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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Monday 1 June 2015

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

FIFA

2.34 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on what further actions his Government will take following the election of Sepp Blatter as president of FIFA?

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): Last Friday, FIFA's members had the opportunity to embrace the overwhelming call for change that is coming from football fans around the world. They failed to do so. FIFA's support for its discredited president was incredibly disappointing, but it will not have surprised the footballing public who have become increasingly cynical as the allegations of misconduct and malfeasance have piled up. FIFA needs to change—and to change now. I can assure the House that the Government will do all in their power to help bring change about.

I have just spoken to Football Association chairman, Greg Dyke, and assured him that we stand behind the English FA's efforts to end the culture of kickbacks and corruption that risk ruining international football for a generation. I agreed with him that no options should be ruled out at this stage.

Let me also reiterate the Government's support for the action of the American and Swiss authorities. Earlier today, I spoke with the Attorney General. We agreed that the British authorities will offer full co-operation with American and Swiss investigators, and that if any evidence of criminal wrongdoing in the UK emerges, we will fully support the Serious Fraud Office in pursuing those involved.

FIFA's voting system is designed to support the incumbent, and it returned a predictable result, but there is no doubt that what remained of Sepp Blatter's credibility has been utterly destroyed. The mere fact that more than 70 national associations felt able to back a rival candidate shows that momentum against him is building. We must now increase that pressure still further. It is up to everyone who cares about football to use whatever influence they have to make this possible.

I am sure that fans the world over will be increasingly vocal in their condemnation of the Blatter regime, and FIFA's sponsors need to think long and hard about whether they want to be associated with such a discredited and disgraced organisation. For the good of the game, we must work together to bring about change. For the good of the game, it is time for Sepp Blatter to go.

Chris Bryant: Sepp Blatter has shown that he cannot and will not bring about the reform FIFA needs. He may have survived last Friday thanks to his mafioso

cronyism, but he is the tainted leader of a corrupt organisation and by clinging on he is merely dragging FIFA further and further into the mud.

Does the Secretary of State agree that UEFA and the other major football associations should now consider setting up alternative competitions for 2018 and 2022? Will the Prime Minister, as a matter of urgency, call a summit of British representatives of the sponsors, the broadcasters and the football associations to agree a robust common position? Will he make clear the damage that sponsors are doing to their own reputation by being so mealy-mouthed about reform at FIFA? Money cannot have the last say.

The US indictment states that three of Britain's overseas territories—the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands and Turks and Caicos—played a part in masking kickbacks. Will the Foreign and Commonwealth Office ensure the full compliance of those territories with any ongoing investigations—and if they refuse, will the Government appoint their own special investigator and prosecutor for those territories?

We also now learn that Barclays, HSBC and Standard Chartered have launched internal reviews into whether they were used for corrupt payments, but should these not be criminal investigations being led by the prosecuting authorities in this country? Why is it that the pioneering investigative reporting of *The Sunday Times* and "Panorama" has been left to one side, with only the US and the Swiss taking the lead on prosecutions?

Can the Minister confirm whether the Financial Conduct Authority and Serious Fraud Office are investigating whether bribery took place on British soil, used British financial institutions or involved British sponsors or broadcasters? If they are investigating corruption at FIFA, do they have the resources they need to prosecute their investigations vigorously and swiftly? If they are not investigating, why on earth not?

Mr Whittingdale: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's comments about Sepp Blatter. We are completely at one about the need for him to go as soon as possible.

The hon. Gentleman raised the possibility of an alternative World cup, and the question of whether UEFA might be promoting such an alternative. I have spoken to Greg Dyke about that. The one thing that is absolutely clear is that any serious attempt to organise an alternative to the existing World cup would be possible only if there were strong agreement throughout the European nations, and preferably with other football associations around the world. The first thing that needs to happen is for that to be discussed within UEFA. As the hon. Gentleman will know, UEFA will meet later this week, and I know that Greg Dyke will be discussing such matters with his colleagues. However, I think that this is, in the first instance, a matter for football to decide, and my answer to the hon. Gentleman's question about a prime ministerial summit would be the same.

There is agreement in this country about the need for change, and the need for us to do all that we can to bring it about. What is important is to try to find allies in the rest of Europe who will join us in making the case for change, and Greg Dyke will be concentrating on that towards the end of this week.

[*Mr Whittingdale*]

I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman about the need for sponsors to think very carefully. Visa has already made a strong statement, and other sponsors have expressed unhappiness, but we would like them to go much further. We will be talking to them when it is appropriate to do so, and stressing that they should consider the damage that may potentially be done to them if they continue to be associated with FIFA—although I suspect that we may not have much luck with Gazprom.

I hear what the hon. Gentleman says about the British overseas territories, and I shall be happy to talk to my colleagues in the Foreign Office, but I will say now that this and, indeed, all suggestions of malpractice, either in the United Kingdom or in British overseas territories, should of course be investigated. I understand that the Serious Fraud Office has information which it is currently assessing. Obviously that is a matter for the SFO, but we have made it clear that we will co-operate with the investigations that are currently being conducted by both the United States and the Swiss authorities, and will be happy to supply them with any information that they need.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. There is understandable interest in this subject, the urgency of which is reflected in the selection of the question, but, as no fewer than 56 Members will be seeking to catch my eye during the subsequent debate, I do not intend to allow these exchanges to continue beyond 2.55 pm. Short questions and short answers are the order of the day.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend for the measured way in which he is dealing with the situation. However, football fans—not just throughout the United Kingdom, but elsewhere in Europe and, indeed, the world—will be listening and watching in disbelief at what is happening. My right hon. Friend talked briefly about the importance of securing a co-ordinated response; perhaps he will take a few moments to give us a little more detail about how he will ensure that the change that is needed receives widespread support, not just in the United Kingdom and not just in Europe, but throughout the world.

