpose of a fundamental rethink about Britain's purpose in the world if we were simultaneously working out what arms and armaments we might need in order to achieve those ambitions? The two things must be done at entirely different times. The SDSR must attempt to address fundamental questions about our arms, armaments and people, and the Government must think particularly carefully about

the youth reserves. The SDSR document must be designed to fulfil the ambitions that are laid out in the national security strategy.

Both those processes must be entirely separate from the comprehensive spending review, which did not happen in 2010. If we mix the three up and deal with the SDSR, the national security strategy and the comprehensive spending review on the same day, as we did in 2010, it will be said—possibly wrongly, but it will be said—that the SDSR is entirely driven by the Treasury, and will be concerned with cuts.

This year, defence budgets have been cut by half a billion pounds, and it is alleged around the souks that quite a lot more has been cut. Ministers have said very firmly that that does not change the baseline, which remains at £34 billion and will increase. I should like them to repeat that today. I should like them to say that half a billion pounds is only half a billion pounds, that we will start with £34 billion next year, that we will not see further defence cuts, and that we will stick by our manifesto commitments to make no manpower cuts and to increase spending on equipment by 1% per annum. All that is terribly important. Whether or not we spend 2% of GDP on defence, we need to see the output.

I want the national security strategy, the strategic defence and security review and the comprehensive spending review to be entirely separate—I want them to be logical and consequential, and not mixed up together—and I want our Government to commit themselves to doing what they should have done in the first place. We heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), the new Chairman of the Defence Committee—I look forward to serving under his chairmanship—that the first duty of a Government is the defence of the realm, and I want to hear the Government repeat that mantra tonight.

3.54 pm

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): I intend to devote most of the time available to me to the situation in the middle east, but first I shall say a little about the general issue of defence expenditure. I strongly believe that our starting point should be what is in the best interests of our security and of the country. We should start with that and proceed from there, rather than the other way around.

A starting point of 2% is one thing, but I do not think that it is enough, and the Chair of the Defence Committee and others have said the same today. We must, for instance, retain and upgrade our nuclear deterrent. It is a dangerous world and we face many dangerous threats, including future threats we do not know about yet. It would be dangerous to let our expenditure fall below that level and not increase it. The SDSR and CSR will be very important in indicating which way the Government are going. Our first and foremost aim is to protect our country, and we must ensure we have enough resources for our armed forces—although this is also, of course, about diplomatic solutions, the Foreign Office and international development and integrating them better.

I want to concentrate on the middle east. It has been said that if we have air strikes on Iraq, we should by logic also have them on Syria, as Daesh moves across the border and has many people based in Syria. We must

ask a number of questions before agreeing to that. I have real doubts about whether we have a proper, thought-through strategy for dealing with Daesh.

Those who are radicalised and recruited by Daesh see it as winning at the moment. They see it as being very successful—undefeated in the true sense—and that acts as a recruiting sergeant. Air strikes alone are not going to inflict serious damage on Daesh, so will not be a solution on their own. There will have to be boots on the ground, and we will have to ponder where they will come from. It would be ideal if they came from Iraq and other middle east nations.

Last year the Defence Committee went to Jordan, which has an important role to play, and which we should be giving more support. We must develop a proper strategy and make sure the Arab nations are involved in putting boots on the ground to defeat Daesh.

We might need to put more resources on the ground ourselves, whether through special forces or specialist forces. We already support the Iraqi Government and the Kurds with training, but that is not enough. The question of whether the Kurds have enough arms to take on Daesh has been raised today.

Those of us who went on the Defence Committee trip to Iraq last year were struck by a number of things. There is still great concern among the Sunni community about their being kept out of the fight against Daesh and not being involved, and not being armed by the Iraqi Government. The Shi'a militias have driven Daesh out, but they have also caused death and destruction in their wake in other parts of Iraq.

We on the Select Committee trip met a large group of tribal leaders in Baghdad. They were crying out for Britain to support them, but they also wanted the Sunni tribes to be armed, to be able to defend themselves and take on Daesh. At present, Daesh is recruiting a lot of Sunnis, who see themselves as ostracised from the Iraqi nation and dominated by the Shi'a. This question has got to be answered.

What are we going to do about Libya? Camps are being set up there in the vast expanse of desert. Air strikes in Syria must be considered in the context of what we do in the rest of the middle east, because Daesh is already spreading its tentacles far and wide. There is a story by Mark Urban on the BBC website, which might feature on “Newsnight” tonight, about Daesh opening a front in Bosnia in the Balkans.

These are serious issues that the Government must address. We will need to know about their strategy to be able to decide whether it is the right one to take on Daesh and inflict serious damage, which is what we need to do. While it is seen to be winning—or at least holding its own—that will be a massive recruiting sergeant, encouraging a lot of people to join, having already been radicalised by it. We need to know what the Government's strategy to deal with Daesh is. Air strikes into Syria alone will not be the answer. I want the Government to set out their strategy, along with our allies and others in the middle east, for defeating Daesh or at least pushing it back.

There are many threats facing us. We must have the armed forces, diplomatic services and intelligence on the ground to deal with them. We cannot do this on the cheap. The Government must think again about the resources they are putting into our armed forces.

4 pm

Dr Phillip Lee (Bracknell) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Halton (Derek Twigg), who made a very thoughtful contribution. I want to talk about globalisation and the opportunities that it has given us, although I get the impression that we have grasped the opportunities and not understood the threats. It is about time we did. Communicating immediately with people across the face of the earth is a fantastic thing, be it by flying or tapping in an email, but with it come the threats of extremism and extreme nationalism via the internet. It is not possible for states as we see them to counter that threat in its entirety because of the amount of data that is flowing, and that is before we start talking about the dark web.

On the transmission of disease that takes place via our remarkable systems of transportation, we do not yet have a bio-security strategy that makes sense in this globalised world; we cherry pick the illnesses that we check. For example, we passed legislation in the previous Parliament on the transmission of TB through migration, but we have absolutely no checks on the transmission of blood-borne viral illness. About 6,500 cases of hepatitis are imported every year into this country, and it is important that those individuals know that they have the condition and are treated, but just as importantly the public need to know what is happening so they can be protected against it. How come we want to treat TB but not hepatitis?

Globalisation also brings with it socio-economic challenges. This country has a large and vibrant economy, but the European economy in proportion to the rest of the world is in decline. We cannot presume to be economically vibrant for the foreseeable future, so we need to start thinking about how on earth we are going to pay our way in this world. This country's debt is currently about £1.5 trillion. If we add personal debts and liabilities for pension schemes and the like, we get to north of £5 trillion. That is not a sustainable position, and it affects national security, particularly if such debt is held by autocratic regimes.

There is also our level of dependence, and not just at home. We know it is an issue, because welfare is discussed in all parts of the House, and that level of dependence has to change. But there is our dependence on the wider world, too, and how we are increasingly dependent for our energy on countries abroad, most of which are also autocracies and not terribly stable.

The concept of nation states has been challenged by globalisation. What constitutes a country? We have a European view, but I am not so sure that it is shared by our friends or enemies in the middle east. It is, however, important, because we rely on the nation state to provide plenty of things in our lives, not least security, but when it comes to what we would like to see happen in the middle east, we need to define the nation state in a different way, because broadly people in the middle east have stronger loyalties to tribe and to religion than they have to Governments.

Having considered all those issues, and there are plenty of others—this is a very broad topic to cover in one debate—I think that Britain as a country has to decide what it is for. What is our role? What part should we play in global affairs, in bio-security, in making sure that the economies of democracies remain strong and

vibrant? That is where we have a problem, because we do not know what it should be and what role we should play. This country should play a big role, because the world is a safer place if Britain plays a bigger part in it. I do not recall any extensive debate on foreign or defence policy in the recent rather parochial general election campaign; I recall only the increasingly parochial arguments, which did no credit to this institution or to the political parties.

Defence matters greatly, and it is unsustainable that we spend more in six weeks on health and welfare than we spend on the defence of the nation in a year. When I turn on my television or my radio, I see an increasingly chaotic, unstable, insecure world. We are being presumptuous if we think we can continue to spend in this way on those areas, however important they might be, if that spending is to the detriment of the defence of the nation.

Only when we have defined our role should we start to have conversations about supranational organisation membership. The upcoming EU referendum is premature, because if we do not know what kind of country we should be or what our role in the wider world should be, it will be extremely difficult to work out whether our membership of the European Union is a good thing or not. We have not yet defined what we want to get out of it. I am well versed in the inadequacies and shortcomings of the EU and the eurozone—we all are, particularly Conservative Members—but I stress that we might just want to retain our membership of certain supranational organisations. We might, for example, want to retain our membership of NATO and to adhere to article 5 if Mr Putin dares to walk into Lithuania.

The document issued by the National Security Council, whose establishment during the last Parliament was a good development, did not mention Russia or Daesh, yet Russia had invaded Georgia and we also had Islamic extremism. That just shows how difficult it is to predict future threats. Given that fact, and the fact that we live in a complex world, I would like us to err on the side of caution and to concentrate extra resources not just on tanks and planes but on intelligence services. We face a challenging future, and I want this great nation to be sustainable and successful.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. May I suggest that hon. Members speak for just six minutes?

4.7 pm

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee), who has, as always, made a thought-provoking speech.

The events at Calais, and the events—as tragic as they are horrifying—on a holiday beach in Tunisia, have brought home something that was perhaps obvious but that we have overlooked for too long. It is a fact that this country sits in a continent separated from some of the world's poorest and most vulnerable people by what is effectively an inland sea capable of being crossed in less than a day. That passage is made by thousands every day. The majority of them are of course seeking a better life, but it can safely be inferred that some are

coming to Europe, and attempting to make their way to the United Kingdom, in order to harm us and our democratic way of life. I spoke about that in the debate on the Adjournment last night, and it is a problem that will not go away unless and until we deal with its root causes and direct a focus, which has hitherto been lacking, on the problems that are being experienced particularly in Africa and particularly in relation to corruption. Those problems are leading to much of the difficulty that we now find ourselves in.

The first duty of a Government is, and must always be, to ensure the security and safety of their own people. I know that this Government are well aware of that; it is in part why we make the case—not always popular in the country—that we should spend 0.7% of gross national income on international aid, which is one of the greatest tools of soft power we enjoy. That is not only the right thing to do; it is critical to our own national security. We have been through some tough times, and that is perhaps what has led the *Washington Post* and the federal Government in Washington to the view that Britain has not walked as tall on the international stage over the past few years as it has done in the past. I venture to suggest to those on the Government Front Bench that it is time to change that view.

We need to ensure that whatever proportion of our national income we spend on defence, we continue to have strong armed forces that are capable of projecting British power across the world. We need that not merely to ensure some form of national aggrandisement, but because what we do overseas matters—it matters to our own security at home. The threat we face from Islamic terrorism in particular means that we have no option but to think long and hard about how we use both our hard and soft power internationally to deal with an ever-increasing menace.

Although many colleagues have focused their remarks on a wide range of subjects, particularly on the middle east, the base of Daesh and al-Qaeda, I wish to focus my remarks on Boko Haram and its operations in northern Nigeria and the surrounding region. What began as a radical political movement in 2002 has essentially become a violent Jihadist insurgency that has killed and abducted thousands, and caused many more to flee their homes in fear.

Boko Haram's ambition to carve out a caliphate in the region, its links to al-Qaeda and its bloodthirsty violence bear similarities to Daesh in Syria and Iraq. Its exporting of Jihad across post-colonial borders is destabilising the region, just as Daesh is destabilising the middle east. But we cannot, and I know that Ministers will not, forget or ignore the threat of Boko Haram not just to the region but to our own security. The task is far from easy, as I recognise. Boko Haram has seldom shown much regard for national boundaries. It readily retreats across them when threatened, and it crosses into neighbouring states to recruit and train disaffected young men, as indeed has recently been the case in Niger. Its focus has changed recently from the north of Nigeria to a much larger area—perhaps in an attempt to replicate the Kanem-Bornu empire that once spanned parts of northern Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon under the Muslim Sayfawa dynasty. We have seen increasing numbers of incidents on Cameroonian soil in particular, especially kidnappings and village attacks, none of which, it must be said, has attracted much coverage in the

media here and still less any debate in this House. The United Nations rightly remains concerned. The Secretary-General has said that he is deeply troubled by Boko Haram's

“continuing indiscriminate and horrific attacks”.

The world seems largely to have forgotten the girls who were kidnapped overnight on 14 and 15 April 2014, but the truth is that Boko Haram has been kidnapping girls from northern Nigeria for years, often for sale as slaves. Although the Nigerian people and the international community were rightly horrified by the scale of the mass kidnap of more than 200 girls from the town of Chibok, such kidnappings have continued to this day and very little is being done to stop them. The horrifying nature of these kidnappings underscores the horrific nature of the menace with which we have to deal, because it does threaten us here in this country.

The displacement of people from the immediately affected area in which Boko Haram is operating is also causing refugee crises all over the region, as terrified people flee further and further away to get out of the reach of the violence, even to the Maghreb from where they attempt to make their way to Europe.

Tom Tugendhat *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Has the hon. Gentleman been here for the debate?

Tom Tugendhat: I have been part of the main debate from the beginning.

Does my hon. and learned Friend recognise that it is the governance problem in Nigeria that is causing the rise of Boko Haram? The rise of so many of these insurgent movements has rather more to do with governance and diplomatic problems than military ones.

Stephen Phillips: I recognise that, and I am coming on to it, although it is always difficult to condense—

Mr Deputy Speaker: The hon. and learned Gentleman is out of time.

Stephen Phillips: It is always difficult to condense a longer speech into a shorter speech, but I will take the injunction from the Chair.

In closing, this is a problem that Ministers must not forget. Of course the threat from Daesh is critical and something with which we must deal, but the threat of Islamist terrorism across Africa is also a very real threat. It threatens us here. I hope that the Minister will say that it is a matter of which the Foreign Office is aware and on which it will concentrate.

4.13 pm

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate. I wish to focus my remarks on three areas: the changing nature of the threat; the increased need for broader and deeper collaboration with our allies, with reference to NATO; and the critical significance of the need to win the battle of ideas.

Military strength, though vital to our nation, must be complemented by a more sophisticated understanding of extremist perspectives and the dynamics of how people are recruited to such evil causes. Let me start by

[John Glen]

examining the very different threats that Britain now faces. The stark differences between the world today and that of the cold war are abundantly clear. Economic and military power are now widely diffused across non-state actors, and an increasingly unpredictable Russia and an inscrutable China, which has evolved and will evolve further into a major player in international security matters, make the world we face very different.

In very recent times, the threat of Islamic extremism, splintering into al-Qaeda offshoots in west and north Africa and the even more extreme Boko Haram, as we have just heard, has made the geographical scope of security risks even broader, thereby accounting for our armed forces being deployed on 21 different operations in 19 countries, double the number of operations just five years ago. Then we have the separate but linked group of al-Shabaab in Somalia. We must recognise that the wide range of extremist groups have different emphases, even though they have a common uncompromising resolve to undermine and attack western values, interests and citizens.

The Arab spring certainly had the consequence of generating greater uncertainty. Even though progress towards democracy appeared to have been secured in Tunisia, last weekend we tragically saw just how easy it is for extremists to penetrate Britain's security interests—that is, the wellbeing of all our citizens—throughout the globe. In Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan, Mauritania, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Sudan, Iraq, Libya and Kuwait, grave but wide-ranging risks face those who live there as well as those who travel and do business there. This fragmented, complex and uncertain security environment, involving security events, risks and attacks that are much more unpredictable, means that Britain's assets must be deployed with increased frequency and with more sophisticated skills and roles.

That leads me to my second point. In this uncertain and profoundly more complex international security environment, Britain will need to collaborate more effectively with our NATO allies. The Gracious Speech made clear the Government's commitment to remain at the forefront of NATO. That will involve intermeshing our assets and capabilities with those of our allies more and more, but it is inconceivable to me that NATO can continue to exist as it does with such wide variance in the interpretation of the 2% of GNI that is to be spent on defence.

In the expanded theatres in which we operate, such as our work with the Kurdish Regional Government, our help for the unprecedented humanitarian response in Syria and our work in Iraq, we must see our allies in NATO spending more. In the UK, the challenge requires three options for defence spending. We must either meet the 2% of GNI not just in the current year but in the comprehensive spending review period for 2016-17 and beyond, or concede that the principle is not sustainable and assess the impact that will have on our moral leadership in NATO and how that differs from where we were at the summit in Wales last year. Alternatively, we can do what I fear we are moving to, and have a fudge using some more DFID money, deftly appropriated for joint humanitarian work. Although the arguments about the £163 billion—1% above RPI—in the equipment budget and the retention of the size and shape of the armed forces will be deployed, the options place a

question mark over the integrity of the 0.7% commitment on DFID expenditure and do not fully reflect the necessity to defend and maintain defence budgets at current levels in the face of increasingly diverse and fragmented security interests. Although I readily concede that the budgetary pressures are immense, a greater and impressive list of activities leads me to the view that more effective defence spending, and more of it, is required.

Finally, and more briefly, I wish to reflect on the need to examine more fully the battle for ideas. We will always need military force and I am fully committed, representing the constituency that I do, to the people of our armed forces, who do so much and put so much at risk for our nation. If we examine the geopolitical landscape and fully grasp the fragmentation of extremist ideologies, we will see that we must devote more energy, thought and resources to understanding how to fight against those who hold a very different and extreme eschatology to ours. We must develop a fuller grasp of how the radicalisation process occurs in the UK and in the unstable states we have referred to. This is difficult. It will not be quick or easy.

Today's debate is timely and critical. We live in a world of changing threats where greater collaboration on a fairer basis will be needed. Britain has led the way in Europe. It must soon decide if it will continue to perform that role in its defence expenditure, but the budget envelope is only one part of it. Without intelligent collaboration, more effective spending focused on reliable outputs, and improved understanding of how all the Government's assets are used together, we will be at risk of failing in our duty to protect our nation.

4.20 pm

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I am pleased to follow the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen), and more particularly to follow three extraordinary maiden speeches. I congratulate their authors enormously—my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green), and the hon. Members for Dundee West (Chris Law) and for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Stuart Donaldson). I agree with the hon. Member for Dundee West in his thesis that we risk, particularly in defence and foreign policy, becoming distant and disconnected—I think those were his words—from the views of those whom we represent.

In 2003 I voted against the Iraq war, though I went on to serve in that conflict. I was conscious at the time that the Government of the day were distancing themselves, as were the official Opposition, from the views being expressed to me by my constituents. It is important, particularly in this arena, that we try to reconnect with the views of the public—the people we represent. The hon. Gentleman was quite right to underscore the dangers we face in the event that we fail to do that.

Twelve years on, we should rule nothing out in dealing with Daesh. It is indeed illogical to conduct strike missions in Iraq, yet not to contemplate doing the same in Syria against an organisation that respects no national boundaries. I suspect that we can lead public opinion on that. Where I think we may have problems is in committing boots on the ground, other than special forces. We will face grave difficulty if such strike missions

succumb to mission creep. Right hon. and hon. Members will, I know, be very mindful of their duty to reflect public opinion more fully in this endeavour than perhaps we did in 2003, when this House gave the green light to an unpopular war which badly stretched the patience of the public. We must not do so again. We must reflect on the lessons of the past.