Mr Whittingdale: My right hon. Friend is right to stress the need to gather together as many allies as possible. Obviously, that will be discussed by UEFA in the first instance, and when I see Greg Dyke later this week, I will certainly talk to him about the further steps that he intends to take. It is worth noting, however, that while we understand that most of the northern European countries voted against Sepp Blatter, we believe that most, if not all, Latin American countries did so as well, which shows that concern about the way in which FIFA is behaving now extends well beyond Europe.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's overdue promotion, and the positive signal that it sends to the House about the importance of Select Committees. Does he agree that there is a model for the cleaning up of an international sporting organisation—namely, what we did about the Olympics after Salt Lake City—which will, however, require concerted

action by the individual states' sporting organisations and, critically, their Governments? Does he agree that the British Government and others that want clean football must take the lead in that action?

Mr Whittingdale: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks. I completely agree with him. What happened 15 or 20 years ago following the Salt Lake City bid, which led to a complete reform of the International Olympic Committee, provides a very good precedent for the tackling of matters such as this. The IOC, which at that time suffered from allegations much the same as those that are now swirling around FIFA, did clean up its act, which shows that a result is certainly possible. The British Government will work with the FA in putting as much pressure as we can on other football associations to ensure that FIFA takes the same route as the IOC.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): Will the Secretary of State make absolutely certain that, with this “cling-on” in charge of FIFA, the sponsors will know that their names will be associated not with the beautiful game, but with a corrupt and discredited organisation?

Mr Whittingdale: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to focus on the sponsors as one of the ways we can best exert pressure on FIFA to make change. The sponsors are paying a huge amount of money because they want to be associated with this game, which is popular and loved by so many around the world. If it becomes clear that FIFA is instead identified with corruption and sleaze, it must be for them to consider very carefully whether they still wish to be associated with it.

Stewart McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): I declare an interest of sorts as the Member representing Hampden Park in the south side of Glasgow. I know that the Scottish Football Association and the FA are looking to work through UEFA to address both the immediate FIFA governance issues and the ongoing efforts to clean up the beautiful game. Can the Secretary of State assure the House that either he or his Department will seek the views of the SFA, the Football Association of Wales and the Irish Football Association as well as the FA before undertaking any actions for FIFA in the future, and will he keep the Scottish Government fully updated on his Department's work?

Mr Whittingdale: As the hon. Gentleman says, there are the four home nation football associations, all of whom have their part to play, and as far as I am aware at the moment they are united in their stand and will be working through UEFA, but I am very happy to talk to them. I am sure the English FA is in touch with the FAs of the other three nations and I am also happy to talk to my counterparts in the Scottish Government and Welsh Assembly at any time.

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): May I take this opportunity to briefly congratulate your team, Mr Speaker, and mine on its 4-0 victory on Saturday?

Will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State tell the House what sum out of the BBC licence fee has gone to FIFA to pay for the coverage of the 2018 and

2022 World cups and what discussions he has had with the BBC as to whether that money is being appropriately used given the revelations?

Mr Whittingdale: I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend. I am sure the congratulations to Arsenal will be echoed around the House—although perhaps not by every Member. I am afraid that I cannot give him the precise figure that he requests about the BBC, but I am very happy to obtain it and let him have it in due course. It is a difficulty; if the World cup proceeds, and particularly if England or any of the home nations are participants in it, clearly people in this country will want to watch those games. Nevertheless, my hon. and learned Friend raises a valid point and we will certainly want to take it into account in considering all these matters.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): In all his representations to FIFA, will the Secretary of State also have a thought for the thousands of migrant workers who have already died in Qatar during the construction of its palaces for the next-but-one World cup, and lay the blame at the door of FIFA for its sponsorship and promotion of it, and its lamentable failure to put any real pressure on the Qatari Government to protect those workers and give them decent rights?

Mr Whittingdale: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern about reports of the conditions faced by the migrant workers in Qatar. It is obviously a slightly separate matter from the matter under discussion today, but that does not in any way diminish concern about those reports. We have made the Qatari Government aware of our concerns where there are such reports, and they have assured us that conditions are being improved, not least through the workers charter, but we will continue to watch this carefully.

Jesse Norman (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con): My hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins) has rightly highlighted the role of the Fraud Act 2006, the Bribery Act 2010 and the Serious Fraud Office. Is there not a case for prosecutions under section 7 of the Bribery Act and is there not a case for my right hon. Friend bringing Adidas, Visa, McDonald's and the other sponsors into his office and giving them a bit of a carpeting on that basis?

Mr Whittingdale: My hon. Friend will understand that investigations by the Serious Fraud Office are operational matters. I know that the SFO is assessing the information that it has received, but I cannot provide any details beyond that. Nevertheless, it is worth observing the reasons why the American and Swiss authorities have been in the lead in this matter. The US indictments have made it clear that they relate to offences committed by US citizens as well as others, potentially on US soil. Equally, the Swiss authorities have jurisdiction because FIFA is based in Switzerland. That is not to say, however, that if there is any evidence of wrongdoing taking place in this country or by UK citizens, we should not pursue it. I know that that is something the SFO is considering.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): There is clearly cross-party support for the removal of Sepp Blatter and for real reform of the governance of world football, just as there is support for those things across

the country. Will the Secretary of State have conversations with his ministerial colleagues and his European counterparts about why it has taken a non-football nation, America, to investigate this kind of corruption? The corruption was suspected, yet it was apparently ignored by this country and other European nations.