Trust and confidence were very much part of the Anderson report that we debated in this place last Thursday, and were reflected in the title of that report, "A Question of Trust". Next Tuesday will mark the 10th anniversary of the 7/7 bombings. We can see when terrorists win, but generally not when they are foiled, yet the public do not necessarily understand—Anderson touches on this—when it is necessary to do things in their name which they do not fully understand to protect their liberty. An attack foiled is a liberty upheld.

The pre-legislative stage of the investigatory powers Bill this autumn and the passage of that Bill in advance of the axe falling on the Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Act 2014 in December 2016 is an opportunity to socialise, as far as prudence allows, the activity of the intelligence and security community honestly, openly and with candour. Fear of the unknown and the unseen always promotes mistrust. Reality is often rather dull, but in this context dull is good.

As defence and security face down the rather techie challenges of the future, we have to ensure that there is no 21st century equivalent of the wild west—no ungoverned space, nowhere for organised criminals and terrorists to go, no refuge for the ill-inclined state and non-state actors from where they can threaten the people whose interests we represent.

In addition to its vital inquisitorial role, I look forward to the reconstituted Intelligence and Security Committee being in the vanguard of the promotion of better public understanding of the intelligence activities carried out in their name, and reaffirming consent, reducing suspicion and improving the trust to which Anderson refers and to which the hon. Member for Dundee West alluded.

The other subject on which I think we might be at risk of parting company with the public is international development, which is a vital part of what we are debating today. Let me be clear that I, like most Members of the House, support spending substantial sums of money on international development, because it is right that we do so. I support the Government's spending of £11.7 billion on aid.

Conflict states do not meet millennium development goals, and states cannot attain prosperity without stability. It follows that if we are serious about international development, we have to be serious about the kind of contribution that our armed forces can make to stability and up-stream conflict prevention. It is strange that we cannot count the cost of the 500 British servicemen in Kabul who are training up security forces simply because they are part of the military and the OECD does not recognise soldiers. It appears that we count finding mates for lovelorn tropical fish in Madagascar as aid, but not squaddies teaching Afghans how to prevent their country from collapsing into civil war. That is clearly wrong.

I am pleased that the OECD is this month belatedly considering its rules for official development assistance—ODA. Perhaps it is time for a parallel system: it has been called total official support for sustainable development,

known as TOSSD—acronyms in this field are rarely attractive—which would encompass some element of peacekeeping and up-stream conflict prevention. I think that is well worth considering. The Prime Minister has said that he is open to spending more aid on peacekeeping and security, and he is right to do so. The vehicle is the highly successful conflict pool, which it seems would be far better aligned with TOSSD than ODA, and much easier to sell to a sceptical British public.

4.26 pm

Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in today's debate on the defence of our country. I join my hon. Friends in congratulating the hon. Members for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Stuart Donaldson) and for Dundee West (Chris Law) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) on their superb maiden speeches.

May I begin by sending my condolences to the families of the victims who have been injured or killed in Tunisia, France and Kuwait? They have our sympathy and solidarity. The attacks demonstrate more than ever that we need to confront and defeat those who threaten our peaceful and prosperous way of life and our rules-based international order. They show that Britain's defence decisions affect not only this country, but countries around the world.

The attacks also remind us how much we rely on our armed forces and security services to keep us safe. They do a superb job around the world. Today, 4,000 men and women of our armed forces are deployed on 23 different joint operations in 19 countries. That includes taking on Daesh. Since last September our planes have carried out over 1,000 missions and 300 air strikes. Our military are training local forces in 15 countries around the world. As my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) reminded us, 500 British troops remain in Kabul. It is thanks to their efforts that more than 6.7 million Afghan children now have the opportunity to go to school. More than 200 of our servicemen and women remain in Sierra Leone, helping to contain the Ebola epidemic. We have 10,000 service personnel stationed overseas, everywhere from Cyprus to the Falkland Islands. Few nations can match that footprint or respond to such challenges so rapidly and at such scale.

I have recently been given a snapshot into the world of our armed services. As a member of the new intake, I have had the privilege of participating in the armed forces parliamentary scheme, which allows hon. Members across the House to experience life in the armed forces, to understand their working environment and engage with servicemen and women of all ranks. Having recently returned from the UK Defence Academy at Shrivenham, where we met senior officers to discuss current operations, finances and strategy across all three services, I commend the scheme to the House. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray) for his work in chairing the all-party armed forces group and leading the work of the armed forces parliamentary scheme.

Amid all that activity it is easy to forget that the past quarter of a century, although punctuated by periodic and dramatic crises, has been one of relative peace, compared with the past 1,000 years. The proportion of people killed in armed conflict has fallen and living standards have risen as globalisation and technology help lift millions out of poverty.

[Alan Mak]

In the year that we celebrate Magna Carta's 800th anniversary, we must also remind ourselves that that success was built on the foundations of an international rules-based order. That order did not exist by accident. From the peace of Westphalia to today's NATO alliance, it is underpinned by states working together for their collective defence. We cannot take it for granted, because today it faces a set of multiple and concurrent challenges. In Europe, we see Russia trying to change an international border by force. In the middle east, we see ISIL, Daesh and al-Qaeda trying to establish a caliphate. In Africa, we see Boko Haram trying to cause mayhem in Nigeria.

Against that backdrop, our armed forces and this country's security and defence are more important than ever. That view is certainly shared by my constituents in Havant, which has a long and proud naval tradition. We are home to many naval personnel and veterans who have given so much to our country's defence and who have not hesitated to press their new MP on defence issues. We are also home to defence contractors such as Lockheed Martin and Eaton Aerospace, as well as a number of supply chain partners who provide the equipment that enables our armed forces to operate.

I welcome this Government's continued investment in our military, especially in our equipment and our Navy. From the two Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers and the new Type 26 global combat ships, to the seven Astute-class submarines and the renewal of our nuclear deterrent through successor-class submarines, these hardware upgrades will ensure that this country remains at the forefront of technology for many years to come, particularly as the nature of the threat to our country changes.

I am proud to say that our country spends 2% of our national income on our defence budget; long may that continue. Our defence budget is in fact the fifth biggest in the world, the second biggest in NATO, and the biggest in the EU. Although our commitment to the safety of our citizens cannot be measured simply in pounds and pence, the commitment of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to investing £160 billion over the next 10 years is certainly welcome. Our plans to buy new aircraft carriers, the joint strike fighter, attack helicopters and armoured vehicles show that some of the threats that we face are still from conventional forces, even in a world where cyber-attack and chemical attack are equally likely.

As I said, the threats we face today are constantly changing, and those behind them are constantly adapting to find new ways of destroying our way of life. I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement of the strategic defence and security review, which will reassess the new threats that we now face in today's world. That review will help us to assess those threats and, I hope, ensure that we have the right equipment, strategies and solutions to deal with them in the coming years. I especially welcome his decision to look into the use of unmanned aircraft, cyber-defence and precision weaponry. The review will ensure that we are ready, willing and able to act to defend our national interests and our values, as we always have done.

The coming strategic defence review will build on a very strong track record that we have had since 2010. Over the past five years, we have established the National

Security Council to ensure proper strategic decision making, balanced the defence budget, led the world in promoting women's rights and tackling sexual violence in conflicts—for that, I pay tribute to my fellow Yorkshireman and former Foreign Secretary William Hague—and continue to play a leading role in NATO and the UN in maintaining a strong defence.

I join my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in praising the contribution that our armed forces are making at home and abroad. This Government rightly put security—economic security and national security—at the heart of our election manifesto. They have also promised to do whatever it takes to maintain our defence and keep our country safe and prosperous in a changing world. I am proud to support that work during this Parliament, both inside this House and outside it.

4.33 pm

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): This has been an important debate at a very appropriate time to be considering Britain's security and our place in the world. We gather here today knowing that our national security is affected by events far from home and actions taken by people thousands of miles away.

Last week, our country was touched by the tragedy of terrorism. Our thoughts are of course with the families of the 30 British citizens who lost their lives. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans) rightly spoke of the importance of observing the minute's silence tomorrow. There is perhaps no better and more chilling an illustration of the interconnected nature of the threats that we now face in the modern world than the horrors that took place on that beach. Today, we have discussed how to keep Britain safe knowing that events in Syria and Iraq can inspire a terrorist to seek out training in Libya and turn a gun on British holidaymakers in Tunisia.

We hold this debate knowing that terror has no respect for borders, from the streets of Kuwait, to the suburbs of southern France, to the forests of sub-Saharan Africa. We know that we face threats that are varied and ever changing—from instability in eastern Europe and uncertain economic events unfolding in Athens, to the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean, people fleeing conflicts in failed states and a region still recovering from the outbreak of Ebola. Never has it been more timely to debate our essential partnership with Europe and Britain's place in the wider world. This excellent debate has risen to that task.

Let me begin by saying how good it is to see the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) in his place to respond to it. I know that he has plenty on his plate at the moment, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) has said, he has been so impressive in responding to the appalling events in recent days. I pay tribute to him for that.

We have heard many excellent speeches by hon. and right hon. Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) and the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray) made powerful tributes to their constituents who were killed in Tunisia.

I also congratulate those who have made excellent maiden speeches. If I may say so, the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Stuart Donaldson)

gave a speech beyond his years, and I thank him for recommending the salads in the Terrace cafeteria, even though he is of Aberdeen Angus stock. The hon. Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) spoke powerfully about the importance of science and innovation across the world. Of course, no debate in this place would be complete without a mention of Winston Churchill, so I wish the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) well as he follows in his predecessor's footsteps.

This debate has shown that we live in an unstable, stormy and rapidly changing world. Global wealth and influence are shifting from north to south and west to east. Technology is changing our lives beyond recognition. This is the year when the human beings on a small planet will be outnumbered for the first time by mobile phones, three quarters of them owned by people in developing countries.

That holds important lessons for our security. Our global village has never been wealthier, healthier or more connected, but the number of people made homeless by conflict and disaster has never been higher. The forces of change have ratcheted up the pressure on volatile states and fragile regimes. That means that today our challenge is to keep Britain safe in a world where the only certainty is uncertainty.

Much has been made over recent months about Britain's apparent retreat from the world. Let us be clear: withdrawing from the world is not an option, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), the shadow Defence Secretary, rightly said at the beginning of this debate. Britain can and should continue to play a leading role in global affairs. We must never allow a false choice to be created between nation building at home and engagement on the world stage. We can do both. Our future success and security depend on it.

The hon. Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti) talked about Britain's unique reach as a nation. He is absolutely right. We are members of the UN Security Council, NATO, the European Union, the G7, the G20 and the Commonwealth. We have a time zone, history, language and cultural exports, and we are home to the capital of global finance.

We should not underestimate how much people are looking for our country to show a lead. Research by Chatham House has shown that more than 60% of the great British public remain ambitious for Britain to play a leading role in world affairs. Across the globe, many countries still expect Britain to play our part as a senior power that led the world in prioritising humanitarian development and upholding human rights. We should continue to live up to that.

Many hon. Members have reflected on the tremendous debt we owe our armed forces. Nothing should give us greater confidence than our brave men and women in uniform, who, like the hon. Member for Havant (Alan Mak), I thank, together with the Foreign Office staff working in consulates and embassies around the world, often in difficult and dangerous situations and often well beyond the call of duty. They are the best of British and we thank them for what they do for our country.

As we begin the strategic defence and security review, the Government's task is to plot a course for how we best marshal that talent and ensure that we have the capabilities we need to keep our country safe in the years ahead. That is not limited to our capacity on land, sea and in the air. At a time when Britain is reported to

suffer more cyber-attacks than any other country in Europe, we must also ensure that we have the means to protect ourselves online. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that they can deliver the comprehensive plan for our future security that we need?

Several hon. Members have rightly concentrated on the new threats that we face. Terror and extremism are as formidable an enemy as any that our country has ever faced, but it is not one that we can easily pin down on a map. It is every bit as fierce as the evil this country waged war on more than 70 years ago. This is the challenge of our generation, and we must use every single asset at our disposal to respond to ISIL or Daesh. The right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) spoke about his reasons for using the term "Daesh", and we have had a good debate about that this afternoon.

As hon. Members will know, ISIL or Daesh is a different entity from al-Qaeda and other foes we have faced in recent times, as the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) pointed out. May I take this opportunity to congratulate him on his new role as Chair of the Defence Committee? We wish him well in that important post. ISIL occupies ground, commands huge resources and is very effective at disseminating its messages. We will defeat its poisonous ideology, which the hon. Member for Salisbury (John Glen) mentioned, only if we work together with our allies and international partners to take on this threat wherever it occurs. That includes the co-ordinated military action against ISIL in Iraq voted for by this House in 2014.

The Defence Secretary spoke about a possible case for extending air strikes to Syria. As the Opposition, we stand ready to work with the Government to defeat ISIL, and we will carefully consider any proposals that they decide to bring forward. These are important judgments that must be made carefully on their own merits. There must be clarity about the nature, objectives and legal basis of any action, and about how it would help us to achieve our shared objective of defeating ISIL.

We must ensure that any potential action commands the support of other nations in the region, including Iraq and the coalition of nations already taking action in Syria. We also know from past conflicts that decisions on military action need to be accompanied by a broader political strategy. That point was made by the hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), whom it is very good to see in this place, although he is not in the Chamber at the moment. We should also reflect on the comments made by the hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) on engaging with partners such as Jordan.

What diplomatic efforts are the Government making to work with the regional powers? What efforts are being made to build alliances with countries that hold a shared interest with us in defeating ISIL? That includes working together to disrupt the means by which ISIL spreads its propaganda, and involves sharing intelligence where appropriate. Crucially, we need to follow the money, which means doing all we can to cut off the finances that fund the bloodshed. More broadly, we need to work with our partners to tackle the illegal trade in narcotics and the people trafficking that is spreading disorder and funding such atrocities across the globe. What efforts are the Government making to address those issues?

[Dan Jarvis]

This has been a wide-ranging debate, but let me briefly touch on some of the broader issues. How we use our soft power is key to ensuring our security in the modern world. That particularly applies to maintaining peace in eastern Europe following the annexation of Crimea and to the role Russia has played in destabilising Ukraine. The hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart)—his arrival in the Chamber is very timely and just in time—particularly focused on how we can support Ukraine. As I am sure he knows, European Foreign Ministers voted just last week to extend the economic sanctions against the Russian regime. If the Minister has time, will he give us his assessment of whether the current sanctions are working? What further diplomatic efforts are the Government making in this area?

Does the Minister acknowledge the variety of grave threats that we face in the coming years? They include patterns of migration, pandemic disease—the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) rightly made that point—and the impact of climate change. The effects of climate change are already contributing to the scarcity of resources and making populations more transient. It is estimated that as many as 200 million people will have been displaced by climate change by 2050, which is five times the world's entire refugee population in 2008. I would be grateful if the Minister updated the House on the steps that the Government are taking to ensure that there is a binding agreement at the UN climate change conference in Paris this December.

I welcome the agreement between the Front-Bench teams about the important role of international development. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) and the hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) made good points about that. Supporting developing countries is not only the right thing to do morally but the right choice for our national security, because it will help to build a safer world in the long term. As we approach the deadline for the millennium development goals, I would welcome anything that the Minister can say about how the Government will help to build on the progress that has been made.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) made a passionate speech about the lessons that we can draw from history, particularly in the region we have discussed today. Perhaps to nobody's surprise—certainly not to mine—the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray) also referred to learning the lessons of the past, so I will conclude with a reflection from history. Some 70 years ago, a new majority Government took office and a new Foreign Secretary issued a warning that foreign affairs would present them with their most vexed and difficult problems. Ernest Bevin said that we would secure a safer and more peaceful future

“by patience. By trying to understand one another's point of view, and bringing people together for a common purpose.”

He spoke from a generation that overcame fascism and worked to repair a world shattered by conflict. Today we face different threats that bring new dangers and complexities, but when people look back on our political generation, let it be said that we kept true to that, brought people together for a common purpose and stood up to the varied challenges before us. Let it be said that we were not cowed by those who lived to

spread fear and hatred, but that we acted to keep Britain safe and to pursue a safer and more prosperous world. Let us deliver on that.

4.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): I begin, as I am obliged to, by acknowledging my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests as a reserve member of Her Majesty's armed forces.

This has been an invaluable debate. Today, Parliament is not just debating but learning about and understanding the challenges that we face. I commend all Members who have contributed, and it is an honour to respond to the debate.

We live in a complex and uncertain world in which we are exposed to a wide range of threats, which Members have articulated in their contributions today. That was brought home by last Friday's brutal terrorist attack on the beach in Tunisia. Our first priority has been to help the British victims and their families. British experts and officials have been working around the clock to support British nationals—the fallen, the injured and the bereaved.

On Monday I visited Sousse with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, and we offered the Government's sympathies to the families who have lost loved ones. We also met Tunisian senior Ministers to offer a variety of UK support. Yesterday I was with the families of eight of the deceased who were returned to RAF Brize Norton in a dignified ceremony. I join the House in reiterating my deepest sympathies to all the victims and their families.

Although the attacker appears to have been a lone actor, the same ideology of violent extremism is spreading, and sadly that ideology will be behind the next attack as more terrorist groups than ever before seek to do us harm at home and abroad. We must not allow terrorists to dictate our lives. We must learn and adapt to protect our people, but we must not give in to hatred and intolerance. That is why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in his statement on Monday, and the Defence Secretary repeated today, that we will pursue a full spectrum response. What that response will be, and what Britain can and should do, has rightly been at the heart of today's debate.

I turn to some of the contributions that Members made. The shadow Secretary of State made a thoughtful and constructive contribution. He said that he stood ready to work with the Government and agreed about the need for a considered assessment. We note the criteria that he set out, and all Members of the new House of Commons must ask the important question about what greater role Britain might play across the full spectrum of capability to expedite the defeat of ISIL.

I join other Members in welcoming my neighbour and right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) to his elected position, and I congratulate him on his appointment as Chair of the Defence Committee—it is wonderful to see him there. He spoke of the challenge of the Sunni-Shi'a divide, and I am pleased with his cautious welcome for further debate on what Britain might do.

The right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) spoke about Tunisia. He will be aware that, sadly, four Scots were killed in Tunisia, and they were repatriated today. He also advanced the debate about the threat of ISIL which, as right hon. and hon. Members know, does not exist only in Syria. In the Sinai there is Ansar Bait al-Maqdis, and in Libya there is Ansar al-Sharia. In Nigeria we have Boko Haram, which has been mentioned by other Members. The House must ask itself whether, if we are to take on an adversary, we are limited by geography.

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Ellwood: I apologise but I will not because I have a lot to get through.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) has huge experience in international development and spoke of the importance of supporting those caught up in these dreadful conflicts. He mentioned his visit to Zaatari camp, which I have also seen. I intervened on the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) to confirm the difference between NATO and Warsaw pact weapon systems, and he spoke about the numbers of weapons in Libya, which now outnumber the people there. That shows the challenge we face.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) was robust and knowledgeable in his speech and spoke about the importance of a relationship and co-operation between DFID and the MOD. The hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Stuart Donaldson) made an incredible maiden speech, on which I congratulate him. He suggested that looking youthful might be a deficit, but I suggest that he should play on it because it will not last forever. He clearly has good connections if he has the Balmoral estate in his constituency, and I noticed that he also got in his tuppence worth on Trident to force his position—it might cost a bit more to keep that in place, but that is for further debates.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) made an equally composed speech and spoke about the importance of a mixed economy and innovation, offering Bolton West as a place to invest. I am pleased that his skills as an engineer have already been recognised in his position on the Science and Technology Committee, and I congratulate him on that.

The hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) spoke of the twisted ideology and false promise of a place in paradise for those who believe in ISIL. He also mentioned his constituent Trudy Jones, and I confirm that she has been repatriated today. My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans) spoke about the importance of the one-minute silence in tribute to the fallen victims that will take place tomorrow. That will be honoured not only in the UK but in all our embassies across the world. Usual channels permitting, I hope that a full list of victims will be presented to Parliament next week to allow right hon. and hon. Members to pay their respects and condolences. I also hope that the BBC will acknowledge the one-minute silence.

The hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) gave a confident performance. I noticed his stature and snappy

dress sense, and I am pleased that I was there for his maiden speech—[*Interruption.*] We will not mention the hair. He spoke with pride about his constituency and has huge knowledge of the area he represents. I am sure that he will be feisty and formidable in representing his constituency, as he spelled out.

My hon. Friends the Members for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti) and for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray) illustrated their command and understanding of defence matters and the importance of appropriate funding, which we will probably debate on a further occasion in the House.

I am grateful for the kind words of the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound), whom I can call a friend. I am pleased with the repatriation process—all hon. Members can acknowledge that that is an important step. It is the least we can do in the House to support those in their time of need.

The hon. Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) spoke of the wider strategy required to help those countries away from Iraq and Syria—Jordan and so forth. That important matter was also reflected by my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen). My hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) spoke of the importance of defining our role and ensuring that appropriate defence spending is met. That was also reflected by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips), who gave a thought-provoking speech and spoke with some authority on the Sahel.

I commend the work of my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) on the centenary of the first world war. He made a profound statement when he said that we must reconnect with the views of the public following the Iraq invasion of March 2003. Those are important words.

As an active, open and forward-thinking global player in an interconnected world, the United Kingdom is exposed to those who would do us harm, but we are one of a small number of countries with the aspiration, the means and the relationships to play a significant role, if we choose, in shaping a safer and more stable world. As has been said, being a member of such important organisations as the UN Security Council, NATO, the EU, the G7, the G20 and the Commonwealth, the United Kingdom is in a unique position to act as a strong and stabilising force for good in today's uncertain world. That is why we were one of the first nations to join the counter-ISIL coalition. The cautious tone of the debate was clear. We must ask ourselves how we can further leverage our distinctive, decisive global role, our diplomatic network, our military capability and our influence, working with our partners overseas, to expedite the defeat of ISIL and tackle its ideology. That ambition needs to be considered properly and carefully. It is not only in Britain's interests, but in the interests of building stability, security and prosperity for the people of the middle east, north Africa and around the world. We have started a very important debate today and it should continue.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Britain and international security.

Hatfield Colliery

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Kris Hopkins.)

4.58 pm

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the issue of Hatfield colliery in my constituency. The first mine shaft was sunk 99 years ago at Hatfield, in 1916. Over the years since, tens of thousands of workers at the mine have laboured on our behalf to keep the lights on. On Monday night, production ceased, probably for the final time. Four hundred miners and staff at Hatfield discovered they were losing their jobs. The vast majority of the men who turned up for work were told on the spot to turn around and go home because they had worked their last shift. The jobs they had done for 20, 30 or 40 years had come to an end.

The average age of a miner at the pit is 50 years old. One of the men I met on Tuesday is 57. He first went down the mines at 16. He has a job to go to, but it is at £7 an hour. That is the reality of what has happened. Hundreds of men and their families have lost their jobs—jobs that pay far better than the ones they might get in their place if they are lucky. The last deep mine in south Yorkshire—one of only three remaining in our country—has closed, with all the effects on the community that will have.

Today, I want to talk about Hatfield and the specific issues arising, but I also want to draw some wider lessons for Government energy policy.

At the heart of the debate is the following question: how do we shape a just transition to a low-carbon economy? I believe that this transition is right and necessary, and I support the Government in their endeavours to make it happen, but a just transition means fairness to workers in affected industries. Hatfield's early closure is not, in my view, just, fair or right.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Kris Hopkins.)

Edward Miliband: Let me explain how we got here. I want to place on record my thanks to Vince Cable and to the former Minister of State at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matthew Hancock), for what they did before the election. As the mine faced a serious crisis, they agreed at least to prolong its life until summer 2016, with up to £20 million of closure aid. Unfortunately, even after the aid was granted, things deteriorated quickly for Hatfield. In April, the Government doubled the carbon price floor, a tax on high carbon fuels. The levying of the tax at point of sale rather than when the coal is burned means that the energy companies have an incentive to stockpile coal, and they did so in advance of April to avoid the higher levy. Companies had huge stockpiles of coal and orders at Hatfield dried up.

That was the grim situation the Minister discussed with me two weeks ago. My argument to her was not that the Government should not have increased the carbon levy, but that they should take responsibility for its effect on Hatfield. We needed to piece together orders that might have made it possible for the mine to

remain open. Thanks to the effort of the management, one energy company did offer to buy half the coal and part of the rest could also have been sold. In the end, however, there was a fundamental stumbling block to the mine remaining open.

In contrast with what was said before the election, the Minister said that not a penny more of Government aid could be provided. My argument to the Minister was, and remains, that early closure will end up costing more, not less, when we take into account the revenues that would come back to the Government if the miners were employed for another year. Calculations made by the company suggest that the extra investment required to keep the mine open as planned to summer 2016 would have been more than offset by tax and VAT revenues coming back to the Government. That calculation does not even take account of the money the Government will now pay out in benefits to miners who do not find work; nor does it factor in the impact of early closure on the 100 companies in the local supply chain or on the local economy, never mind the social effect of what has happened. The miners feel they have had the rug pulled from under them. I do not believe the decision makes economic or industrial sense, and nor is it morally right. I believe the Minister should think again.

I also want to use the debate to raise specific issues on which I hope the Minister can be of help. As I do so, I hope she will consider the context. Historically, we have asked the miners throughout our country to put themselves at some risk, in dangerous conditions, to help the rest of us to power our country. We therefore owe them a special duty of care. The miners at Hatfield were led to believe that they would have another 12 months of work and could therefore plan their futures. However, that situation changed in large part due to a Government decision. Inevitably, this chain of events leads to a deep sense of grievance against the Government. That grievance is compounded by the fact that the Treasury has benefited to the tune of £300 million from the high carbon tax. Our ask, therefore, is that the Government accept their share of responsibility and use a small part of the Treasury's windfall gain to help the miners and their families. One option is to extend the life of the mine, but there are other things the Minister could do and I want to raise them with her.

First, I want to raise the issue of redundancy. Hatfield miners will be getting the minimum statutory redundancy of as little as £475 for every year worked, rather than the £900 for every year worked that was the norm in the industry. Since the mine closed briefly in the early 2000s and only reopened in 2006, the maximum service any miner can claim for is nine years. We are talking about very small sums of money that the men will receive. It means they have a very small margin to support them as they seek other employment. The Minister will want to reflect on that. I ask her to do so.

In those circumstances, and as a gesture of goodwill to the miners at Hatfield—as well as at the last two remaining deep mines, Kellingley and Thorsby, which are due to close in the coming months—I hope the Minister will seriously consider the possibility of enhanced redundancy.

I also believe that the miners at Hatfield deserve the best support to find fulfilling and well-paid work, as well as retraining. Will the Minister undertake that the work of the Employment Service will continue—not

just for a short period, but at least for the eight weeks that the mine will remain open and beyond? I hope she will work with the Coal Authority, which will take over running of the site, as it might be able to take on some of the former workers. I ask the hon. Lady, as a BIS Minister, to use her good offices to work with the owners of the site, ING, to think about what a creative and possible future for the site would look like.

Those are some specific asks about Hatfield that I put to the Minister, but I want to make a broader argument about Hatfield and the low-carbon transition and what we should learn from this episode. Coal is definitely a polluting fuel, and it is right that environmental standards are applied to it as part of the battle against climate change. That means that there is no viable future for unabated coal, but there is a future for clean coal technology through carbon capture and storage as part of our potential armoury in the transition to a low-carbon economy. *[Interruption.]* As my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) says, there are tens of thousands of jobs along with it.

However, the Government's energy policy does not add up. There is a plan for a CCS plant at Drax by 2020. It will be burning coal, and it could be coal from Hatfield colliery, which is less than 20 miles from Drax. Yet it will not be: it will be coal imported from thousands of miles away, from Colombia or Russia, with all the associated environmental costs.

Projections from the Department for Energy and Climate Change say that by 2029 we are set to burn 26 million tonnes of coal or natural gas through CCS, but none of that will be from deep mines in the UK. I think people will look back on this and wonder how we got to this position. I would like the Minister to reflect in her reply on whether she believes that is a rational or sensible state of affairs and on what it says about the Government's energy policy. I would like her to reflect, too, on how we got here.

The first CCS plant was due to be up and running by 2014. The last Labour Government committed to two to four CCS projects, and agreed a small levy to fund them. At the time, when I was the Secretary of State, I remember the Conservative Opposition criticised me—Oppositions tend to do this—for not being nearly bold enough. They said there should be four projects—never mind two to four—and asked why I was not getting on with it. What then happened is that the coalition Government came to power, dithered for two years and decided to scrap the previous Government's plan and start all over again. As a result, as the Climate Change Committee noted in its report earlier this week, CCS will be up and running not by 2014 as projected, but by 2020.

That delay has been fatal for Hatfield and the other deep mines in our country. I say that not to score points, but because I hope the Minister will learn lessons for the future. My constituency has an interest in a gas-fired CCS project at Hatfield—the Don Valley project, which has secured European resources. Yesterday I met the director of Sargas Power, which owns the site and is now overseeing the project, and he emphasised above all the need for timely decision making by Ministers, so we cannot afford more dither and delay.

This takes me to a wider point that I hope the Minister will consider. In the two discussions we had—I hope the Minister will allow me to say this—the most

heated moments were about whether the Government's decision was motivated by ideology. *[Interruption.]* I see that she agrees from a sedentary position.

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry): Only about having the conversation.

Edward Miliband: Only about the conversation. The ideology I referred to was one of a narrow view of faith in the market. The Minister said that that was not the case and not her motivation. In fact, she vehemently and perhaps characteristically denied it. In some sense, the issue goes well beyond what she believes and into a deeper issue about the ethos of government, particularly the ethos at the Treasury, which has controlled so much of what the Government do—not just under this Government, but under previous Governments.

If we look at the history, we find that until 2007 there was no Government Department that even had “energy” in the title—and there had not been since 1992. Why was that? It is because the prevailing assumption had been that energy could be treated more or less like most other markets. Of course, that is all changed by climate change, because without serious intervention by the Government we will not make the low-carbon transition. Part of the incoherence of energy policy at the moment is that we are stuck in a halfway house where at times the Government pretend that this is a market-oriented system, when the truth is that in large part it is not any more.

Let me give the House an example. The Government have negotiated a 35-year fixed price for new nuclear power stations. The last time I looked, price fixing was not an intrinsic part of a free market ideology. I do not blame the Government, because the risks associated with new nuclear and the difficulty of low-carbon transition demand a different response. However, I find it frustrating when new nuclear is given a multi-billion-pound bill payer subsidy, but a few million more for a coal mine is seen as an option that either cannot be afforded or should not be entertained—particularly in the context of the extra revenue from the carbon levy, and the billions that the Government have received in surpluses from the miners' pension fund.

My appeal to the Minister is this. The reality that the Government need to embrace is that we are moving towards a much more managed market. They need to drive that logic through everything they do, not just some of what they do. That takes me to the issue of how we can prosper economically, and how we can create jobs that are worthy of the skills of the men who went underground at Hatfield and other mines in the country. How can we use those precious skills?

There is another tension that the Government need to resolve. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, who drives so much of what the Government do, famously said, referring to climate change,

“I don't want us to be the only people out there in front of the rest of the world.”

He has presented environmental progress and a strong economy as being in conflict, but in my opinion he is dead wrong. It is that view that has led to uncertainty, dither and ambiguity in the Government's approach to the environment. We have seen that in the delays on CCS, and in the recent decision on onshore wind.

[Edward Miliband]

Quite simply, the more mixed messages the Government send, the fewer jobs—jobs that could be taken by the men at Hatfield and elsewhere—and successful businesses will be located here. I hope that the Minister, in her new job at BIS—and as someone who cares about good-quality jobs—will see it as her role to champion the environmental cause. I hope that she will think of that cause not as the enemy of a successful economy that some consider it to be, but as its friend, because that, I believe, is the reality.

Let me finally return to Hatfield. I want to record my thanks to the National Union of Mineworkers, to all the management who sought to keep the mine open, and to my former parliamentary colleague John Grogan, who chaired the employee benefit trust and made a herculean effort to save the mine. Without all their efforts, it would undoubtedly have gone under earlier. I also pay tribute not just to the current work force, but to all who have worked at Hatfield during its 99-year history—the tens of thousands of miners who have gone underground and worked in the most difficult conditions to power our country, and who have risked their lives over the years—and to their families. I thank them for their sacrifice, their service, and their hard labour on behalf of our country. They created strong and vibrant communities that were built on the mining industry. Theirs is a legacy of hard work, solidarity and comradeship, for which they deserve respect and admiration.

5.13 pm

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) on securing the debate. I also pay tribute to all the men who have served at Hatfield and who now face the end of that work, and to their families. I say “served” because there is a service in the working of coal, especially when it takes place underground in a deep pit.

I absolutely understand about the age of those men, and, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, I understand—perhaps better than many Members, including those on the Opposition Benches—the effects of coalmining, and of the closure of a mine, on a community. I was brought up in Worksop, next door to Manton colliery, and I went to the comprehensive school that served the Manton estate. Because of my background, I fully understand the huge sacrifices made by men when they work underground. I will be frank: they are indeed lions, often led by donkeys in my experience.

I have never understood, however, why there has been such an over-sentimental attachment to working underground in, often, the most appalling conditions. As a girl, I was never allowed underground, but at Manton we built a coalface on the top: we could all visit, and see the photographs and understand the experience of men who were stripped to the waist and often worked squatting for long shifts in the most appalling conditions, as these men will have undoubtedly done at some stage in their lives. It is indeed darned hard work and it is a service.

I want to make it absolutely clear, however, that the right hon. Gentleman is effectively saying that millions of pounds of taxpayers’ money should now go, and continue to go, to keep open this mine until next August

even though, unfortunately, it has failed to secure a single contract, despite all the hard work and efforts of its board and the will and determination of all those involved in the pit.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): My right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) talked about the economic benefits of keeping the mine open at the moment. The Minister’s earlier rhetoric was really positive, but what comes out of this same old Tory Government are ideological attacks on the miners. When will the Government give them a break and give them what they deserve?

Anna Soubry: I am afraid I am going to treat that contribution with the contempt it deserves and will continue with my speech.

We have made a commitment, and this is what we have done. In May 2015 the Government announced we had agreed to provide Hatfield with a longer-term repayable grant of up to £20 million to enable the colliery to continue operating until its planned and agreed closure in August of next year. This funding is state aid which has been approved by the European Commission. Further funding would require further state aid approval.

Last week the directors of Hatfield Colliery Partnership Ltd told my officials they had been unable to secure sufficient customers for their coal, thus calling into question the viability of the original closure plan. Since being advised of this position, the Government have done all we can to assist the directors of Hatfield, including reiterating our earlier commitment to provide up to £20 million to help the company achieve an orderly and safe closure, and accepting that this funding is, in the light of developments, now unlikely to be repaid. Despite this, the directors concluded it was not economically viable to continue mining and so took the decision to stop coal production on 30 June. It was their decision.

To understand the cessation of mining at Hatfield, it is important—[*Interruption.*] No, we did not pull the plug on it; absolutely not. We said we would give £20 million. We will continue to give up to £20 million. The decision was taken by the directors because they failed to secure the contract. This is the history, which I hope the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Jon Trickett) will listen to.

Hatfield’s difficulties go back some time. I believe it closed in 2001 and 2004. Most recently it entered administration in 2010—[*Interruption.*] If the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) continues to mutter in the way she is doing, I will take great exception, especially if she makes sexist comments.

Angela Rayner *rose*—

Anna Soubry: And no, I will not give way. I have already heard what the hon. Lady has to say.

Hatfield was restructured at the end of 2013, and in September 2014 had to secure a £4 million loan from the NUM to allow mining to continue. Owing to the continued deterioration in world coal prices, together with production issues, the NUM funding was fully utilised by November, so all that money had already been spent.

Unable to secure further funding elsewhere, Hatfield approached the Government in November of last year to request funding. In January of this year, the Government provided Hatfield with a short-term commercial bridging loan of £8 million. The intention was to provide time for the Government to consider options for longer-term financial support, which would allow mining to continue at Hatfield until 2016.

In undertaking the due diligence, and owing to changing conditions in the coal markets, it became clear that Hatfield would require funding in excess of the initial £8 million bridging loan and that longer-term support could not be delivered commercially. The Government worked extensively with the company directors and the European Commission to facilitate further support, and approval for state aid was quickly agreed with the Commission. I know that the right hon. Member for Doncaster North has paid tribute privately to, and I know he will join me in thanking publicly, all the officials in my Department for the really hard work that they put in to secure that arrangement.

It has been suggested that the Government could have provided Hatfield with additional support in the light of possible offers to buy Hatfield coal which might have kept the mine open until August 2016. The directors' managed closure plan had assumed that replacement contracts, from June this year onwards, would be secured for all Hatfield's coal output at pricing similar to what had been achieved before. I am aware that there was a possible offer—I have seen the email—from one company for about 50% of Hatfield's coal output, in addition to other possible commitments and bridging loans. Those offers were at a significantly lower price than the previous contracts that were being replaced. That level of interest was deemed insufficient by the directors—it was they who made the decision—to support the planned closure through to August 2016, and, as we know, no contract was even drafted, even less signed.

Edward Miliband: I attempted in my remarks to make the tone of this debate as constructive as possible. It is correct that the mine would have needed more money to keep going, but does the Minister or her officials dispute the central proposition that more money would have come back in tax and VAT revenue? That is the central economic question that faces the House.

Anna Soubry: I do take issue with the right hon. Gentleman, and absolutely undertake to provide him with all the figures. My argument—it is not just my argument; it is the argument of the officials—is that there is effectively no market for that coal. It would be wrong to mine that coal and stockpile it for—what?—six years on the off-chance that perhaps somebody might come along and buy it. If there had been any way in which any company might have thought it could buy that coal, those contracts would have been secured, but, despite best efforts, they were not. It would be wrong—it would be a complete failure of the Government's duty to the taxpayer—simply to hand over over and above the £20 million that was originally a loan, but which we now accept will never be repaid.