Mr Whittingdale: I think the hon. Gentleman is being slightly harsh towards American football—by which I mean American soccer. It is well known that the reach of the US authorities is longer in some instances due to the legislation on the books there. These matters have been of concern to us for a long time, but the question of whether there is evidence that offences have been committed in this country is still under examination. The important thing now is that we should all work together and we will obviously give every support to the authorities conducting criminal investigations and respond to their every request for additional information.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): What a contrast between the beautiful game displayed by Arsenal on Saturday and the ugly dealings of FIFA! And what hope is there for concerted action, not least by UEFA, when countries such as France vote in favour of Sepp Blatter?

Mr Whittingdale: The voting on Friday was not public, although there has been widespread speculation about which countries supported Mr Blatter and which voted for the alternative. The important thing now is to try to build as wide a consensus as possible, and in the early stages that will be within UEFA. I very much hope that the French will be a part of that consensus.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Secretary of State's robustness in this matter, but further to the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw), what further conversations is the right hon. Gentleman having with his counterparts around the world? We clearly need to see pressure from UEFA but also courage from the political masters around the world.

Mr Whittingdale: The hon. Lady will know from the exchanges that took place last Thursday that the Minister for sport, the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), wrote on that day to all her counterparts in the European capitals to call for co-ordinated action. This is a matter for football in the first instance, and I want to work closely with the English FA and the other home nations' FAs, but if they believe that it would be helpful for us to try to persuade other countries to act together with us by contacting members of the Governments of those countries, I would be happy to do that.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): The election of Sepp Blatter is as unsurprising as it is depressing, but does the Secretary of State agree that the biggest losers in all this are the millions of fans and players, not only in this country but around the world, who simply want an open and honest system for managing the sport? They are the ones who are often overlooked in this whole process.

Mr Whittingdale: I agree with my hon. Friend. In many ways, this is the tragedy of what is now unfolding. Not only is the game loved by millions across the world, but the World Cup is seen as one of the greatest sporting competitions, second only to the Olympics. For that reason, we would not want to try to interfere with that unless it became clear that to do so was the only way of proceeding. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that it is ultimately the fans who will be most upset and who will lose out unless change is brought about in FIFA.

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): The Secretary of State has said that it was a disgraceful decision, that FIFA is discredited, and that he is seeking allies across Europe. As the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) mentioned, Sky has reported that France and Spain voted for Blatter. What correspondence and conversations has the Secretary of State had with his colleagues in France and Spain, in other European countries and in the home nations to take his agenda forward?

Mr Whittingdale: As I said earlier, I am very happy to have such conversations if the English FA suggests that it would be helpful to do so. It is not entirely clear which way France and Spain voted, although I have seen the reports to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. Whichever way countries voted on Friday, I hope they will now recognise the strength of opinion right across the world that is demanding change and will join us in pressing for it.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Does the excellent new Secretary of State agree that the situation is so serious that we might see England boycotting a FIFA World cup? Does he have the impression that that might happen, having spoken to Greg Dyke?

Mr Whittingdale: The chairman of the English FA has been very clear on this matter: a boycott by England would be self-defeating. If we are to put pressure on FIFA to change, such a tactic would be effective only if we could get the support of a significant number of other countries. So the first priority is to assess how much support there would be for such moves. If it could be demonstrated that there was significant support, that alone might be sufficient to force change. Obviously, that kind of incentive is effective only if it is believed that it will be used unless change takes place.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): The Secretary of State continues to say that this is a matter for the football authorities. Does he accept that it is a matter for everybody who is interested in football? He has indicated he will do this, but as a first step will he give a time scale for getting together with the culture Ministers of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and the football associations of those countries to examine how, in the light of what my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Graham Jones) said, we could get a collective platform in Europe and start the ball rolling in that sense?

Mr Whittingdale: I merely say again that the English FA is in close touch with the other home nations. I am very happy to talk to my opposite numbers from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. We will make it clear that

we are all united in trying to force FIFA to accept the pressure for change, but I will be guided by the football authorities in this first instance. I have made it clear to them that whatever help they feel they need, I would be happy to provide.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): England has repeatedly tried to host the World cup finals and been unsuccessful. Can the Secretary of State confirm that there has been no corruption involved in any of the England bids? Does the fact that England has been unwilling to play FIFA's games explain why those bids were unsuccessful?

Mr Whittingdale: My hon. Friend will have seen the outcome of the process when England did make a bid for the 2018 World cup; we received just one vote, apart from our own. That in itself suggests that probably there were not the same incentives to vote for England as other countries were perhaps offering at that time.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The Garcia inquiry was meant to investigate allegations of wrongdoing and bring to light any proven evidence about corruption, but the report was subsequently locked away and Garcia has disowned the summary that was produced by FIFA. Does the Secretary of State accept that until that report is published in full, the World cups in Russia and Qatar do not have a shred of credibility?

Mr Whittingdale: I strongly agree with the hon. Gentleman that the Garcia report should be published in full. We were assured that that would happen but it has not, and Mr Garcia has made his profound dissatisfaction about that clear. But even the Garcia report did not go far enough, in that the enormous quantity of evidence suggesting corruption, which was published by *The Sunday Times*, was not examined by Mr Garcia. So even the report on the rather limited investigation that did take place has not been properly published, which is why the current investigations by the US authorities and, in particular, the Swiss authorities into the bidding process stand a better chance of exposing what actually happened.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): I, too, declare an interest as Cardiff City's ground is in my constituency, and Wales will be playing Belgium there later this month. The Secretary of State is coming across as if he is not taking a very activist approach to this matter. A few moments ago, he effectively said that bribery was responsible for the awarding of the World cup, when the Prime Minister and the second in line to the throne invested a lot of time and effort in that bid and the English FA put in a lot of money. If he really believes that, should he not be calling into his office the sponsors and the authorities and everyone else to ensure that we in this country are taking the maximum action?

Mr Whittingdale: A criminal investigation into the bidding process for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups is under way, and we will co-operate fully with it. We will give it every support that it requires, and we will wait to see the outcome of that investigation. Clearly, if it were proven that corruption was involved, there would be serious questions about whether the outcome should remain, but we are not at that stage yet.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I will accommodate remaining interest if Members ask single, short, supplementary questions, rather than taking the Brennan approach, which was enjoyable but marginally longer.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): Four years ago, the Prime Minister told Sepp Blatter that he had taken the game of football to new heights. I welcome the change of heart in the approach being taken, but will the Secretary of State listen to those Members who have called for the Government to be behind the efforts that are being proposed?

Mr Whittingdale: I was one of those Members. This was a matter that the Select Committee investigated three or four years ago. At that time, we expressed our profound dissatisfaction. We should give credit to the English FA for leading the campaign for change. Under the leadership of David Bernstein, before Greg Dyke, the FA made it plain that Sepp Blatter should not continue. That view received very little support then, but we have been drawing attention to the accusations and allegations of corruption within FIFA for some considerable time.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Newcastle is home to some of the most passionate football fans in the world, and the re-election of Sepp Blatter is a betrayal of that passion. The Secretary of State has implied that most of the support for Sepp Blatter comes from the African and Asian continents. Why is that and what can he and football fans do to address that?

Mr Whittingdale: It is a system whereby each country—there are 209 of them—has one vote. Some of those countries are small with very few resources of their

own. There is no doubt that FIFA provides considerable resources to support football in such countries. It is a system that is almost designed to ensure that support can be bought. Therefore, what is required is not just a change of leadership but a fundamental reform of the way FIFA operates.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): The Secretary of State is absolutely right to say that any decision regarding an alternative tournament must be for football itself. Would he not care to promulgate the idea that the home nations are open for business? We have the stadiums and there would be nowhere more appropriate for football to become clean than for football to come home to Wembley in the London borough of Brent.

Mr Whittingdale: I say again that we are not yet at that stage. It is a matter for the FA and other football associations to decide whether it is necessary to consider an alternative tournament. The hon. Gentleman will recall that England put in an extremely convincing bid for the 2018 World cup, although, at the time, it received very little support.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): It has been reported that there was an internal report that recommended that there should be term limits for the person who holds the post of Mr Blatter and that that was blocked not by the other regional federations but by UEFA. Can the Secretary of State confirm that that is the case, and if so, is there not a problem in UEFA as well as in FIFA?

Mr Whittingdale: Mr Blatter has now been re-elected after 17 years in the post. I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman whether UEFA blocked a proposal to impose a term limit, but I observe that Mr Platini was one of those who, unsuccessfully, went to Sepp Blatter to try to persuade him not to stand again.

Debate on the Address

[3RD DAY]

Debate resumed, (Order, 28 May).

Question again proposed,

That an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

Britain in the World

3.5 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): It is a privilege to open this debate on Britain's role in the world. It sends a powerful signal that Parliament is focused on this important area so early in its term.

I apologise in advance to you, Mr Speaker, and to the House, for the fact that I will not be in the Chamber for tonight's winding-up speeches as I have to represent the UK at an ISIL coalition core group meeting in Paris. I am grateful to you, Mr Speaker, and to the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) for your understanding. I also congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his appointment as shadow Foreign Secretary and look forward to a constructive working relationship with him while he is in post.

The UK is one of only a small number of countries with both the aspiration and the means to play a significant role in world affairs. Maintaining that engagement is very much in our national interest. As one of the most open economies in the world—a nation that earns its living through trade in goods and services across the global commons—we have a greater stake than most in securing: a world that operates according to a rules-based system of conduct in which international norms are respected, differences are resolved through the application of legal principles and the zero-sum game approach is rejected in favour of a recognition of mutual benefit through international co-operation; a world in which the majority of nations work together with a common agenda and resolve to isolate rogue states and suppress terrorists and others who threaten the rule of law; and a rules-based international order that is in Britain's interest but is also in the interest of building stability, security and prosperity for the world's population as a whole. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council and a leading member of the EU and NATO, as well as the G7, the G20 and the Commonwealth, Britain is in a better position to help deliver that ambition than most.

Sadly, as we look around us today, we see that we are far from that vision of the world. In Europe, where we thought the rules-based system was well established, we face the challenge of a Russia riding roughshod over it by illegally violating Ukrainian sovereignty. The middle east and north Africa are threatened by a violent Islamist extremism that by its actions has shown itself the enemy of every reasonable vision for civilisation and a travesty of the values of the religion it purports to defend. In the

south and East China sea we see China asserting territorial claims with a vigour that is alarming her neighbours and increasing the risk of escalation. Although the rise of new powers creates a new source of opportunity for greater global prosperity, it also presents the challenge of persuading those emerging powers to accept the norms that keep the peace between nations.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): The Secretary of State mentioned in his preamble the importance of our membership of the European Union. Is it his intention when the referendum happens to vote for our remaining members of the European Union?