Edward Miliband: Forgive me, Mr Deputy Speaker, for intervening on the Minister again. With respect, she acknowledges that contracts were possible for 50% of

the coal from one company. I have the email and could read it out, but I will not trade emails with her in the House. Another significant part of the coal could have been sold. It is acknowledged that more money would have been required, but, on the basis of the contracts that she has acknowledged could have been put in place, my contention is that more money would have come back to the Government. That is why it does not make economic sense.

Anna Soubry: That is where we completely fall out, unfortunately, because there was not even a draft contract. The email I saw was not even the beginnings; it was couched in terms of “perhaps”, “maybe”—

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab): No.

Anna Soubry: The hon. Gentleman says “No” from a sedentary position. He has not seen the email—

Jon Trickett: I have seen it.

Anna Soubry: Well, we will talk about it later. If the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene, he should stand up and do it in the right place.

In the emails I have seen, there is no contract. There is, unfortunately, no possible contract.

Edward Miliband *rose*—

Anna Soubry: No, I will not give way, because I want to finish this point.

Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): Give way!

Anna Soubry: No, hang on, hang on. I have given way. [*Interruption.*] Hang on. This is a debate. I need to finish my sentence, and I am running out of time.

There was no possibility of a contract. The right hon. Member for Doncaster will accept that the directors and others—all involved in the future of the pit—were doing everything they could to secure a contract, but the one thing that nobody has been able to do is to secure a contract. There is no debate about that.

Edward Miliband *rose*—

Anna Soubry: I will give way again, but I will run out of time.

Edward Miliband: I hope the hon. Lady does not run out of time.

I shall read an email from the head of generation liaison at the company concerned—I will not name the company but the Minister knows it. Let me just read this paragraph, because it is important:

“with the objective of working with you to support a managed closure of the mine with dignity, we have reviewed our procurement strategy and have determined upon a higher risk/higher stock approach that we could manage within to facilitate contract volume with you. Indicatively, subject to internal approvals, we could therefore commit to procuring”.

Then it lists the procurement of, essentially, half the coal. If that is not an offer, I do not know what is.

Anna Soubry: That is the same email that I have seen, and the whole point about it is the “coulds” and the “maybes”. Why did they not draft the contract? They had more than two weeks to do so, so why was it never done? If there was any chance of a contract being put in place, the process of deciding terms and conditions would have begun, but it never did. Why? Because the reality is that the companies knew that they could not afford to pay the prices to get the coal and to keep the colliery open.

Let us dig further into that email and make it clear that the offers involved a significantly lower price than those in the previous contracts that were being replaced. The level of interest was deemed insufficient by the directors, and that is the point. The right hon. Gentleman seeks to have a debate with me, and of course he is entitled so to do, but he should be having that debate with the directors. They were in possession of this information, and they were in contact with this particular company. They are the people who should have been getting the contract, but they did not do so. That is because they knew that they could not achieve what they wanted.

Edward Miliband: The contracts were not put in place because the Minister was saying, “Not a penny more.” That is the whole point. It was a chicken-and-egg situation. An offer was made by the company concerned but it required the Minister to agree to further aid. My contention is that that would have been economically rational.

Anna Soubry: If the right hon. Gentleman is right, why did the board of directors never say that to me? They certainly did not say it. They knew that if there was any chance of a contract, they would have pursued it. They did not do so. Why did the right hon. Gentleman not have this debate with the directors? Why did he not say to them, “Come on, guys, you’ve got an offer here. Get it written down in black and white. Get the contract signed.” That never happened because the board of directors had taken the honourable and the right decision. I am sure they took that decision with bucket-loads of regret, but the mine cannot continue because it is no longer financially viable, notwithstanding the fact that up to £20 million of taxpayers’ money will undoubtedly help to ease it, as it has done in the past. That money has been spent far more quickly than was ever anticipated. It was due to last all the way through to next August, but unfortunately, at this rate, there could be only a few weeks left, if that. And of course that includes the £4.5 million to ensure that the mine is put good.

I reiterate that Hatfield has been unable to secure contracts to sell sufficient volumes of coal at the price necessary to support its closure plan. That is why the directors decided that it was not economically viable to continue mining. It is not a question of the Government putting in additional short-term funding. We have reiterated our continued commitment to make up to £20 million available—that was originally announced in May—to assist the company in achieving a managed closure. The reality is that there is a lack of economically viable contracts to sell the coal that is mined. I am running out of time, but I promise to answer in writing all the other questions that the right hon. Gentleman has rightly raised about the carbon price floor and other matters. He also asked about carbon capture and storage, which I will try to deal with in a moment.

I noticed on yesterday’s news that the first step had been taken towards opening a £1.7 billion potash mine in North Yorkshire, with the local authority giving its approval for the mine. That will provide 1,000 permanent jobs in the area. Those of us who have lived in or represented a coalmining area will know that there is a history of coalminers travelling to find work. I remember that one of the first National Union of Mineworkers officials I met was Jimmy Hood. He was at Ollerton at the time. He had travelled down from Scotland to work there, and many miners across the country came to Nottinghamshire or travelled to Wales to find work. I very much hope that some of the new jobs in North Yorkshire will go to the men of Hatfield.

I want to deal briefly with the question of carbon capture and storage. It has been claimed that the closure of Hatfield is short-sighted because it could have been used to supply the proposed new power station at Drax, which will be fitted with carbon capture and storage capabilities. The long-term future of coal is inextricably linked to CCS, and the Government have committed significant resources to facilitate its commercialisation, including committing £1 billion to our CCS competition, plus operational support under contracts for difference. However, on current plans, the coal-fired CCS project at Drax, one of the two CCS projects being supported through the Government’s competition, is unlikely to be generating until 2021, so that would not have been of assistance to Hatfield. I reiterate—

5.30 pm

House adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 9(7)).

Westminster Hall

Thursday 2 July 2015

[MR CHARLES WALKER *in the Chair*]

Sustainable Development Goals (Education)

1.30 pm

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered education and the sustainable development goals.

It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Mr Walker. I am glad to have the opportunity to talk about education and the sustainable development goals and financing global education, hot on the heels of the recent debate initiated by the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), who I am glad to see here in the Chamber. I am glad to see the Minister, too. I speak today as co-chair of the all-party group on global education for all. I believe that we cannot raise these matters too often, not least because the sustainable development goals will be finalised at the United Nations meeting in September.

I praise the great Send My Friend to School campaign, which many hon. Members will be aware of in their constituencies. Last week, I was delighted to welcome to the Jubilee Room representatives from schools across the country, including schools in the constituency of the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), who with impeccable timing has just arrived in the Chamber, along with young ambassadors who represented the UK in Ghana. I have visited schools in my constituency, as many hon. Members do, most recently—last Friday—St Padarn's school in Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, where I met children from years 2, 3, and 4 who have been engaged in the cause of getting the 58 million children across the world who are out of school into education.

The World Vision group has declared that the success of the post-2015 framework that replaces the millennium development goals must be measured by its ability to reach the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children in the hardest places to live. Trips I have undertaken with the all-party group to Nigeria and Tanzania in the past two and a half years have convinced me that any new goals on promoting global education will not be delivered by simply doing more of what we are already doing.

Significant progress has been made in recent years in improving the state of the world's education systems, with the number of children out of school dropping by 48 million since the MDGs were agreed in 2000. However, 58 million children of primary school age still remain out of school; 59 million adolescents are out of secondary school; and, critically, 250 million children—I say this as a former primary school teacher—are in school but failing to learn the most basic of basics. UNESCO has described this as a “global learning crisis”. Adult literacy levels globally have barely improved: between 2000 and 2011 there was a decline of just 1% in the number of illiterate adults. I cite those figures because the majority of the world's out-of-school children are in sub-Saharan

Africa, where many of the Department for International Development's target programmes—commendable projects—are located.

Education remains the key to successful development, and in that context this year is critical. Last year, the UN's open working group on sustainable development set 17 goals and a total of 169 targets, to be identified and prioritised in September, which will carry on the work of the MDGs. Education rightly has its own stand-alone goal—goal 4—to

“Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

The long list of targets covers universal primary and secondary education; pre-primary, technical, vocational and tertiary education; skills for employment; universal literacy and numeracy; and enabling targets on school infrastructure and supply of qualified teachers. In short, goal 4 of the proposed SDGs is about ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education.

Underpinning the new goals and targets, the current Government and the previous one have led calls for a framework that leaves no one behind, ensuring that

“no target is considered met, unless met for all social groups—with progress on targets disaggregated by wealth, disability and gender.”

In May, the declaration made at the World Education Forum in Korea reaffirmed education as a human right, a public good, and main driver of development in achieving the other proposed SDGs. It set financial targets of 4% to 6% of GDP and contained positive language on access, equity and marginalised groups. There is a strong commitment to teachers who are

“empowered, adequately recruited, well-trained, professionally qualified, motivated and supported”.

The Global Partnership for Education was specifically acknowledged and recognised in the document, with a recommendation that it be part of the future 2030 education agenda.

This is all very positive, but there is concern that with so many goals and targets, laudable though each and every one is, Governments will in a position to pick and choose the ones they work on, and people will be left behind. Will the Minister update us on the outcomes of the separate negotiations on education for all that took place in Korea, and the broader SDG framework? Do the Government regard the two frameworks—the SDGs and education for all—as consistent, or is there risk of mismatch and duplication? We need to clarify that we are moving beyond MDG 2—getting more children into primary school—and doing so in an achievable manner that provides a good-quality education. How is DFID ensuring that the “no target is met unless met for all” principle is underpinning all discussions about the SDGs?

Turning to funding, DFID has a good record of supporting 10 million children in primary and lower secondary education, and particularly in prioritising the most marginalised children in hard-to-reach places, such as children with disabilities and those in conflict areas. I commend in particular the work it has undertaken on the girls' education challenge, a programme that aims to support an additional 1 million of the world's poorest girls into school and learning. I have seen at first hand in Nigeria how that works and how it draws young girls into schools, despite the many pressures on them to do otherwise.

[Mr Mark Williams]

I reiterate plaudits for the UK's pledge of up to £300 million over four years for the Global Partnership for Education. I am sorry to have missed the Welsh-born chair of GPE, Julia Gillard, who was in my constituency on Tuesday getting an honorary degree from Aberystwyth University—a well deserved reward.

On a visit to Tanzania with the all-party group, I saw GPE's work at first hand. Its ethos—being a partnership of Governments, civil society, international organisations, students, teachers, foundations and the private sector, all working together—is the correct one: it is genuinely about partnership. However, despite the UK making the largest pledge by a donor, GPE fell well short of its funding target, with \$2.1 billion pledged of a target of \$3.5 billion. The UK's pledge is contingent on the UK making up no more than 15% of total donor contributions, and there is concern—perhaps the Minister can reassure me—that the UK is placing more conditionality on the pledge, potentially reducing further the amount of money to be delivered to GPE.

I am told that the £300 million target, which is conditional on other countries' pledges, amounts in reality to £210 million—not an insignificant sum, but some way short of £300 million, and it is, of course, consequential on the Government's getting other countries on board. What success has the Minister and his Department had in getting other countries on board and making pledges and increasing them? In that spirit, I encourage the Government to use their strong position at the third international conference on financing for development in Ethiopia—the hon. Member for Glasgow North mentioned this during business questions in the House today—to ensure that more finances are available to make the SDGs work.

Last December, my noble Friend Lady Northover, then a Minister in the Department, launched the disability framework, which I welcome. I know that work is ongoing, but the framework is an important pledge that the UK will prioritise disability more systematically in overseas aid. The need is clear. There are 93 million disabled children globally, and in most countries they are more likely than any other group to be out of school. In some countries, being disabled more than doubles the chance of a child never going to school, and disabled children are less likely to remain in school.

For far too long, this has been a niche area of development policy. With 80% of disabled people living in developing countries, it is staggering to think that disability was not even mentioned in the millennium development goals of 2000. Disability is a cause and a consequence of poverty. The UN has called the disabled the world's largest minority, yet in the schools I have visited overseas, there is little evidence of provision for the disabled or any differentiation in treatment or special provision in any guise. The issue needs to be addressed.

Critically, DFID has said that it will work with the GPE, UNICEF and UNESCO and others to improve data on disabled children, and will also share learning and good practice on inclusivity from its programmes in Pakistan, Tanzania, and Rwanda and the girls' education challenge. What progress has been made in the six months since the launch of the disability framework? If the framework is to be updated and republished annually—an important principle—will the Department

consider further commitments on education, such as, for example, ensuring that UK-funded teacher training programmes include inclusive education, if they are not already doing so?

Early childhood development was the subject of a visit to Tanzania by the all-party group and Results UK, the charity that supports the group, at the end of 2013. We produced a report, “You can't study if you're hungry”, with which the Department may be familiar. Its central message was that nutrition and early years learning are intrinsically linked. The World Bank has estimated that 200 million children in developing countries under the age of five will not reach their potential. Research and practice are increasingly highlighting the importance of better integration across development policy areas from health and nutrition, education and social protection to water, sanitation and hygiene. The concept of early childhood development and that holistic approach should therefore be a central component of the new SDGs. We were mindful of that in our visits to Tanzania and Zanzibar. Is the early childhood development approach being reflected in DFID's programmes? How does that work at country level?

Of the 58 million children of primary school age who are out of school, about half—28.5 million—live in conflict areas. A new generation of children hit by emergencies and protracted crises are being deprived of education. As we speak, that is affecting 65 million children in 35 countries, yet last year only 1% of the overall humanitarian aid and 2% of the money from humanitarian appeals went to supporting education in those settings.

Education does not just equip children for the future; it protects them in the present. Children in school are less likely to be trafficked, forced into early marriage or exploited as child soldiers, and they stand a better chance of escaping poverty. More than 30 countries around the world have been affected by widespread attacks on schools. Last year, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack published new international guidelines to reduce the military use of schools and universities during armed conflict and to minimise the negative impact that armed conflict has on student safety and education. What consideration has the Minister's Department given to signing up to the guidelines to prevent schools from attack and military use?

This is a vast subject, and I am grateful for the House's indulgence on a hot Thursday afternoon in allowing me a full 15 minutes or thereabouts to make my case. The size of the subject presents DFID and the international community with huge challenges. The case for education is unquestionable, but it is important that the new goals and the plethora of work towards them are achievable. It is important that the SDGs on education clearly address the case for inclusivity in relation to gender and disability and the issue of conflict areas. Sheer numbers are crucial, and I do not in any way minimise the achievements over the past 15 years, but so too is the standard of education being delivered. We need to measure success and improvement.

One particular group concerns me—the unseen, uncounted and invisible children. That point was brought home to me graphically at the end of 2013, when I visited a street project in Dar es Salaam with the former Labour MP Cathy Jamieson. She did excellent work on this issue when she was in the House. The project was

for teenage boys who had a talent for dance. It was located in a deprived district of Dar es Salaam, and the boys performed for us, showing their breakdancing skills. Mercifully, neither Cathy nor I were asked to participate. In that naïve politician's way, I said to one of the boys, who was probably 15 or 16, "If you are ever in London, come look me up. Come to the Houses of Parliament." He was intelligent, inspirational and had a dynamic personality, and he responded—not in a hostile way—by saying, "How can I, sir? I have no identity, no birth certificate and no passport. I don't exist." That graphically brought home to me the challenge of invisibility and the scale of the problem, but it also brought home to me the potential.

1.47 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your excellent chairmanship, Mr Walker.

Send My Friend to School was brought to my attention by two very articulate youngsters—Lauren and Aiden, from Bishop Vaughan school in my constituency. So involved were they with that wonderful project that they came to Westminster last week to a reception hosted by the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams), whom I congratulate on securing this important debate.

I will re-read the list of statistics that the hon. Gentleman has already shared with us, because they are important. In 2012, 58 million children of primary school age were out of school, half of them in conflict-affected countries; the number had decreased from 100 million in 2000. Some 63 million young adolescents around the world are not enrolled in primary or secondary school. More than four out of 10 out-of-school children will never enter a classroom. Some 250 million children are not learning basic skills, even though half of them have spent at least four years in school. An additional 1.6 million new teachers need to be recruited to achieve universal primary education by 2015. In a third of countries, fewer than 75% of primary school teachers are adequately trained.

Those figures caught the imagination of the young people in my constituency. They get up every morning to go to school. They understand the benefits of education, and even when issues hinder them from attending school, such as illness or caring responsibilities, there are mechanisms to help them to receive an education. For the pupils of Bishop Vaughan, the statistics I just read were a shocking reflection of the fact that life in other parts of the world is very different from theirs. That stark reality check led to their involvement with the Send My Friend to School campaign, which works tirelessly to do just that—send young people across the globe to school. We talk about helping and supporting countries with fewer resources and less wealth than ours, but the basis of that support should be about doing all we can to help young people have an education. There is yet another statistic about lack of education: 774 million illiterate adults—a decline of just 1% since 2000. Almost two thirds of those people are women.

The UK is one of the largest bilateral donors for basic education, and the largest contributor to the Global Partnership for Education. In June 2014, developing country partner Governments pledged a \$26 billion increase in domestic financing for education. Donor countries pledged \$2.1 billion of support for the GPE, but we still need to do more.

Last Friday, I visited Bishop Vaughan school and was welcomed by a class of year 7 students who, although not yet old enough to start their GCSE courses, are already acutely aware that the lack of global education is causing great disadvantages. They had each made a cardboard figure that represented a world leader, and each spoke as if they were world leaders. The speech from each leader had different words but the same message: let us get all kids into education.

I promised the class two things. First, I would deliver their message today and ask their question: when will world leaders be able to ensure that every child has access to and the opportunity for an education? Secondly, I promised that I would ask the Minister whether he would meet them to receive their cardboard world leaders—at a convenient time, of course.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way in the middle of a very good speech, and I also thank the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams) for introducing the debate. Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a great deal of hope in these parents, governors, school teachers and children—such as the year 6 pupils at Garth primary school who have sent me their information—because, on a deep, human, personal level, they understand the importance of reaching out? If we could convey that message to many of our constituents on their doorsteps, that would be a great cause for optimism.

Carolyn Harris: I entirely agree. We could indeed learn great lessons from the children of our country.

Members present know that reality and principle can be very different. On principle, we would all wish for children globally to be educated. The young people at Bishop Vaughan, as well as at the other schools involved in the project, have a valid point. As politicians, it is our duty to ensure that we provide them with an answer that shows that we share their maturity in acknowledging and understanding the issues. We must do more—everything that we can—to ensure that their principle is a global reality.

1.52 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I declare an interest, as I did at the start of my debate on the sustainable development goals a couple of weeks ago: until the election I was employed by the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, and I was a member of the Scottish working group on the sustainable development goals, so I have a considerable personal and professional interest in this subject area.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams) on bringing this issue back to the House so soon and for giving us the chance to explore in more detail the education aspect of the sustainable development goals. He made a very thoughtful contribution, and I agreed with a lot of what he said, especially on financing, to which I will return; on the importance of data disaggregation for monitoring the goals' impact, particularly disaggregation by age for education; and on the importance of nutrition in schools to enable children to learn effectively.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on highlighting the fantastic Send My Friend to School initiative. One of the first

[Patrick Grady]

pieces of mail I received as an MP was from St Charles primary school in Kelvinside in my constituency; it included pictures of the world leaders who young people throughout the country—indeed, around the world—want to see act on their behalf to make progress on global education. The point made by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) about solidarity among young people is a lesson for us all.