Mr Hammond: My sincere hope is that we will be able to negotiate a substantive package of reform of how the European Union works and changes to Britain's relationship with the European Union that will enable us to recommend a yes vote to the people of this country when they make that decision in due course. If I may, I shall come back to that theme in just a moment.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): The Foreign Secretary mentioned what is going on in the South China sea. As he knows, I have for a number of months expressed concern in this Chamber about the actions of the Chinese Government in building runways and port facilities on uninhabited and disputed atolls. What does the Secretary of State think the UK can do about it? Is he in discussions with the Chinese? Has he made representations about our concerns to them? What discussions is he having with our allies in the five power defence arrangements?

Mr Hammond: My right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary is just back today from the Shangri-La dialogue meeting in Singapore, where that has been a major theme. It is a matter of concern when any power, however great, starts to exercise its territorial claims in a way that gives rise to alarm among its neighbours. What we all fear is destabilisation in the South China sea. What we need to see is the many territorial disputes in that area resolved by arbitration and the application of the principles of international law, just as we seek to see those principles applied more widely.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): The Foreign Secretary has already mentioned a list of matters the world over that have within them threats to human rights. Does he therefore support this country's withdrawal from the European convention on human rights?

Mr Hammond: That is not the proposal on the table. The proposal, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, is to ensure that our obligations in respect of compliance with the human rights agenda are overseen by judges in this country, in the context of what is happening in this country. My right hon. Friend the Justice Secretary is looking now at how best to deliver that in a way that is acceptable to the British people and compliant with our obligations under international law.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Hammond: I shall make a little progress, if I may.

It is also in Britain's interest and in Europe's interest that we resolve decisively the question of Britain's relationship with the EU. Alongside the challenges and threats to the rules-based international system, negotiating

a better future for Europe and our future relationship with Europe will be one of the overriding priorities of Britain's foreign policy agenda in this Parliament. Allowing the British people to have the final say on Britain's future in Europe was one of the centrepieces of the Conservative party's offer to the electorate at the recent election, and one that distinguished us from the Opposition parties.

The British people grabbed that offer with both hands, and whatever revisionism we now see from the Opposition, the British people will not forget in a hurry who was prepared to trust them with this decision on Britain's future and who was not. The introduction of the European Union Referendum Bill last week represented an election promise delivered by this Government, and I look forward to making the case for a referendum—a case that Labour, the SNP and the Liberal Democrats have all denied—in the Second Reading debate next week.

The three key immediate challenges we face are clear: repelling the threat to the established order from Russia and developing a response to its doctrine of asymmetric warfare; crushing the evil and poisonous ideology of ISIL and extremist Islamism more generally; and resolving Britain's relationship with the European Union.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): My right hon. Friend says that we should not link that evil organisation in Syria and Iraq, Daesh, with Islam, but the international community is doing so indirectly by calling it Islamic State. It is not a state, it is not Islamic and it is an affront to billions of Muslims around the world to call it Islamic State. Will the United Kingdom do what Turkey and other countries do and call it Daesh, or Faesh in Arabic?

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend will not have heard me using the two unmentionable words that he uttered. I use the term ISIL. Daesh is equally acceptable. I would be grateful if he presented his argument to the BBC and perhaps got it to adopt his very sensible proposal.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): Is this an opportunity for the Foreign Secretary to update the House on what the British Government are doing in Iraq and the support of the front-line forces in training?

Mr Hammond: If the hon. Lady will allow me, I shall come on to Iraq specifically shortly. I will address her question then and I will happily come back to her if she wants to ask a supplementary question at that point.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Hammond: I shall take one more intervention, then I must make progress.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I am grateful to the Foreign Secretary for giving way. In relation to the EU and his trips to see his counterparts in the European Union, and the Prime Minister's trips, is a two-speed Europe developing, where some of the European countries want closer political union and the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary want the EU to become more like a common market?

Mr Hammond: I have always rejected the concept of a two-speed Europe because that implies that we are all going to the same place but that some of us are getting there faster than others. I rather like the concept of a two-pillar Europe that recognises that there will be a more integrated eurozone core but that there will be countries such as the UK that are not and never will be part of the eurozone and will have a less integrated relationship within the European Union. This is the basis on which we should discuss these issues going forward.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Hammond: I will make a little progress before happily giving way again.

I have set out the three key immediate challenges we face. Our resolve to deliver on each of them should not be doubted, and, although all three are in our near abroad, neither should our commitment to playing a role on the broader world stage, re-enforcing Britain's reputation as a reliable ally and partner in the task of sustaining the global order.

Over the past five years we have seen our overseas aid budget saving lives, preventing conflict and raising living standards in 28 countries across Africa, Asia and the middle east. We have seen our armed forces deployed in Afghanistan, building that country's ability to provide its own security; in Sierra Leone, battling Ebola; in the Philippines, responding to Typhoon Haiyan; and, just recently, in Nepal, in the wake of the terrible earthquake there. We have played a leading role in countering nuclear proliferation, including in negotiations with Iran. We have led the world's engagement in Somalia, stabilising the country and leading the naval force that eradicated piracy from the horn of Africa.

The tireless work of our officials at the UN in New York, at NATO in Brussels and in other international organisations has kept us at the forefront of multilateral diplomacy. We are a leading player in climate change diplomacy, as we approach this December's crucial Paris meeting. The quietly effective work of our embassies and missions around the world daily played its role in reducing tensions and managing conflict, from the South China sea to Africa's great lakes.

Mr Keith Simpson (Broadland) (Con): My right hon. Friend has articulated three challenges we now face. May I suggest that he consider a fourth challenge: matching our capabilities with resources? The strategic defence and security review will take place this autumn. Will the savings that the Treasury requires be made before or after the review?