As I said, I have some personal interest in and experience of this matter. Between 2004 and 2005, I had the great privilege of living in Malawi, where I worked as a teacher in St Peter's secondary school in the capital of Malawi's northern region, Mzuzu. The school was founded by Father Nazarius Mgunge, who has become a very good friend of mine, and it has gone from strength to strength over the 10-plus years during which I have been connected to it. The school has sister schools in Scotland—perhaps later I will say a little more about the connections between school communities and how they affect the education of children both overseas and at home. I probably learned more from the pupils and my colleagues in the school than any of them did from me, but if anything my experience brought home the absolute value and importance of education in tackling global poverty.

Education is fundamental to development and ending poverty, as we can see from our own histories. In Scotland, we are very proud of the historic enlightenment that our country went through and the establishment of free education, as a matter of principle, from parish schools through to university level. That has led to some of the inventions and contributions of which we in Scotland are rightly proud. Ahead of the debate, I saw some analysis that described the educational systems in many developing countries as being at least 100 years behind ours. In some ways, we can see that that is the case, but we must not wait 100 years for international developing education systems to be brought up to the level that we expect and appreciate in this country.

It is worth touching on the importance of education for girls. There is no silver bullet when it comes to eradicating world poverty, but if there is something close it is investing in education for girls. As more young women receive a formal education, that has knock-on effects across the whole spectrum of development indicators. It leads to healthier, longer, more productive and more fruitful lives—not only for the individual concerned, but for their families and whole communities. Educating girls must be a key priority in the sustainable development goals for education. I should say that I know some very valuable projects in Malawi with just that focus—one is run by my very good friend Janet Chesney, who runs a school in the north of the country. It would be remiss of me if she found out that I was speaking on education and did not mention that.

The fact that there has been progress in education—80 million more children are in education than before the millennium development goals were established—is testament to the success and importance of the MDG framework. Nevertheless, as we have heard from the statistics and as the Global Partnership for Education said, there is “no chance whatsoever” of meeting the goal of achieving universal primary education in time for the MDG deadline. That is why it is so vital that that

goal is not only retained but enhanced in the successor framework. In the sustainable development goals we have the opportunity to get it right and to go further by extending the right to education to include secondary school education and by focusing on quality.

In his opening speech, the hon. Member for Ceredigion was absolutely right that funding for education is going to be crucial, so I will repeat to the Minister the question I asked the Leader of the House this morning: when can we expect to hear from the Government who will represent the United Kingdom at the Financing For Development summit starting on 13 July? I appreciate that we are very close to the Budget statement and there is a lot of pressure on the Chancellor's time, but the UK's global leadership, of which the Government are proud, will be enhanced if a senior figure from the Treasury team can join international development colleagues at the summit and show the global leadership that is needed.

Finance is going to be vital. One example from my experience in Malawi is that when the country became a multi-party democracy in 1994, one of the first things it did was to introduce free primary education for all. That was a hugely significant and important move, and it has made a big difference. However, the school system really struggled, and continues to struggle, to cope with the number of pupils. The secondary education system is still fee-based, which limits access, even for talented pupils.

I mentioned the Scottish Government's work on the sustainable development goals. A very positive working group of the Scottish Government, DFID officials, NGOs and academics is looking at the negotiation and implementation process of the sustainable development goals—including how to fund appropriate programmes, perhaps including education. The group is also considering the domestic aspect of the sustainable development goals and a universal framework. There is a responsibility for us at home to consider how we make progress on these issues. One of the important ways of doing that in education lies in the roll-out and improvement of global citizenship education in our schools, whether they are under a devolved Administration or not, as was discussed in the main Chamber earlier.

The Send My Friend to School campaign that we discussed earlier is a good example of development education in action. In Scotland, there is a fantastic network of development education centres. I do not know whether there is a similar network south of the border, but this one gives schools and pupils the tools and opportunity to access resources. Pupils learn about the experiences of international development, which helps to bring issues alive and promotes understanding.

I spoke briefly about the community links that exist in Scotland between many different communities—schools, parishes and community groups—and our counterparts in Malawi. Again, that builds a sense of solidarity and helps to promote education.

When I was involved in student politics, we used to chant that education was a right, not a privilege. That is as true for a young girl in a developing country as it is for a teenager looking at university courses or a wannabe student politician with their placard. Education is a right and if we can get it right, we will be well on the way to achieving sustainable development goals and building the fairer and more just world that so many of us want to see.

2.1 pm

Heidi Alexander (Lewisham East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate with you in the Chair, Mr Walker. I congratulate the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams) on securing today's debate. I think he said he was co-chair of the all-party group on global education, and it is clear that he has great expertise in this area, so I am pleased that he led the debate today. It was also a pleasure to hear such excellent contributions from my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) and the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady).

Access to education is a fundamental human right. Although in countries such as the UK we may take our education systems for granted, the same is not true the world over. We may understand the potential of education to drive prosperity, create tolerant and inclusive societies and tackle inequality, but the sad truth is that a decent education is still not available for far too many people in far too many countries across the world. I want to talk today about the huge potential that education offers, the progress that has been made to date and the challenges that still exist. I want to suggest to the Minister that the actions of our Government and the international community must be focused on ensuring that the poorest and most marginalised see significant gains in their access to decent education over the next 15 years and that we use the sustainable development goals to make the world a more equal place, reducing the gap between the richest and poorest.

Some people may think that this debate interests only experts in international development and education policy makers, or those who work for international aid charities. My experience tells me something very different. Strange as it may seem, I recall conversations on the doorstep at the election in my constituency of Lewisham East where I ended up talking about the need to improve education in the developing world. I will take a couple of minutes to explain how that came about.

When asked about our spending on foreign aid, I would say that it was surely right to help children in developing countries to go to school. When asked about immigration, I would say that while our world remains so unequal, people will always aspire to move from one country to another to improve their lot in life. I would do it, the Minister would do it, and unless education can drive economic development and prosperity in the developing world, this will remain the case. Unless education can give women information about their own bodies and reproductive rights, we will continue to see enormous population growth in parts of the world that will struggle to deal with it. Unless future generations are educated about the peace and tolerance that lie at the true heart of our big global religions, extremism and radicalisation will be allowed to flourish. It has been said before, but it is worth saying again: education is the most effective vaccine against extremism.

It may sound sensationalist, but education really can be a matter of life and death. Educated societies are less likely to see violence and conflict as the way to resolve problems and differences. On a fundamental indicator such as child mortality, education has a dramatic effect. A recent *Lancet* study, for example, found that around half the reduction witnessed in under-five mortality every year—4.2 million deaths in total—can be attributed

to improved levels of education. It is clear that the advantages of a decent education are vast and unequivocal.

However, the potential of education to deliver change is determined by two key factors. The first is the extent to which education can be accessed by the poorest and most marginalised. If gender, caste, race, disability, religion or sexuality—all characteristics determined at birth—are the same attributes that determine access to education, schooling becomes a further driver in a vicious cycle of prejudice and inequality. The second factor is the quality of education received. Again, if learning outcomes are determined by the wealth of a person's parents or the community in which they live, education will perpetuate and reinforce pre-existing inequalities.

Although great gains were undoubtedly achieved with the millennium development goals, we can see that we have fallen far short. Although the number of children out of primary education has almost halved in a generation, 58 million children across the world remain outside of any schooling system. Of these, nearly half have never once seen the inside of a classroom. We will clearly miss the second millennium development goal's target of achieving universal primary education by 2015. Perhaps more worrying is that any signs of progress have seemingly stalled: the number of children not in school has remained constant for more than five years. As the hon. Member for Ceredigion has already said, experts are also warning of a learning crisis in the quality of education: children who do attend school are being let down by the standard of learning that they are exposed to.

An estimated 250 million children worldwide are not able to read, write or perform basic arithmetic. That is four in every 10 children of primary school age whose future is frustrated from the very start, and it is the most marginalised children who continue to miss out. Children from poorer families remain five times more likely to be out of school than children from more wealthy families. In west and central Africa, the gap is even wider. In Guinea, two thirds of children from the poorest households will never enter school, and alarming gaps persist in learning outcomes between children from richer and poorer households.

Although overall levels of girls' education have improved, in many countries the gender gap remains large. In some places—eastern and southern Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean—these gaps have not only endured, but widened. Significant gender disparities also persist in children's learning performance. As has already been said, children with disabilities are not only less likely to be in school, but are more likely to drop out, as their needs fail to be catered for.

Finally, the percentage of children outside the schooling system in conflict-affected states has increased. The image of Syrian children in refugee camps should haunt us all on a daily basis. The legacy of failure will affect future generations. The global education agenda has been the subject of many ambitious summits and global accords—not only the millennium development goals, but the Dakar Framework for Action and now the SDGs, which is the subject of today's debate. The Government's action on that agenda must be welcomed.

Having said that, I am aware of continued issues with the Department for International Development's delivery of educational programmes in Nigeria. The most recent

[Heidi Alexander]

annual review, for the third phase of the girls' education project, which has £103 million to support more than 1 million girls to complete basic education, notes fundamental uncertainty about the ability of the in-country partner to deliver that crucial project. That is a full two years after deep and pervasive concerns were revealed in a review by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact. Furthermore, I also share ICAI's concern that DFID's withdrawal from India could be happening too fast. In a country where more than 1 million children remain out of school, is it right that all funding should come to an end by March of next year and that all technical advice should be withdrawn only a few months later? I will welcome the Minister's thoughts on those two specific issues.

Despite that, it must be recognised that the Department for International Development has consistently increased the level of funding that it invests in education. The continued focus on the importance of girls' learning must also be welcomed, but now is not the time for complacency. The scale of the challenge we face is only projected to grow. In sub-Saharan Africa, already the region with the largest number of children not in schooling, UNICEF estimates that 444 million children will be in need of basic education by 2030, which is nearly three times the number enrolled in schools today. If we are to achieve the transformative change that we all want to see, we must understand the scale and the nature of the challenge we face, learn from past mistakes and ensure concerted global action to deliver decent education for all.

To that end, what steps is the Minister taking to ensure that tackling inequality is embedded in his Department's work in this crucial area? What will he be doing to ensure that children in the most marginalised communities are targeted first, under the sustainable development goals agenda, and that those children and their families are given the necessary support not only to enter school, but to excel in it? Increased funding alone will not achieve that. Instead, smarter and more targeted resources, coupled with disaggregated data to measure outcomes, will be needed to ensure that the SDGs achieve their full potential and that no child is left behind. What will the Government be doing to ensure that that happens and how will we galvanise the global action that such a crucial issue deserves?

I mentioned earlier that this debate will be of interest not only to policy makers and students of international development, but to people up and down the country. The Send My Friend to School campaign has already achieved a couple of mentions in the debate, but I want to inform Members about my visit to Rathfern primary school last week. When I turned up in the playground, a long line of pupils queued up, each to give me a paper puppet they had made, setting out what they would do if they were a world leader. I have brought a puppet for the Minister—I noticed earlier that it is a female world leader, which was not intentional, but I am quite pleased that is the case. I have plenty more in my office, if the Minister wants to pop by later and collect them.

In the assembly afterwards, I was asked by a 10-year-old child why the UK spends more money on our Army—tanks and guns—than we do on helping children in poorer countries to go to school. Explaining that to a 10-year-old

is probably an experience that all Members of the House should go through. The pupils in my constituency instinctively knew that education for everyone is the right thing to do. I look forward to the day when those pupils are our world leaders and when all children, irrespective of their country of birth, the colour of their skin, their gender or the wealth of the parents, receive the sort of education that we in the UK would want for our own.

2.14 pm

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr Desmond Swayne): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander). I thank the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams) for calling this timely debate. We are well served in this Parliament by such an active all-party group, and I look forward to working with it to advance the agenda at such an important time. I will say a little more about that shortly.

Every Member who has spoken has mentioned the fantastic Send My Friend to School initiative. I recall that when I was the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, at this time of year I was continually ferrying those cardboard cut-outs to No. 10 Downing Street, and I was always impressed not only by the amount of physical work that had gone into them, but by the effort pupils had made to understand the problem and to advocate a solution. As the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) said, that is a guarantee of enthusiasm for our future.

I receive a great deal of correspondence from my constituents complaining about the level of international development aid and how much we are spending, so it is excellent that children in our schools are alive to the very reasons why we need such spending. I look forward to the time when they have more influence on their parents in getting that message across, and as they grow up and change the attitude of society generally. I have said in several forums that one of my ambitions for this Parliament is that, by the end of it, instead of being curmudgeonly about the amount that we spend on international development aid, my constituents will be proud of what we are doing and achieving.

I said that the debate was timely. I acknowledge entirely the concern of the hon. Member for Ceredigion that we have 16 goals and 169 targets. Where does sustainable development goal 4 and the seven targets that underpin it fit into that? I acknowledge the problem. Our ambition was for a smaller number of goals and of targets. The United Kingdom Government, with all their sophistication, measure our economic and social progress across about 60 targets, so I wonder how a Minister in Burkina Faso will be held to account on performance against 169 targets.

Our ambition was for something smaller, and we were prepared to expend a considerable amount of political and diplomatic capital on reopening the question and driving the numbers down to something more manageable. Frankly, our allies did not have the will to come with us, perhaps for understandable reasons. There was a genuine feeling that we had got a good set of goals and we were pleased with them, and any attempt to reopen the question and to narrow the numbers down, perhaps by combining some items—a

whole process of reopening negotiations—might lead to a loss of some of the gains made. So we are where we are.

The important debate on much of what the hon. Gentleman discussed begins now. There is a continuing conversation to be had with him and the all-party group about how we should proceed. I extend to him an invitation to meet and continue the discussion with my fellow Minister of State at the Department for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps), who will be dealing with the matter. What underpins the targets are the indicators—the indicators that will be measured to see whether the targets have been achieved—and that discussion will get under way more substantially and be agreed in March next year, so this is a good time for the all-party group and for the Government to consider what the indicators should be and what we believe needs to be counted.

The hon. Member for Lewisham East is right to draw attention to the huge question about the statistics and how we are to disaggregate them in order to be able to measure the very things that we need to measure. For example, we need to know how many disabled children there are and the nature of their disabilities. We have to be able to disaggregate and break down all the statistics to measure properly. We are ahead of the game—indeed, the British Government have been driving the agenda forward—but we all know the political reality: if we cannot count it, it will not count. It is vital that we get the metrics right in order to hold Governments to account for whether they have met the targets.

We have seen what was millennium development goal 1 morph into sustainable development goal 4. The hon. Member for Ceredigion was quite right to express a measure of disappointment about our achievements in relation to the original aim of getting all children into primary education by this year. That will not be achieved. We can say that 90% of children have at least got some sort of education, and he was right to draw attention to the fact that whereas there were 100 million children out of school, that figure is now 58 million—notwithstanding an increase in population, which could mean that the measure is better than it would appear on the surface—but the hon. Gentleman was right indeed to draw attention to the fact that, under those headline figures, there are some real worries, particularly with regard to sub-Saharan Africa and girls' education. On the latter, if we take the headline figure for those at school, the balance is about 50-50, but there are places where the education of girls is greatly lacking. That has to be dealt with. The hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) is absolutely right that if we are looking for an investment to reduce poverty, the best thing to do to have the greatest impact is secure education for girls.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion was right to suggest that we focused too much on enrolment rather than on the quality of education. As the hon. Member for Lewisham East pointed out, it is all very well to have 250 million children in school for four years, but if they come out unable to read, write or count, the whole enterprise will have been a waste of time. It is a question not just of access but of outcomes. It is worth repeating the sustainable development goal:

“Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

I point out to the hon. Gentleman that half of the expenditure on our relevant multilateral programmes is on teacher training. Concentrating on quality is key. I know one of his particular concerns is the need to get away from chalk and talk and to have much more engaging education for children. I entirely support that agenda.

Mr Mark Williams: The Minister is right—that is a great interest of mine. Is he satisfied that DFID-promoted teacher training programmes are moving away from chalk and talk and more into diagnostic methods of teaching? That is particularly important for inclusivity with regard to disability. When one travels to schools—something he has done far more than I—one can see the great omission in that respect.

Mr Swayne: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman's analysis. Those are the key issues. I share his concerns about the way we teach. I was a teacher myself once; I used a great deal of chalk and talk, and I regret it.

On disability, we have imposed a framework on our Department, after a great deal of thought and a huge amount of consultation, especially with disability groups and their advocates, on the grounds that there should be no decision made about them without them. An enormous effort went into the framework, and it is a living document, to be continually updated and reviewed and republished annually. We have doubled the number of staff working on disability and appointed a champion to take forward the agenda, which will inform absolutely every project that we undertake. Every DFID project must now consider disability on the principle of “nobody left behind”. The hon. Gentleman asked whether our teacher training work takes disability into account. Clearly, the answer ought to be yes, absolutely, because that requirement is now a condition on which the whole Department has to operate.

We are stepping up to the plate. We are spending about £800 million a year on our education effort—a figure that has risen since last year by £180 million. Generally speaking, ICAI's follow-up report gave us pretty good marks for how we are dealing with education. Our target is that by the end of this year we will have trained 190,000 teachers and educated 11 million children through primary and early secondary school, and I am confident we will meet that target. The manifesto commitment of the new Government is to do that for another 11 million children by 2020.

The principle on which DFID works in delivering our education effort is to combine learning with equity. By learning, we mean that all boys and girls are to gain a foundation in skills to further their education and employment and realise their potential. That means a quality education that delivers what it is supposed to. As I say, that is done on the basis of equity. The hon. Members for Ceredigion, for Glasgow North and for Lewisham East all rightly drew attention to that agenda. It is the key principle.

On disability, the principle of “nobody left behind” must underpin the delivery of our efforts. It is how we will measure whether the goal and the targets have been achieved, and we are making enormous strides on that agenda. For example, any school we fund has to be accessible by disabled people. However, we do not want

[Mr Swayne]

simply to make things accessible—it is no good children getting into a school if they are not actually learning anything when they are in there. Disabled children must have the same access to education, which is why we have invested heavily in specific projects dealing with the needs of disabled people—for example, providing Braille resources for 10,000 blind children in Ethiopia and for the Ghana Blind Union. We must be much more alive to this issue in the design of our future projects if we are to meet the targets.

The hon. Members for Glasgow North and for Lewisham East both talked about children in conflict areas, Syria in particular. We have put enormous effort into ensuring not just that no child is left behind but that there should be no lost generation. We have invested a huge amount of resource into ensuring that in both Jordan and Lebanon refugee children can be enrolled, through having two shifts, one in the morning and one in the afternoon; there are also enrolment targets.

We are also funding the education Ministries. A new funding model is required for these emergencies. It is no good stumping up money and saying, “Here’s our commitment of £50 million” or £100 million, or whatever it is. Ministers who are delivering education in Lebanon and Jordan need to be assured that the finance will be there next year and the year after if they are to have plans. Therefore, part of our effort has been driving forward the agenda of delivering education over the longer term. That will be part of our agenda in Oslo and Addis: to make sure that finance is available not just as a one-off donation, but on the basis of a commitment on which Governments and Ministers can plan to provide for the educational needs as required.