Mr Hammond: The three key immediate challenges that will dominate our foreign policy thinking, which I have set out, are plain to see. The question of how we develop the toolkit to respond to them is an equally valid but different question. To answer my hon. Friend's specific question, my understanding is that the strategic defence and security review and the comprehensive spending review will take place in parallel and lead to conclusions later this year.

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): In the light of the positive contribution that 16 and 17-year-olds made in the referendum in Scotland, does the Foreign Secretary feel that it is now time to give them the chance to vote in the forthcoming referendum?

Mr Hammond: The answer is no. If the hon. Lady has read the Bill that has been published, she will know that the intention is to operate on the Westminster franchise, plus peers and citizens of Gibraltar resident in the UK. We think that is the right way to proceed on a matter that is reserved and is of importance to the whole United Kingdom.

No one should doubt the Government's ambition to sustain and strengthen Britain's role in the world. How, colleagues might ask, are we positioned to deliver on that ambition? In the previous Parliament we made significant progress, and I want to pay tribute to my predecessor, William Hague, for reversing many of the mistakes of the Blair and Brown years and laying the sound foundations upon which we are now building. However, I am the first to recognise that there is much more to do in this Parliament to finish the job, as we complete the task of rebuilding Britain's public finances and reinvigorating Britain's economy. Our economic security and our national security are two sides of the same coin—without one, we cannot have the other. Our prosperity depends upon Britain remaining an outward-looking nation that is engaged with the world, and strong national security is underpinned by a strong and growing economy.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Has the Foreign Secretary seen the recent reports from *The Washington Post* columnist Fareed Zakaria, who points out that the United Kingdom's inward turn over recent years, moving away from engagement in the world, is folly not just for our country but for the international order?

Mr Hammond: There is always a lag in these things. There was indeed an "inward turn" by the United Kingdom, but it took place in the period 2007 to 2010. That is a matter of deep regret that we are now in the process of reversing.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Hammond: I want to build on the point that I have made to the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes). In 2010 we inherited a hollowed-out system, with public finances that were on the brink of collapse after years of overspending and over-borrowing, and the largest peacetime deficit in this country's history.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab) *rose*—

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Hammond: I see that there are still one or two overspending deniers on the Labour Back Benches.

All this was the product of years of mismanagement by Labour—economic decline that had diminished our global influence. In defence, we inherited an equipment programme that was wholly unsustainable and a budget with a £38 billion black hole at its heart. In the Foreign Office, Labour's legacy was a shrunken diplomatic network that was demoralised and in decline. Faced with the urgent challenge of rebuilding our economy and our public finances, and looking at the devastation of the levers of hard and soft power that we inherited, we could have accepted strategic shrinkage as inevitable and settled for decline in our global influence—but we did not.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): The Foreign Secretary was absolutely right to pay tribute to his predecessor, the former Member for Richmond, Yorkshire, because since 2010 we have put the word "Commonwealth" truly back at the centre of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office—something that was desperately lacking under the previous Labour Government.

Mr Hammond: It was one of the many things that were desperately lacking. I was a little surprised by the comments of the other Miliband—the former Foreign Secretary—last week, because they read like the comments of a man who has never been inside the Foreign Office and has no recollection of the damage that the previous Labour Government did to our foreign policy and its instruments.

Mr Jim Cunningham *rose*—

Jonathan Ashworth *rose*—

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Hammond: I want to make a little more progress and then I will give way.

In the face of continuous opposition from Labour, we chose to tackle Britain's problems in 2010, not paper over them with more borrowed money. We chose growth over recession, jobs over welfare, strength over weakness, and influence over decline. We stuck to our pledge to meet the United Nations target for development aid and committed to ensuring it was used to complement our global objectives. We are rebuilding Britain's economy to be among the most dynamic in the developed world, with the fastest rate of growth in the G7 last year and the fastest rate of job creation in the European Union, earning the respect that underpins our role as a player on the world stage.

Let us not forget, and let us not allow others to airbrush out, the situation we inherited and the tough decisions we had to take. Armed forces had been sent into battle in Afghanistan without the protective vehicles, body armour and helicopter lift they needed to keep them safe. Under Labour's stewardship, the Foreign Office had shut down over 30 diplomatic missions, ignored trade and investment opportunities around the world, and neglected vital relationships, including those with some of our closest allies—a neglect exemplified by the fact that during the entirety of Labour's 13 years in office no Labour Foreign Secretary set foot in Australia, one of our closest allies.

Mr Jim Cunningham: In the Foreign Secretary's report on foreign policy worldwide, he failed to mention the situation between the Palestinians and the Israelis. How far down the road to progress have we got on that?

Mr Hammond: Not nearly far enough. The Israeli election process and the process of forming a Government—the initiative that had started last year—has stalled, and now there is a common consensus among those most concerned with this issue that we have to complete the sensitive Iran nuclear negotiations before trying to kick-start the middle east peace process again. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise this because it lies at the root of so many of the other challenges that we face in the region, and we absolutely have to return to it over the course of this summer.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): Since the House last sat, the situation in Yemen has deteriorated to a terrible extent, with thousands of people being killed and there are still some British citizens who are trapped there. I know that the Foreign Secretary is focused on this issue, but will he tell the House what further help we can give to President Hadi, who is the legitimately elected President of Yemen?

Mr Hammond: The long-term sustainable solution in Yemen has to be an inclusive Government that represent all the elements in that country. The Houthi may be the subject of the Gulf Co-operation Council coalition's attacks at the moment, but they are not the enemy: they are part of the community in Yemen and they have to be brought inside. Our focus at the moment is on trying to secure the agreed UN conference that we had hoped would take place last week but which has not yet happened. We shall continue to use our diplomatic efforts to ensure that it happens as soon as possible.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): My constituents are particularly interested in Cyprus. The situation there has been left unresolved; indeed, the country has been divided for more than 40 years and there was a manifesto commitment to seek a resolution in that troubled island. Given the election of Mr Mustafa Akinci, which is a very positive development for Turkish Cypriots, what prospect does the Foreign Secretary see for the reunification of the island and is it a priority of his?

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend's question is timely, because I do not think we have seen—certainly not in my political lifetime—the stars as optimistically aligned as they are now for Cyprus. We have a Turkish Cypriot community leader and a Greek Cypriot President who are committed to a settlement, a Government in Athens that are distracted by problems of their own, a President in Turkey who is also clearly amenable to the idea of a settlement, and an excellent UN-appointed intermediary who is making progress with the talks that are going on right now. I hope to visit Cyprus in the near future and I have been discussing the issue with my Cypriot counterpart over the past few days. I think we should be optimistic and the UK is, of course, fully supportive of the process of finding a lasting resolution to the situation in Cyprus. The UK has made a very big and generous offer that, as part of a proper, comprehensive settlement, we will surrender a significant proportion of the land mass of the sovereign base area in Cyprus to allow the economic development of southern Cyprus.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Hammond: I am going to make a little progress.

It fell to us in 2010 to hold the first strategic defence and security review for almost a generation and to balance the books in the Ministry of Defence. It fell to us to replace Labour's system of sofa government with a proper National Security Council and to reverse Labour's rundown of our diplomatic network by extending our reach with new posts in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and, of course, by undoing Labour's bewildering decision to close the Foreign Office language school.

I am proud of the achievements of the last Government and now is the time to build on them in Britain's national interest, using all the tools at our disposal—our

extensive, world-class diplomatic network; our growing economic and trading muscle; our extraordinary armed forces and military capabilities; and our generous aid budget—to continue to rebuild Britain's reach and influence across the world while tackling the three key immediate challenges I have identified.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Hammond: I will address each of those challenges in turn, but before I do so I will take an intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron).

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I thank the Foreign Secretary for giving way; he is being very generous. Given the extent of the refugee crisis that has been unfolding in Lebanon and Jordan since Parliament last met, does he accept that we need to continue as a country, together with others, to properly support those countries when dealing with refugees, because under-resourced and ill-run refugee camps can become a breeding ground for extremists?

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I entirely agree with him. The Department for International Development has a very large programme. In fact, it is our largest ever single programme of support in a humanitarian crisis. We are the second largest donor to the Syria-Jordan-Lebanon area, and we will continue to support refugees and displaced persons, and the Governments in the region, as they struggle with the consequences of what is going on.

Jeremy Corbyn: On the subject of refugees, the Foreign Secretary is obviously aware, as everyone is, of the massive flow of migrants across the Mediterranean, many thousands of whom have already died, as well as of those in the Andaman sea and elsewhere. There is a global phenomenon of victims of war, poverty and oppression fleeing in desperate circumstances. Do the Government have a strategy for supporting refugees and saving life at sea, rather than repelling people seeking a place of safety?

Mr Hammond: Yes, we do have a strategy, and we are deploying it. As the hon. Gentleman says, thousands have died in the Mediterranean, but well over 1,000 have been saved by HMS Bulwark since we deployed it to rescue people from those perilous seas.

There are of course people fleeing persecution and oppression, but there are also very large numbers of economic migrants, many of whom are trafficked by criminal gangs who have extracted from them payments that they can ill afford. It is essential that we respond to this crisis in depth, dealing with the causes upstream in the countries of origin by investing more of our development budget in trying to create better conditions there, by working with countries of transit to strengthen security and, crucially, by working to install a Government of national unity in Libya that can once again get control of that country's territory.

Jonathan Ashworth: Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

Mr Hammond: I will make some progress, but I will come back to the hon. Gentleman because he has been very persistent.

[Mr Philip Hammond]

When it comes to tackling Islamist extremism and its consequences, we will need a comprehensive approach, deploying every one of the tools available to us in a generational struggle against an evil but amorphous foe. As the brutal attacks in the past year by Islamist terrorists in Tunisia, Belgium, France, Australia, Canada and elsewhere have demonstrated, this is not just about Iraq and Syria; instability and extremism in one part of the world can end up costing innocent lives on the other side of the globe.

Established groups such as ISIL and al-Qaeda have an international reach and pose a direct threat to the safety of British citizens and those of our allies. Newer extremist groups aspire to match them. They threaten stability in regions critical to our prosperity and our security, and the brutality and suffering they inflict on communities in the areas they currently control have led to millions of people being forced to flee from their homes in search of safety.

That is why the 60-nation international coalition against ISIL, in which the UK plays a leading role, is developing a comprehensive response across five mutually reinforcing lines of effort: supporting military operations and training; stopping the flow of foreign fighters; cutting off ISIL's funding; providing humanitarian relief to those displaced by ISIL's advance; and delegitimising ISIL and its messaging. We will remain at the forefront of the battle to degrade and ultimately destroy Islamist extremism in the middle east and Africa, and to stop it spreading and undermining democracy in south-east Asia, especially in Indonesia, the largest country in the Islamic world.

Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con): My right hon. Friend is speaking very well about everything Britain can do to prevent ISIL from killing people in Syria and the middle east. What can we do to prevent the appalling tragedy that might befall the great ruins—the great archaeological site, I should say—in Palmyra? Is there any hope he can offer?