As for the systems that underpin the principles of learning and equity, I have drawn attention to the fact that we need to address a whole series of statistics and metrics—things that we need to be able to measure—in order to ensure that data are used properly to deliver the outcome that we require.

The new SDG is a considerable expansion beyond the primary objective of the MDG. That raises all sorts of questions about finance, and the hon. Member for Ceredigion was right to consider whether we can provide the finance to deliver the goal. I think that we have to take a step back and consider policy and what we can do to address the needs of lifelong learning in a way that goes well beyond the emphasis on primary education. We are already active in that area. We have been supplying early years education for 150,000 children in Burma, and through the organisation BRAC in Bangladesh we have supplied 2.7 million children with pre-primary education, but we also have to address the needs of tertiary education. We are certainly active in technical and vocational education, but we need to consider particularly the concerns of further education beyond that. Most of our fellow donors deal with that through scholarships, but there is a weakness with scholarships in that all the expenditure is carried out in the donor country. It does not actually get out beyond that to the nations that are developing and that require it. How we deliver such things will have to be considered in more detail than perhaps it has been hitherto. There is a great policy decision to be made.

My view remains that primary education is of key importance in building foundations for development. It is one of the things that delivers huge improvements in delivery of other goals. Education is not only a goal in itself, but the door to other SDGs in terms of health outcomes and economic development. If education has not been delivered on, it will not be possible to deliver economic growth and the healthcare benefits that accrue as a consequence of having educated girls, which leads to later marriage and fewer problems with maternal health. All sort of things are transformed because of education. An additional year of education can increase a worker’s income by 10%, with all the effects that that has.

I would go further and say that the huge benefit of an educated population is that it delivers a stable, well governed country that provides for development—for the golden thread of economic development. Countries are poor because their elites choose to keep their people poor, because it suits them to do so and there is not an educated, active, civil society able to hold them to account. Education will deliver so much more than just the delivery of educational results in themselves.

2.35 pm

Mr Mark Williams: I am grateful to all the hon. Members who have taken part this afternoon. I look forward to facilitating, on behalf of the all-party group on global education for all, the opportunity to see the Minister’s colleague, the Minister of State, Department for International Development, the right hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps). Yes, education is the great key to individual prosperity and economic growth, and as people of all political persuasions have said in the Chamber this afternoon, it is the key to global and community cohesion as well.

I am genuinely grateful to hon. Members who have taken part. There has been consensus across the House that although the period from 2000 to 2015 has been one of achievement, it has been one of some disappointment as well. It is incumbent on all of us, in all parties in this House, to carry on making the case, particularly in the weeks and months ahead of the discussions in September, so that the SDGs really are meaningful. I would not want anybody to think that my concern about the multiplicity of targets and sub-targets in any way diminishes the need for them. Those targets have emerged for good reason. My intention in raising this issue is to say that if those goals, however many there are, are not achievable, we will be failing many people around the world.

Finally, the Minister alluded to community engagement. One of the great DFID projects that I visited in Lagos was a system of school-based management committees engaging not only children and their parents in education, but the whole community in the value of education. It was an admirable project, and projects such as that need to be encouraged and developed in the future.

Thank you very much, Mr Walker, and I am very grateful to everybody for participating this afternoon.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered education and the sustainable development goals.

2.37 pm

Sitting suspended.

Iranian Nuclear Programme

[SIR DAVID AMESS *in the Chair*]

3 pm

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Iranian nuclear programme.

It is a pleasure, as always, to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Amess; it is great to see you in the Chair this afternoon. I am grateful to the Chairman of Ways and Means for giving us this opportunity. I have been raising concerns about Iran's nuclear ambitions ever since I became a Member of Parliament: I have raised this issue with four Foreign Secretaries over the past 10 years. I applied for the debate in the hope of getting it this week because of the negotiations currently taking place in Vienna.

It is worth recalling how we got here and why Iran's claims that it does not want a bomb have no credibility whatever. Iran has been caught lying time and again. In 2002, Iranian opposition groups disclosed details of major secret nuclear sites that Iran had kept hidden. Those sites included a large underground uranium enrichment facility at Natanz and a heavy water production plant and reactor at Arak that could produce weapons-grade plutonium, neither of which are necessary for civilian power. In 2009, Britain, France and the US exposed another secret enrichment facility under a mountain at Fordow that is too small for civilian fuel but big enough to produce weapons-grade uranium.

The International Atomic Energy Agency issued a report in November 2011 with detailed evidence of Iran's nuclear weapons programme, which included a structured programme until 2003 and suspected activities since. In defiance of binding UN Security Council resolutions, Iran has expanded its enrichment capacity over recent years, reducing the time needed to reach one bomb's worth of enriched uranium to two to three months. Iran has repeatedly refused the IAEA access to the Parchin military base, which is suspected to have been working on nuclear triggers, and has been working to cleanse the site of all evidence. Iran already has missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads, and our Prime Minister warned in 2012 that Iran is developing intercontinental ballistic missiles.

The Iranians say that they are enriching uranium for nuclear energy, despite not having the capacity to make nuclear fuel rods and not having a nuclear power station that can use the fuel. Iran has only one nuclear power plant, which was built by the Russians, and it is contractually bound to use only Russian fuel rods in that plant. Experts have likened the situation to someone buying a gallon of petrol from a petrol station every day for 12 years despite not having a car. All those activities have been in direct breach of Iran's non-proliferation treaty commitments and numerous binding UN Security Council resolutions.

I will talk a little about the nature of the current proposed deal and the concerns that it raises. The framework announced in Lausanne in April 2015 has created much concern. Henry Kissinger and George Shultz put it well in their article for *The Wall Street Journal*:

"Nuclear talks with Iran began as an international effort, buttressed by six U.N. resolutions, to deny Iran the capability to develop a military nuclear option. They are now an essentially

bilateral negotiation over the scope of that capability... The impact of this approach will be to move from preventing proliferation to managing it."

It was welcome to hear President Obama say earlier this week that he will

"walk away...if it's a bad deal".

At times we have heard from the US that the only alternative to the deal would be war. The impression has therefore been given that the US is more concerned than the Iranians about the consequences of not reaching a deal. Yet it is surely the case in any negotiation that, unless we are willing to walk away and unless we have an alternative to an agreement, we are negotiating from a point of weakness, which will be exploited by the other side. Even at this late stage, and given what the P5+1 has already conceded, we need to get a deal on the best terms possible to meet our basic concerns. That means not accepting a deal at any price.

The red lines tweeted by Supreme Leader Khamenei last week are clearly not consistent with an acceptable deal for the UK and our P5+1 partners. What is our plan B if the Iranians do not budge from those red lines? Will our Government press our P5+1 partners to keep negotiating for an acceptable deal? Will the UK consider calling for a further extension of the current joint plan of action to allow more time, if needed? Meanwhile, this week the Iranian President threatened that, if there is no deal, Iran

"will go back to the old path, stronger than what they can imagine."

Will the Minister confirm that we will not be moved by such threats? If Iran does not agree to our minimum terms, walks out on the talks and carries out its threat to resume its stockpiling of enriched uranium and centrifuges, will there be a robust and effective response to dissuade it from that path?

I will now turn to the details of the deal under discussion. I am waiting to see exactly what emerges from Vienna. If an agreement is reached, we already know from the framework that it will allow Iran to become a nuclear-threshold state. The framework says that Iran will scale back its enrichment capabilities for 10 to 15 years, but most of the restrictions on the enrichment and stockpiling of uranium will then expire. President Obama has said that the

"fear would be that in Year 13, 14, 15, they have advanced centrifuges that enrich uranium fairly rapidly, and at that point, the breakout times would have shrunk almost down to zero."

As the framework will ultimately allow Iran to be within touching distance of nuclear weapons, and as Iran cannot be trusted, there are two critical concerns. The first is about knowing exactly what is going on inside Iran's nuclear programme, and I have some specific questions about that.

First, is it a condition of the deal, and of the lifting of sanctions, that Iran answers all the IAEA's questions about its suspected nuclear weapons research? Will the Minister confirm that, as his colleague the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), told the House last month, it is essential that the IAEA

"is able to verify all of Iran's nuclear-related commitments, including through access to relevant locations"?

[*Ian Austin*]

How will the Government ensure that the IAEA can conduct intrusive and robust short-notice inspections of any site, including military locations, when Khamenei declared just a few days ago, while negotiations were taking place in Vienna, that such inspections will be limited? On research and development, will he confirm that the development of advanced centrifuges will be strictly limited to prevent the rapid technical upgrade and expansion of enrichment after the initial 10 years? Can he confirm that the remaining enriched uranium in Iran that is above the limits agreed in the framework will be irreversibly converted into a harmless form?

My second concern is that real and credible deterrents are needed in case Iran attempts to break out for a bomb either in the next 10 to 15 years or beyond that. Again, I have some specific questions. First, what discussions have the Government had with our American and European allies about how we would respond to Iranian violations? What planning will take place with our allies to deter Iran from making a dash to a bomb when its breakout time is, in the words of President Obama, “almost down to zero”?

How can the Government prevent Iran from acquiring the capability to produce nuclear weapons when the agreement is over? How will they ensure that the breakout time does not reduce to zero? How will the Government ensure that Iran does not continue to develop military aspects of its nuclear programme given that it has not come clean on past activities, has violated protocols signed in the past and has failed to comply with its commitments to the IAEA to answer questions posed by the nuclear watchdog?

How will the Government and our international partners deal with violations of the agreement? Does the Minister believe that a joint committee mechanism of which Iran is a member will be reliable for dealing with such violations? What mechanisms will be in place to quickly reimpose, or snap back, biting sanctions if necessary? What would be the threshold for snapping back EU sanctions? Is there a threshold, or would one follow political negotiation? Will the Government reaffirm that all options ultimately remain on the table to prevent Iran from getting nuclear weapons, should it try to do so in the future? Finally on the deal itself, every nuclear arms control agreement has included measures to control the means of delivery, so why does the current proposal lack a clause that deals with the issue?

I now want to raise some points about what will happen after the deal. We appear set to enter an agreement that, within 10 to 15 years, will allow Iran to reduce its breakout time to almost zero, according to President Obama. As the sanctions fall away, Iran will receive a huge economic and political boost, greatly empowering it in its ambitions to dominate the region. It is not surprising that that has united Israel and some Arab states in deep concern.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. Of course the question has to be seen in the American, as well as the Israeli, geopolitical context. Does he agree, however, that the supreme leader, along with President Rouhani, would be better served by looking at Iran’s history? Great leaders from Persian history, such as King Darius

and King Cyrus, supported the return of Jews from Persia to Jerusalem and helped to pay for the building of the Temple. That is real leadership, and it shows how to live in peace with Israel, rather than threaten it.

Ian Austin: I think Iran’s leaders would be better served by doing lots of things differently. I hesitate to use the words “wishful thinking”, but I am not sure how much confidence we can have that Iran’s present leadership will embark on the course of action that the hon. Gentleman has set out.

There is real concern right across the region that others—first and foremost, Saudi Arabia—will use the next 10 to 15 years to catch up with Iran’s nuclear capabilities. Former Saudi intelligence chief Turki al-Faisal said recently:

“Whatever the Iranians have, we will have, too.”

What will the UK and its allies do to reassure states in the region that they will deter Iran from breaking out to a bomb and, therefore, dissuade others from trying to match Iranian capabilities, creating a cascade of proliferation across the region?

There is also real concern that Iran will use its strengthened economic and political position to expand its existing destabilising activities. The country is shipping rockets to Palestinian armed groups in the Gaza strip and paying them to fire those rockets at Israel. It is also shipping rockets to Hezbollah in Lebanon, which now has 100,000 rockets aimed at Israel. In addition, it is shipping weapons to Houthi rebels in Yemen, propping up Assad in Syria and expanding its attempt to dominate a Shi’a-controlled Iraq. It is worth recalling that Hezbollah, which answers to the Iranian regime, is also guilty of murderous attacks on European soil. Just this week, a Hezbollah operative was convicted in Cyprus and sentenced to six years’ imprisonment for planning an attack against Israeli targets there.

Will the Minister tell us what discussions the Government are having with our US and EU allies and with friends in the region, including the Gulf states, Egypt, Jordan and Israel, about how to contain an Iran that will be unbound by this deal? How does the UK plan to work with its allies to deter Iran from pursuing more destabilising behaviour? In the short term, the deal is likely to grant Iran an immediate bonus, which could amount to up to \$50 billion, as a result of the lifting of sanctions. How will the Government ensure that that money is not used to increase Iranian insurgent activities in Syria, Iraq and Yemen or to continue supporting and arming Hezbollah and Hamas? What conditions will the agreement place on the use of those assets?

It is particularly disgraceful that Iranian leaders have repeated open calls for the destruction of Israel. That includes the supreme leader, in November last year, tweeting a nine-point plan for Israel’s elimination. Will the Minister assure us that the tone of relations between this country and Iran will reflect the deep distaste we have for such rhetoric and for Iran’s general approach to the region? Finally, will he give a commitment that the UK will continue to enhance its strategic co-operation with Israel against shared threats, including Iranian behaviour?

I have put lots of questions to the Minister, and I appreciate that the debate taking place in the main Chamber means that he is having to deal with a policy

area for which he is not personally and directly responsible, but I would be grateful if he could answer my questions either in the debate or, subsequently, in writing. If he would prefer, I would also be happy to table them as written questions.

3.15 pm

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) on securing the debate. He made some important points, and I agree with everything he said. I also want to put on record my support for some of the questions he put to the Minister.

Iran has a distasteful track record of supporting states that have supported acts of terrorism. The supreme leader also has an unacceptable track record in terms of his behaviour towards the state of Israel. The hon. Gentleman was right to highlight Iran's lack of transparency, its obfuscation and its intransigence on its nuclear programme. He was also right to highlight the fact that the supreme leader's attitude has become more hard-line in recent months. Similarly, he was right to highlight the fact that a deal for a deal's sake is no good for the middle east or the world as a whole. It is also no good in terms of the precedent it would set regarding attitudes in this country and more broadly, including in the United Nations, towards other extremist and potentially dangerous states in the middle east and elsewhere.

It is therefore important that Britain continues to support the right deal, and we had reassurances on that in the debate a few weeks ago from the Minister with responsibility for the middle east. I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe is responding to the debate today, because he always speaks wisely and with great experience and knowledge of issues not only in Europe, but more broadly. I am sure he will be able to give us further reassurances that the Government will ensure that the right deal is sought and that Iran is held properly to account, so that it will want to show greater transparency in dealing with its nuclear programme in future. That should be an absolute precondition of a deal.

It is important to look at some of the background to not only the debate, but the behaviour that Iran has exhibited on nuclear weapons over the past few years. The five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany put together a provisional package of outline measures, through which a future deal on Iran's nuclear programme should be looked at. The deadline for coming to an agreement was 30 June. It would be interesting to get an update from the Minister on what has taken place on putting together a firmer deal on the basis of the outline in principle that was put in place earlier this year.

My right hon. Friend will be aware that there are long-standing UN concerns about ensuring that Iran's nuclear programme is legitimately peaceful and for civilian purposes before the country can be considered a normal non-nuclear-weapons state. In June, the EU said no deal should be put in place with Iran without a proper UN probe into the country's nuclear capabilities. We have already heard from the hon. Member for Dudley North that the IAEA has long suspected Iran of conducting

nuclear tests with the strong possibility of military intentions. In November 2014, Mr Amano, its director general, called on Iran to increase its co-operation with the IAEA and to provide timely, appropriate and transparent access to documentation, sites, materials and all other aspects of its nuclear programme. However, Iran has repeatedly refused to allow inspectors access to key nuclear sites. That is a matter of continuing concern, which undoubtedly led to today's debate. I hope that the Minister will talk about that.

The Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), has said, in explaining the Government's position, that they will not do a bad deal with Iran, and will only do a deal that provides assurances about the peaceful nature of Iran's programme. Previous assurances have been welcome, but what can my right hon. Friend the Minister of State add today, particularly in view of an escalation in Iran's behaviour in the past few weeks?

I have several points to make about that and in particular about Iran's intransigent behaviour in June. Ayatollah Khamenei, the supreme leader, said in June 2015:

"Inspection of our military sites is out of the question and is one of our red lines".

He also said in May:

"No inspection of any military site and interview with nuclear scientists will be allowed. The enemies should know that the Iranian nation and officials will by no means give in to excessive demands and bullying."

There has, furthermore, been escalation through the Iranian Parliament. In June 2015, Iranian lawmakers passed legislation to deny IAEA inspectors crucial access to military sites to verify the country's nuclear activities. In particular, the legislation sets out criteria that any nuclear deal must meet, and I want to mention two points. First, it states:

"Access to all documents, scientists and military/security sites...is forbidden under any pretext".

Secondly, it states:

"No limit will be accepted on Iran acquiring peaceful nuclear knowledge and technology and the materials required for research and development".

Those are clearly worrying developments, which have happened only in the past few weeks. I should be grateful for the Minister's thoughts about the impact they will have on any future agreement and for his reassurance that we will not push for a deal for a deal's sake—that we will ensure that any deal is the right one for the middle east and for world stability.

It is worth highlighting the UK's role, which is to the credit of the Government. It is right that, as a permanent member of the Security Council, the UK has played a leading role in the international community's handling of the Iranian nuclear issue. The UK has tirelessly pressed Iran to respond to international concerns about its nuclear activities, even unilaterally imposing an unprecedented series of sanctions against Iran for its continued non-compliance. The British Government now stand to play a decisive part, as I am sure my right hon. Friend will agree, in shaping the terms of a final nuclear agreement with Iran. They must, however, ensure that it is the right one. I look forward to hearing the Minister reassure the House on that.

[Dr Daniel Poulter]

I want to pick up two points from the outline principles of agreement set out earlier in the year. They relate in particular to research and development capacity, which is vital, given the rapid progress of science and technology research in the past few years in all areas, including nuclear. The pace of change is rapidly increasing, and when we do not have enough transparency now—inspectors are not allowed access to documentation, military sites or scientists, so it is difficult to get a proper understanding of the current research base in Iran and the current state of affairs—it is all the more important to have more transparency, to inform any future, firm agreement with Iran, and to ensure that the agreement is future-proofed, not set in stone. If there are future developments in research and technology and in capability using centrifuges or other nuclear research areas, future-proofing would allow proper inspections and transparency, and action to be taken if behaviour or research supported military rather than civilian purposes in any way. I hope that the Minister will reassure me and the House that such future-proofing will be a key component of any final deal.

I hope I have made some important points about how the Iranian Parliament's legislative proposals and the supreme leader's attitude escalate matters, and about the need to future-proof against scientific and technological advances if any deal is to work. Further reassurance is needed about vital issues. I look forward to the Minister's reassurance that the UK Government will take a robust line on the escalation in Iranian rhetoric and continue in their right course of holding Iran to account for failing to enter into meaningful negotiations. I hope he will also reassure us that, given the lack of transparency and the IAEA not being allowed access to documents, scientists and military sites, we can future-proof any agreement, particularly with regard to science and technological development as it affects nuclear technology, including centrifuges, that could be used for military purposes.

3.26 pm

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I thank the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) for obtaining the debate.

The Prime Minister said of Iran in 2012:

“The Regime's claim that its nuclear programme is intended purely for civilian purposes is not remotely credible.”

I am not convinced that too much has changed since. The Iranians still do not allow IAEA inspectors to see sites or to see what centrifuges there are. How many do they have? What are their intentions? It is a simplistic thing to say, but if their intentions are honourable and they have nothing to hide, why do they not let the inspectors in to see exactly what they are doing? I do not make any apologies for that simple question.

I agreed entirely with what the hon. Member for Dudley North said about claims that the only alternative to an agreement is war. He rightly said that is nonsense, and I would turn it around. If we—the international community—sign a flawed agreement with Iran, that will most definitely lead to war, for the simple reason that Iran will produce a nuclear weapon. Many of the

states in the middle east—not just Israel—will want to follow suit, and all that we will have will be a huge proliferation of nuclear weapons in the middle east. Are we all, including the Americans, going to sit back and let that happen, when the Iranian President still will not recognise the state of Israel, and would prefer it to be written off the face of the map? What sort of language is that, and what sort of world are we living in?

I said in a Westminster Hall debate last week—on 16 June, at column 14WH—that it is dangerous when a US President is coming to the end of his second term of office and is looking for a legacy. It may be simple to sign up to a legacy having reached an agreement with Iran, but if that is not worth the paper it is written on—and it probably will not be—the approach is wrong. I have great respect for the Minister, for our British Government and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and for all the work that we do around the world, but we must keep our eyes absolutely open. Iran has form on this issue, going all the way back to 2004. While Iran was busy negotiating an agreement with the EU, that allowed it more time to carry on producing more enriched uranium. That is the whole game, and it is why this debate is timely.

We must pause until we can be certain that we have an agreement under which we can go in and see the facilities, completely unfettered. It is absolutely right, if Iran wants to further its nuclear power, that it should be allowed to do so—I would be the first to say so—but I find it difficult to believe that that much uranium is being enriched just for a nuclear programme. That is where we are all being far too naive. I look forward to hearing the Minister and the shadow Minister sum up this debate; I do not think there will be many political differences between them. In my view, we must not have any political differences on this issue. If we are to be taken seriously by the Iranians and sort out the situation, we must present a united front to them.

Before any agreement is signed, we need to get into Iran to see what is being produced and ensure that it is being used for civilian purposes and nuclear power, not weapons. I repeat what I said at the beginning: if we do not get this right, we will regret it, because it will lead to huge problems and action will have to be taken. We in the international community must decide whether to sign a flawed agreement, brush everything under the carpet and allow Iran to increase its amount of enriched uranium—which will lead eventually, in however many years, to a nuclear weapon—or take more action now, however uncomfortable it might be, to sort out the situation so that we do not find ourselves in that position further down the road.

We must also be careful about ISIL, those dreadful people who are committing huge acts of terrorism and atrocities across the region. Again, whatever co-operation with the Iranians there may or may not be, we must not let that cloud the issue or the need to take firm action. I have every faith in our Minister. I am sure that he can sort out the whole situation, and I look forward to hearing him sum up.

3.33 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) on

securing this debate, which recognises the importance of the issue. This is the second time it has been debated in Westminster Hall in recent weeks.

I agree with a certain amount of what has been said. Of course we deplore the baiting of Israel by the Supreme Leader of Iran or any attempt to destabilise the region in whatever form, but I would strike a slightly less hawkish tone than we have heard so far. Developments, however small, are welcome. It is a live, ongoing negotiation process, and there is rhetoric on both sides while detailed negotiations go on. Some progress is probably better than no progress at all.

Diplomatic relations between Iran and the west have thawed in recent years, and this is a manifestation of it, starting most recently with the Lausanne agreement and the ongoing talks. We can see the election of President Rouhani, who spent considerable time in Glasgow, completing his doctorate there, as a demonstration of willingness to make at least some kind of progress. Iran has also indicated it might accept the additional protocol of the agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency, which again suggests a certain willingness to engage.

The issue has important consequences for the wider region. If a peaceful agreement can be achieved between Iran and the western powers, that could well represent a model for future agreements elsewhere in the region. If Iran is respected and demonstrates that it can be trusted, where appropriate, we might see more peaceful and democratic negotiations and transitions in the region. The negotiation process represents an important opportunity to get things right, and perhaps to help not just the region but the whole world make progress on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament—issues close to the heart of the Scottish National party.

We must consider the wider context of getting our own house in order when it comes to the messages that we send out from the United Kingdom with the decisions we make. The SNP is not ashamed to oppose the renewal of Trident and the existence of weapons of mass destruction on the Clyde or anywhere else in these islands. We are rightly opposed on moral and ethical grounds, because the destructive power of nuclear weapons and their ability to cause devastation and loss of life on an unimaginable scale is reason enough to scrap them wherever they exist. We are also opposed on the grounds of the cost and investment at this time of austerity. There is a consensus in Scotland that nuclear weapons should not be possessed by any country in the world: 57, not 56, of Scotland's MPs agree. We will see where the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland goes when his party whips him on that.

There is also the question of nuclear power. Most people suggest that countries have a right to develop a peaceful civilian programme. Perhaps that is true—we would not have air conditioning today if it were not for a base-load provided by nuclear power stations—but the trend in this part of the world has been away from nuclear generation and towards renewables and so on. If we do not want other countries to develop civilian nuclear programmes, maybe we need to provide them with support for alternatives. Solar power is certainly not lacking in the parts of the world that we are debating. Perhaps that is a small example, but it goes to my wider point: as is so often the case, we must get our own house in order. The United Kingdom must lead by

example. What right, moral or political, do we have to dictate terms to other countries if we are not prepared to apply the same standards to ourselves?

In welcoming the progress made diplomatically, I look forward to an update on where the negotiations are, and I encourage the Government to lead by example—not just in the negotiations as part of the western grouping, but in considering the impact of their domestic decisions in the areas of nuclear power and nuclear weapons.

Ian Austin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Patrick Grady: No, I am just finishing. I encourage the Government to work ultimately towards a world that is both peaceful and nuclear-free.

3.38 pm

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): Thank you for your chairmanship, Sir David, as we debate a hot topic on a hot day. I pay tribute to my parliamentary neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) for securing this debate. I know that he cares deeply about the middle east and international stability and is hugely concerned about the issue. I also thank the hon. Members for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter), for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) and for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) for their contributions.

The House debated this matter just a couple of weeks ago. I think that this debate might have been intended to reflect on an agreement that had been reached, having been secured before we knew that the deadline for agreement would be put back for a further week from 30 June. The timing of the negotiations may also be affected by deadlines in the United States, because if an agreement is not reached before 10 July the period for Congress to review and debate such an agreement lengthens considerably. I hope the Minister agrees that it is important that negotiation on substance is not sacrificed to timetables set elsewhere.

Before discussing the detail of any agreement, I ask the Minister to outline in his response the basic purpose of such an agreement from the Government's point of view. The whole point of this process when it began was to test the thesis that Iran has advanced for the past decade or more—namely, that it is pursuing a civil nuclear programme. It denied that it wanted to develop a nuclear bomb. Is the point of the agreement with Iran still based on that notion—that it should facilitate a civil nuclear programme, but prevent a military one?

The Minister may be aware that *The Washington Post* said recently that

“a process that began with the goal of eliminating Iran's potential to produce nuclear weapons has evolved into a plan to tolerate and temporarily restrict that capability.”

If the ground has been moved in such a fundamental way, that is important. Is the purpose of the agreement to stop the development of military nuclear capability in Iran or merely to suspend and restrict it for a number of years? In other words, is the purpose of the agreement to keep Iran as a nuclear threshold power for the period the agreement lasts? That is the first point I want to address.

[Mr Pat McFadden]

Then, of course, there are key issues of detail between the parties. We keep hearing the phrase that a bad deal is worse than no deal, and it is on the key measures that a judgment will be made. There is a lot of detail in the agreement; the Minister will be relieved to hear that I do not want to ask about every part of it. However, there are a few key issues to consider.

First, there is the issue of inspection and verification; whatever is agreed, those elements are absolutely vital. The purpose of agreement on them is that commitments can be verified and that there can be no covert breaking of the terms of the deal. We understand that the International Atomic Energy Agency will be granted access to nuclear sites in Iran, but there is still the important question of military and other sites. Iran has argued that the request for unfettered access to those sites would be a breach of sovereignty that no state would tolerate, but trust is absolutely crucial on this point. On what basis, if any, will inspections of non-nuclear sites be allowed? It is important that the House is aware of the Government's position on this issue.

Secondly, there is a range of issues around capability, including centrifuges, research and development, and the quantity and quality of enriched uranium. This House can often become very focused when we discuss issues such as the number of centrifuges, but once again the agreement seems to have moved around on this point. There seems to have been an escalation in the number of centrifuges that Iran will be allowed to keep. We have heard figures of 1,500, 2,000, 5,000 and even 6,000.

The fundamental point, however, is not only the number of centrifuges but what it tells us about capability. What will happen to the centrifuges that Iran is allowed to keep in the future? There are centrifuges that Iran currently possesses that will not be included in the agreement, so how will they be monitored? How will we continue to monitor the capability that Iran will have after whatever number of centrifuges is agreed?

On research and development, the agreement seeks to freeze nuclear capacity for 10 years. If the goal is to stop Iran from becoming a military nuclear power, why only 10 years? Why not longer? Is there not a logical flaw in placing a time limit on a capability that Iran denies wanting to have in the first place?

There is also the issue of the enriched uranium that has already been developed. What will happen to it, and how will that be monitored? Also on capability, what of the heavy water plant at Arak, which my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North referred to, or the other facilities whose existence has only reluctantly and sometimes belatedly been acknowledged by Iran? How will we ensure that the capacity in these facilities to produce plutonium for potential military uses is permanently decommissioned? Can the Minister tell the House what is intended to happen to this capacity under the agreement and how we can ensure that it will be followed through?

The capability issues come together in the concept of breakout time, which my hon. Friend also referred to. That is the time needed for Iran to develop a weapon in the event of the failure of the agreement, and the withdrawal of inspection and monitoring facilities. Can the Minister tell the House what the view of the P5+1 is

on the issue of breakout time? Is breakout time a matter of capability, or a matter of time? Have we put a time on it? There has been talk of six months, or a year. My hon. Friend quoted President Obama, who said the period could be even shorter. The issue of breakout time is absolutely crucial to the future of the agreement.

Finally, on the agreement itself there is the issue of sanctions. Iran is at the negotiating table because it wants sanctions to be lifted. Throughout this process, facilities have been discovered whose existence had not been previously admitted; uranium has been enriched beyond the levels needed for civilian use; and Iran has continued to sponsor client groups in the region, such as Hamas and Hezbollah, as my hon. Friend pointed out. It is little wonder that in this environment trust is in short supply. Does the Minister agree that calls by Iran for sanctions to be lifted as soon as an agreement is signed should be resisted? If an agreement is reached, would it not be much more appropriate for there to be a phased lifting of sanctions alongside verifiable compliance by Iran with the commitments it has made under the agreement?

Of course, there are advantages for the world if Iran co-operates with the rest of the world, but that co-operation cannot simply be taken on trust. Trust has to be built and earned, and that means a phased rather than an immediate lifting of sanctions. On the sanctions point, of course, there is the concept of "snapback", as President Obama has put it. What arrangements will be put in place for sanctions to be restored quickly if Iran does not adhere to the commitments it has made?

A good agreement with Iran, which prevents an escalation to nuclear military capability and brings it more into the international community, would be a good thing. But a bad agreement, which was either not capable of being properly enforced or which simply delayed capability for a few years as a trade-off for the lifting of sanctions, would be a bad deal for the P5+1, the region and the world.

I would like the Minister to tell the House what the process will be here in Parliament to examine an agreement, if one is reached. We debate here—Westminster Hall is not exactly crowded today—but this issue is fundamental for our security. What will be the parliamentary process for considering an agreement if one is reached in the coming days?

To conclude, it is impossible to discuss this matter without considering it in the context of Iran's wider role in the middle east. What are the implications of an agreement for the sponsorship of proxies, which Iran continues to engage in, and for Iran's wider regional struggle with Saudi Arabia? The Minister will be aware of the statement from Prince Turki al-Faisal, which was quoted by my hon. Friend. The prince said:

"Whatever the Iranians have, we will have too."

If that is the case, what would this agreement mean for nuclear capability in the rest of the region and, equally importantly, what would be the implications of a failure to reach agreement? If the west is to lift sanctions as a result of the agreement, how do we also influence Iran's wider role in the region? How do we give assurance to other allies in the middle east, who fear a more assertive Iran and that the agreement will not constrain and influence Iran but simply empower it through the lifting of sanctions?

This discussion is not only about the technicalities of centrifuges, inspections and quantities of yellowcake; it is also about whether Iran is really serious about adopting a different role in the region, and a wider role than the one it has pursued in recent years. The rhetoric that comes from the top of the regime continues to be belligerent, to call for the annihilation of the state of Israel and to cause huge concern, even among our non-Israeli allies in the region. If we get an agreement, it is important not only that it is the right one in terms of security, but that it has a positive effect on the wider issues in the middle east.

3.49 pm

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): I, too, welcome you to the Chair, Mr Amess. I congratulate the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) on securing this debate. I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) and for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) for their contributions, and the two Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen for theirs.

It will be no surprise that I am unable to speculate about quite a few details, because negotiations are continuing in Vienna today. Although all questions asked during the debate were perfectly reasonable, many can only be answered if and when there is a final agreement between the E3+3 and Iran. At present, there is an interim agreement—the so-called Lausanne parameters—and ongoing negotiations. The Foreign Secretary is in Vienna today to take forward conversations with the Iranian negotiators, having met his five counterparts a few days ago.

I can tell the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) that throughout this process, which it is fair to say has commanded broadly bipartisan support under successive Governments, Foreign Office Ministers have sought to keep Parliament informed about negotiations, and we will certainly continue to do so. I expect that, in the event of a final agreement being reached, a statement to Parliament will be made by the Foreign Secretary or another Minister, so that Members have the chance to see the detail of what was agreed.

When we and our E3+3 partners and Iran agreed the key parameters for a comprehensive agreement on Iran's nuclear programme on 2 April, we set ourselves a deadline for reaching a final deal. That deadline passed on Tuesday, as hon. Members mentioned, without an agreement being reached, but that does not mean that the process has definitively ended in failure. It demonstrates our resolve not to be hurried into an unsatisfactory agreement on the substance, including on the vital technical details—I accept what Members from all parties said about consideration of the technical details being essential to any judgment about the nature of a final deal, should one be secured. It is important that all sides have the assurances they need and that we get those details right. We have to be confident that any deal is verifiable, durable and addresses our concerns fully. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman: substance is the key to this, not any particular question of timing.

All parties remain committed to achieving a deal. Nobody wants another long extension, so the interim agreement—the joint plan of action—has been extended for seven days to allow negotiations to continue.

Just over two weeks ago, the House debated these issues, and the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), replied on behalf of the Government. I have picked up from this debate, as I did from the record of the previous one, that hon. Members in various political parties are concerned about the detail and worry that Iran might be granted too many concessions.

Although I cannot give a running commentary on the detail of the negotiations, I reiterate my strongest possible assurance on behalf of the whole Government that we will not do a bad deal. Any deal must achieve the Government's prime objective of preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. That means more than just a verbal or written commitment: it means the inclusion of detailed undertakings by Iran that are sufficient to give us confidence that their nuclear programme will be entirely peaceful. Anything less is completely unacceptable.

We have an historic opportunity to find a solution to a long-standing source of tension, instability and global concern that, if unresolved, will undoubtedly threaten our security and that of our partners. In a week when we have seen tragic violence and bloodshed in the wider region, we should reflect on how much progress we have made towards reaching a solution through peaceful, diplomatic and negotiated means. A great deal is at stake—for this country, for our partners and for the people of Iran.

Let me give a bit more detail on the parameters within which we hope to agree a deal and its implications for Iran, for the region, and for the UK. In addressing the Lausanne parameters, I hope that I will answer at least some of the questions and concerns raised during this debate.

The parameters for a deal agreed in Lausanne are a sound basis for what could be a very good deal that is durable, verifiable and addresses our concerns about proliferation. Under the Lausanne interim agreement, Iran's enrichment capacity, enrichment level and enriched uranium stockpile would all be limited, and the facility at Natanz would be Iran's sole location for enrichment.

Hon. Members mentioned research and development capability. Iran's research and development on centrifuges will be carried out under the Lausanne parameters, based on mutually agreed details relating to scope and schedule. When I say "mutually agreed", I mean agreed not just by Iran, but by Iran and the six international partners with whom it is negotiating. The Lausanne deal also requires the Arak heavy water research reactor to be redesigned and modernised to exclude production of weapons-grade plutonium. Taken together, these measures will ensure that Iran's break-out time—the time taken to produce sufficient fissile material for a nuclear device, should Iran ever attempt to do so—will be extended to at least 12 months.

A robust and credible regime for monitoring compliance by Iran will be put in place under the Lausanne parameters. Iran would need to implement the modified code 3.1 and the additional protocol to the comprehensive safeguards agreement. The International Atomic Energy Agency must be able to use the best modern monitoring technologies and have enhanced access to sites to make sure that if

[Mr David Lidington]

Iran ever tried to break out towards a nuclear weapon, the international community would be alerted and have sufficient time to respond.

Neil Parish: What faith have we that this agreement, which should deal with enhanced access to nuclear sites in Iran, will happen? We have had agreements like this before, but still have not had access to the sites.

Mr Lidington: I want to say a little bit more about access in a few moments, but to answer my hon. Friend directly, questions about access and verification lie at the heart of the detailed negotiations going on today. Unless we and our partners are satisfied that the IAEA will have the access that it believes it needs, there will not be a final agreement.

Dr Poulter: My right hon. Friend's considered, helpful response is shedding perhaps greater light on the issues than we had in the previous debate. On access, is it not difficult to understand what is being negotiated if there has not been transparency about exactly what the situation is on the ground and what access there is to the scientists? Should there not be some level of access first, before the final details of the negotiation are put to bed?

Mr Lidington: I promise my hon. Friend that I will come to the point he raised on access to scientists a little later in my remarks. All the questions about access and the sequencing of access are precisely the subject of the negotiations that Foreign Ministers are pursuing this afternoon in Vienna.

So far as sanctions are concerned, the position under Lausanne is that once the IAEA has verified that Iran has taken all the agreed actions on its nuclear programme—and only at that point—Iran will receive phased sanctions relief, including comprehensive relief from economic and financial sanctions. The interim plan provides for proliferation-related measures to remain in place until the international community has confidence in the peaceful nature of Iran's programme. Importantly, Iran will remain bound by its non-proliferation treaty obligations both during and after a deal. We will not hesitate to take action, including through the re-imposition of sanctions, if Iran at any time violates its obligations under a comprehensive deal. To respond to the shadow Minister, one thing we and our partners are discussing is how to devise the mechanism for the snapback of sanctions in the event that Iran breaks from the terms of a deal that it has agreed. Obviously any final agreement will contain far more detail than I am able to set out today, but we are confident that a deal within the Lausanne framework will achieve what we set out to do.

Turning to some of the questions raised in the debate, the hon. Member for Dudley North asked about the joint committee. The joint committee mechanism would be set up only in the wake of a deal. It would be a format within which issues relating to the implementation of the agreement could be discussed by all parties together. It would be a deliberative forum. The political reality is that Iran would be present along with the six negotiating partners. One may want to be very pessimistic and say that the six will not be able to maintain solidarity—so far, there has been a very good working

relationship among the three EU members, the United States, Russia and China, but were something to go wrong, it would remain the reality that the three European countries and the United States would constitute a majority on the joint committee.

On access, it is essential that the IAEA is able as part of any agreement to verify all of Iran's nuclear-related commitments, including through access to relevant locations. That must include robust monitoring of Iran's nuclear activities and how it implements the additional protocol, which it will need to sign up to once again as part of any agreement. Under a comprehensive agreement, Iran, by implementing the additional protocol to the NPT, will provide the IAEA with substantial access to its declared nuclear facilities. Also, under the additional protocol the IAEA can request access to any location in Iran that it chooses, including non-declared and military sites. For a comprehensive agreement to be credible, we will need to ensure that the IAEA can obtain that access. It needs to be more than just words on paper. The detail of how we can ensure confidence in the IAEA having the access it believes it needs is central to the ongoing negotiations.

If Iran implements the additional protocol, the IAEA will have additional rights to information on and access to the entire Iranian fuel cycle, including uranium mines and some parts of the centrifuge production process. That will clearly give the IAEA a better understanding of Iran's nuclear fuel cycle and make the diversion of nuclear materials more difficult than it has been.

The question on access to scientists, which was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich, relates to what is sometimes termed the possible military dimension of Iran's programme. The IAEA is keen to see that addressed. The six and Iran agree that the resolution of outstanding issues remains essential, particularly those related to the possible military dimensions, or PMD, of the Iranian nuclear programme. The completion of measures to address the IAEA's concerns over PMD will constitute one of the set of "key nuclear-related actions" that Iran must complete following agreement at Lausanne of the joint comprehensive plan of action. The IAEA director-general has been careful to separate the talks taking place under the framework for co-operation signed by the IAEA and Iran on 11 November 2013 from the E3+3 process. He has said that he hoped they would be mutually beneficial, and we continue to share that view.

Iran will need to address the IAEA's concerns about the possible military dimensions of its programme, regardless of the outcome of the E3+3 talks and any joint comprehensive plan of action. We note and are disappointed by the extremely limited progress on PMD reported by the IAEA in its board report of 29 May. We continue to give our full support to the IAEA, which has continued to engage with Iran at short notice and has tried to demonstrate maximum flexibility on what it sees as the essential need to get to the bottom of the PMD question.

Concerns were expressed about whether a time-limited agreement could be a problem, because Iran might just massively expand its nuclear programme once the period of the agreement expired. The key point to make is that a comprehensive deal would lead to significantly increased transparency, in particular through the implementation of the additional protocol and modified code 3.1, and

those measures do not expire at the end of any deal; they are permanent and will ensure that Iran's programme remains transparent and subject to verification by the IAEA, providing reassurance to the international community about the peaceful nature of that programme. Iran remains bound by its NPT obligations during and after any deal. The deal is attractive to Iran because of the huge economic benefits it would bring, and that gives it a significant incentive to keep its nuclear programme exclusively peaceful. I said that we will not hesitate to take action, including through the reimposition of sanctions, if Iran violates its NPT obligations at any time. Our hope is that the implementation of a comprehensive agreement, with all the benefits that that would bring to the people of Iran, would mean that the Iranian Government would not wish to take such a step.

A nuclear deal would also make a significant contribution to regional stability. It goes without saying that the alternatives to a diplomatic settlement are a nuclear-armed Iran or a military confrontation aimed at stopping its nuclear programmes. Those would be terrible outcomes for the region at large. If Iran had or was believed to have nuclear weapons, the risk of a nuclear arms race in the middle east would be serious indeed. By contrast, a deal that ensured that the Iranian programme was exclusively peaceful would have a significant positive regional impact. Improved trust and confidence could go a long way in easing the tensions of a volatile and dangerous region.

At the same time, we completely understand that Israel and our partners in the Gulf have concerns. To them we say, as we have said consistently: we do not want and will not do a bad deal. We will only do a deal that provides assurances about the peaceful nature of Iran's programme. Securing such a deal, if it is indeed attainable, is inherently better than the alternatives.

Our relationships with our partners in the region—our commitment to talking to them and keeping them up to date with our views and the progress of the talks—will remain. We will not turn a blind eye to Iran's destabilising actions in the region, but we will work both with our partners and Iran to support and encourage in the Iranian Government a more constructive regional attitude. By reaching a nuclear deal, Iran can start to show willing, and it can show us that it is willing to work towards solutions to regional challenges.

On the bilateral relationship, a comprehensive deal would bring potential benefits to the UK as well as to Iran. If—I say “if”—Iran not only strikes a deal but adheres to its commitments and so sanctions are lifted, the Government will help British business in whatever way they can to take advantage of the resulting opportunities and to promote trade and investment between the two countries. A functioning British embassy in Tehran would be an important part of the Government's role. We have been clear from the start that the reopening of our embassy is not dependent on a nuclear agreement, and we remain committed to reopening it as soon as we have resolved some outstanding issues relating to the practical functioning of the mission.

Sending our diplomats back to Tehran would not, however, mean setting aside all differences with Iran. We continue to disagree on a number of core topics, not least Iran's record on human rights and approach to regional stability. Nevertheless, an embassy in Tehran

would allow us to engage the Government and people of Iran on a full spectrum of issues, just as we do in many other countries around the world with whose Governments we also have profound disagreements. Increased dialogue is in our mutual interests and the only way to move forward.

We have the opportunity to settle one of the most complex foreign policy problems of our time. To have got even this far is a remarkable achievement and a testament to the dedication, perseverance and creativity of diplomats and officials from all sides, including Iran. It demonstrates what can be achieved when we allow the time and space to settle differences through diplomatic means. There is an historic opportunity for Iran, the region and the international community, but we cannot and will not make a deal at any price. An agreement is worth having only if it delivers our key objective of ensuring that Iran's nuclear programme can only ever be peaceful, and it must deliver that outcome in a credible, verifiable way.

We face some difficult discussions in the coming hours and days, and, whatever the outcome in Vienna, we will continue to have our differences with Iran on regional issues and human rights. However, a deal within the parameters agreed in Lausanne remains the best way to secure the assurances we seek on Iran's nuclear programme—the best way for Britain, the region and the global community.

4.13 pm

Ian Austin: I apologise to you, Sir David, for getting your title wrong at the beginning of the debate.

I am grateful to all the Members who have taken part today. The Minister was presented with a lot of questions and I am grateful to him for the answers he gave. I particularly welcome his assurances that we will not do a bad deal, that we will not make a deal at any price and that we will not turn a blind eye to Iran's destabilising of the region. I am grateful for the contributions made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden), and by the hon. Members for Tiverton and Honiton, for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) and for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady).

That said, I want to make one point, which was the reason why I tried to intervene on the hon. Member for Glasgow North right at the end of his speech. I do not accept at all the argument that there is some sort of moral equivalence between us in the west and the Iranian leadership, nor do I accept his argument about getting our own house in order before we can comment on what the Iranians are trying to do. The truth is that Britain's nuclear stance has not changed for 50 years. We are not promoting a radical anti-western ideology. We are not threatening to destroy other states. The issue is Iran, which, uniquely, signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, broke all its provisions with a secret nuclear weapons programme, and was caught red-handed on two occasions.

I must also say that we are not an autocratic dictatorship—1,200 people have been executed under Rouhani's supposedly moderate leadership. We do not arrest journalists, bloggers and political activists and lock them up for years on end and we do not threaten to wipe other countries off the face of the Earth. It is

[Ian Austin]

utterly ludicrous to compare the Iranian regime with western democracies and say that we have to get our house in order before we can comment.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the Iranian nuclear programme.

4.15 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 2 July 2015

CABINET OFFICE

Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Matthew Hancock): I can confirm that the Review of the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments will report later this year. The review will consider the role of the Commissioner and the processes around public appointments. The terms of reference for the review are as follows:

Terms of reference

The role of the Commissioner for Public Appointments was created by the Public Appointments Order in Council 1995 on 23 November 1995, following recommendations made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (under the chairmanship of Lord Nolan). We are now twenty years on, and this provides a suitable opportunity to review the role of the Commissioner and the processes around public appointments. In the light of the range and diversity of public appointments, it is important to ensure that the procedures are both effective and proportionate and to review whether procedures as practised fit within the intentions of the Nolan principles. The review will be led by Sir Gerry Grimstone and will report to the Minister for the Cabinet Office.

[HCWS82]

TREASURY

Financial Conduct Authority/Payment Systems Regulator

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Harriett Baldwin): The annual reports and accounts 2014-15 of the Financial Conduct Authority and Payment Systems Regulator have today been laid before Parliament.

These reports form a key part of the accountability mechanism for the Financial Conduct Authority under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 and the Payment Systems Regulator under the Financial Services (Banking Reform) Act 2013. They assess the performance of the Financial Conduct Authority and Payment Systems Regulator over the past 12 months against their statutory objectives.

[HCWS84]

DEFENCE

Armed Forces Pay Review Body

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon): I am pleased to announce that John Steele has accepted the Prime Minister's invitation to continue to serve as

the chairman of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body, for a further two-year term of office commencing on 1 March 2016. This appointment has been conducted in accordance with the guidance of the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

[HCWS81]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

New Consulate-General (Belo Horizonte, Brazil)

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): I am pleased to announce to the House that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office intends to open a new British consulate-general in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, by the end of September 2015.

Belo Horizonte, the capital of the state of Minas Gerais, is the third largest city in Brazil. Both the city and the state are politically important. Furthermore, Minas Gerais has a GDP of more than £150 billion, 10% of Brazil's total, and boasts strong mining and agriculture sectors, a large automotive industry, and an expanding, high-tech industrial base.

Belo Horizonte will also serve as the location for Team GB and Paralympics GB's pre-games training camps from July to September 2016, and will play host to multiple test camps, to check the training facilities, over the course of 2015 and 2016. The British Olympic Association and British Paralympics Association's decision to host the training camps in Belo Horizonte is likely to open up further opportunities within Minas Gerais for the UK.

Opening a consulate-general in the city of Recife in north east Brazil in 2011 has shown us just how valuable having a presence in a state capital can be. Our consulate-general in Recife has allowed us to provide direct support to British businesses in accessing commercial opportunities in the state, while also enabling us to build stronger political links at a local level, of particular importance in a country the size of Brazil, where a considerable amount of decision-making power lies with the states themselves. Given the scale of opportunities in Belo Horizonte, and the added dimension of the British Olympic Association and British Paralympics Association's decision to host their training camps there, the Government believe that we should open a new British consulate-general in Belo Horizonte for an initial period of two years. A resident consul will be appointed, and our consul-general to Rio de Janeiro will concurrently assume the title of consul-general to Belo Horizonte.

The rising economic and global importance of Latin America and Brazil is clear; our overseas network in the region plays an important role in strengthening our political, economic and commercial ties. The Government launched their Canning agenda in 2010; a long-term strategy aimed at revitalising relations with Latin America. While we have made good progress, we need to look for innovative ways by which we can fully realise the potential of closer relationships in the region. The opening of a new consulate-general in Belo Horizonte, within existing resource constraints, is an important part of that ongoing work.

[HCWS78]

HEALTH

Ministerial Correction

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ben Gummer): I would like to inform the House of two inaccuracies in a statement I made in response to the Opposition day debate on A&E services in the House of Commons and to correct the record.

First, I stated that the number of training places for nurses,

“is now at a record level.”—[*Official Report*, 24 June 2015; Vol. 597, c. 921.]

Nurse training commissions are at near record levels, following an increase of training commissions of 14% over the last two years.

Secondly, I referred to the Salford Royal Hospital, “saving £5 billion a year.”—[*Official Report*, 24 June 2015; Vol. 597, c. 924.]

when the correct figure is “£5 million a year.”

[HCWS79]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum

The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire): The United Kingdom has a long and proud tradition of providing safe haven to those who genuinely need our protection and this Government take that commitment very seriously. But for an asylum system to offer help to those who genuinely need it, it must be capable of managing a high volume of applications by making quick decisions wherever possible.

The UK has operated a detained fast track policy for cases that can be decided quickly, including those that have very weak claims, since 2000. The decision to detain a person seeking asylum is never taken lightly, but the courts have been clear over the past decade in upholding the principle that an accelerated process for asylum seekers while detained, operated with certain safeguards, is entirely lawful.

Just over 30,000 asylum claims were made in the UK last year—close to the average for the last 10 years. The majority of applicants are provided with accommodation and support by the Home Office or find their own accommodation. Most decisions on asylum claims are made within 3-6 months. Many, including from countries such as Syria, are accepted as refugees and granted permission to stay.

But a fast track process, including for those that have very weak or spurious claims, with decisions normally made within a matter of weeks and subject to an accelerated appeals process, is an important part of our immigration system and ensuring that our help is rightly focused on those who truly need it.

It is vital that we deal robustly with unfounded or abusive claims in the asylum system. It is also vital, however, that we can identify vulnerable applicants, including victims of trafficking or torture, to ensure that they can receive a fair hearing.

The Government are committed to the underlying principles of the detained fast track (DFT) and believe that for the most part it is operating well and is removing back to their own countries those whose asylum claims are clearly unfounded. But we must be satisfied that our safeguards for dealing with vulnerable applicants throughout the system are working well enough to minimise any risk of unfairness—as we have always striven to do.

Recently the system has come under significant legal challenge, including on the appeals stage of the process. Risks surrounding the safeguards within the system for particularly vulnerable applicants have also been identified to the extent that we cannot be certain of the level of risk of unfairness to certain vulnerable applicants who may enter DFT.

In light of these issues, I have decided to temporarily suspend the operation of the detained fast track policy. I hope this pause to be short in duration, perhaps only a matter of weeks, but I will only resume operation of this policy when I am sure the right structures are in place to minimise any risk of unfairness.

This decision does not mean that we will cease to detain people for immigration reasons. Immigration powers and policies relating to detention remain in place and we will continue to use them across the immigration system, including for removing illegal immigrants and protecting the public, wherever necessary.

We will continue to exercise the right to detain or keep in detention illegal migrants who have claimed asylum, where their specific circumstances warrant it.

In the meantime, every individual who was detained under the DFT policy and remains detained will have their detention urgently reviewed at senior level. Those who meet the general criteria for detention will not be directly affected by the decision to suspend DFT. Many are already detained under these powers, for example because they are at risk of absconding and face imminent removal. Only if detention can no longer be justified outside a DFT process will applicants be released to continue their asylum claim in the regular asylum system.

Asylum seekers who face removal to a safe third country or who come from a country designated as being generally safe, those who pose a risk to the public, those who are foreign national offenders, or those who otherwise face the likely prospect of removal are still liable to be detained or remain detained. Their cases will be prioritised under existing general rules.

We will urgently review all the evidence we have about any possible unfairness in the DFT system and address any shortcomings identified. In the meantime, we will continue to consider all asylum cases very carefully, granting protection to those that need it and refusing and removing those that do not. Asylum must not be used as a means to avoid legitimate immigration control and we will continue to be robust in ensuring that it is not.

This decision is in keeping with the Government’s wider work to ensure that we are doing everything we can to safeguard the welfare of those whom we detain. In February this year, the Home Secretary asked Stephen Shaw, the former Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, to conduct a review into the welfare of people detained for immigration purposes, including those detained under

the DFT policy. When he reports we will take his findings seriously and use them to continue to improve whatever processes are in place.

It is vital that our asylum policy ensures that safe haven is provided to refugees and that our systems are fair and offer good value to the tax payer. It is also important that if a case can be determined quickly, it should be so determined, and that no immigration advantage can be obtained by making a spurious or opportunistic claim. That is why the Government remain committed to the principles of a detained fast track system and will re-introduce one as soon as we are satisfied the right structures are in place to ensure it operates as it is supposed to.

[HCWS83]

TRANSPORT

Crossrail (Annual Update)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Claire Perry): On Thursday 4 June 2015, the Prime Minister joined the Mayor of London and the Secretary of State for Transport at Farringdon to mark the end of Crossrail tunnelling. For almost three years, eight tunnel boring machines have been in operation seven days a week below the streets of London to construct the 42 km of new rail tunnels.

Excavation of the Crossrail tunnels has also now been completed, and with it comes the creation of Wallasea Island, a Royal Society for the Protection of Birds nature reserve in Essex. A total of 1,528 shipments delivered 3 million tonnes of excavated material from the Crossrail tunnels to create the nature reserve.

In the past year we have made great progress in many different areas of the project. The project is now over 65% complete with work well under way on planning for and delivering an operational railway.

Major surface works being delivered by Network Rail on the existing rail network continue apace with a number of key milestones reached. The first section of the Stockley flyover has been completed; a new signalling system between Reading and the Heathrow Junction has been implemented; in south-east London the first mile of new Crossrail track has been installed and the existing station at Abbey Wood demolished; and improvement works are well under way at a number of surface stations.

In July 2014, Transport for London announced that it had awarded the contract to operate future Crossrail services to MTR Corporation (Crossrail) Ltd (MTR).

MTR is expected to employ around 1,100 staff with up to 850 new posts. This will include almost 400 drivers and over 50 apprenticeships for people from communities along the route. MTR have now taken over the operation of services between Liverpool Street and Shenfield on behalf of TfL Rail in readiness for the introduction of the new Crossrail trains supplied by Bombardier from May 2017.

In November 2014, together with the Mayor of London, we announced that all 40 future Crossrail stations will be step free, dramatically improving accessibility provision along the route. All newly built Crossrail stations will have marked routes together with simple signage and information, and the Crossrail fleet will be built by Bombardier to the latest accessibility standards.

In January of this year we marked the appointment of the 400th apprentice on the project, beating the original target of 400 apprentices over the lifetime of the project. Crossrail has now appointed 460 apprentices. Alongside this, 3,886 jobs have been created by contractors for local and/or previously unemployed people on the project. Crossrail's tunnelling and underground construction academy has had over 10,000 enrolments on courses since opening in 2012; and over 12,000 people are currently working across 45 Crossrail construction sites.

The Crossrail board continues to forecast that the costs of constructing Crossrail will be within the agreed funding limits. We expect Crossrail to cost no more than £14.5 billion—excluding rolling stock costs.

During the passage of the Crossrail Bill through Parliament, a commitment was given that a statement would be published at least every 12 months until the completion of the construction of Crossrail, setting out information about the project's funding and finances.

In line with this commitment, this statement comes within 12 months of the last one which was published on 3 July 2014. The relevant information is attached.

The numbers above are drawn from Crossrail Ltd's books of account and have been prepared on a consistent basis with the update provided last year. The figure for expenditure incurred includes moneys already paid out in relevant periods, including committed land and property expenditure where this has not yet been paid. It does not include future expenditure on construction contracts that have been awarded.

Attachments can be viewed online at:
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2015-07-02/HCWS80/>.

[HCWS80]

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