Mr Hammond: I know that my hon. Friend is extremely concerned about this issue, but he will know that ISIL, for what it is worth, has given some limited assurances about its intentions with regard to the site. The problem is that the principal instrument the coalition has to deploy is air power, and he can well understand the difficulty in deploying air power to protect historical sites—that does not make sense. I am afraid that the answer lies in the relentless pursuit of the campaign against ISIL: pushing them back on the ground, pushing them back wherever they present themselves.

Jonathan Ashworth: Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

Mr Hammond: Yes. Simply on the basis of persistence, the hon. Gentleman must be allowed to intervene.

Jonathan Ashworth: I am extremely grateful to the Foreign Secretary for giving way. He is at great pains to convince us that the UK is not retreating from the world stage, despite increasing commentary that it is. In that spirit, will he tell us what representations he has made

to the Burmese authorities about the Rohingya refugees and migrants? Will he tell us from the Dispatch Box that it is UK policy to say to the Burmese that they should grant citizenship to the Rohingya?

Mr Hammond: Yes, that is our policy, and we have made representations in that respect. I am cautiously optimistic that there is a change going on in Burma among the political elite about this issue, under pressure from the international community in the face of what is another humanitarian disaster in that part of the world.

Those who are suffering most from the ravages of extremism are the Iraqi and Syrian people, so we will maintain our support for the Iraqi Government, as they seek to reverse the mistakes of the past and to deal simultaneously with the threat from ISIL, a perilous humanitarian situation within their borders and the fiscal impact of the low oil price.

At the request of the Iraqi Government, we are delivering vital military equipment and training to the Iraqi security forces. After the US, no nation has delivered more coalition airstrikes in Iraq than Britain. We will go on doing so. But we are clear, and the Iraqi Government are clear, that western boots on the ground cannot be the answer. The task of pushing back ISIL on the ground in Iraq has to be fulfilled by local forces. That means Sunni forces must be generated to push ISIL out of Sunni-dominated Anbar province and to retake Mosul.

Ultimately, it is only Iraqi unity, built on the back of an inclusive Government, that can defeat ISIL in Iraq. I therefore welcome Prime Minister Abadi's commitments to reform and his efforts to reach out to all of Iraq's communities. I met him in Baghdad in April, and I will be meeting him again in Paris tomorrow. I will reinforce to him our commitment to help his Government achieve the genuine political reform and meaningful national reconciliation that are so badly needed. I will reinforce to his Sunni Gulf neighbours the important role that they must play in mobilising the Sunni in Iraq to balance the fighting forces effectively deployed by the Kurds and the Shi'a.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): What is the Foreign Secretary's assessment of the state of relations between the Kurdish regional Government and the central Iraqi Government? Has progress been made since the new Prime Minister took office?

Mr Hammond: Yes. The hon. Gentleman made that question much easier with the last phrase: since Prime Minister Abadi took office, there is no doubt that relations between the Kurds and the central Iraqi Government have become much less strained. Within that, there have been ebbs and flows in the relationship and tensions, created, frankly, by the collapse in the oil price—in the end, a great deal of this is about the sharing of revenues and resources, and when the cake is smaller, the discussion becomes very much more difficult, as the hon. Gentleman will know.

In Syria, we will continue to seek a political settlement to the civil war, which has allowed ISIL to seize control of large swathes—

Ms Gisela Stuart *rose*—

Mr Hammond: I did say I would give way to the hon. Lady on Iraq. I do beg her pardon.

Ms Stuart: I am very grateful, because I am still not clear on one issue. If press reports are to be believed, our involvement in training Iraqi forces has moved closer to actually training combat forces. I am also not entirely clear whether all our training—that includes of the Syrians—is happening outside Syria and Iraq, or whether more is going on inside Iraq and Syria.

Mr Hammond: The answer is that, in relation to Syria, we are doing our training outside the country; in relation to Iraq, we are doing training inside Iraq. We are providing important specialist training to Iraqi forces—particularly counter-improvised explosive device training, which is probably the most pressing single need they have at the moment. We are actively looking at areas where we can increase our support; what we are looking for is areas where we can bring something to the table that others cannot—where we have a niche capability that will deliver a meaningful benefit to the Iraqi forces.

In Syria, we have to seek a political settlement to the civil war, which has allowed ISIL to control large swathes of territory in which to create a nascent terrorist state. We support UN special envoy de Mistura's efforts to kick-start a political dialogue, and we will continue to train and support the moderate armed opposition and to seek a settlement that leads to a truly inclusive Government that can then tackle ISIL head on.

We are clear that Syria cannot overcome the extremist threat so long as Assad remains in power. As the forces under his command and control showed through their use of chemical weapons against their people and through their continued use of indiscriminate barrel bombing—including attacks over the weekend in Aleppo province—he has lost any claim to legitimacy in Syria. Assad is the heart of the problem. He has triggered a crisis that worsens day by day: 220,000 people dead, nearly 4 million people forced from their homes and more than 12 million in extreme need. We will maintain our leading humanitarian role. With our international partners, we must be ready to support a post-Assad regime to prevent the country being overrun by ISIL and to contain other Islamist extremist forces as it consolidates power.

Rehman Chishti: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Hammond: I will in just a moment.

While we work with our coalition partners to use the full range of diplomatic, economic and military tools to overcome a barbaric terrorist organisation with aspirations to statehood on NATO's south-eastern flank, we must at the same time face a renewed threat on Europe's eastern border to the rules-based international system. At the end of the cold war, we sought to draw Russia into the international community of nations by offering investment, trade and friendship, but President Putin has rebuffed those efforts. By his illegal annexation of Crimea and Russia's destabilising activities in eastern Ukraine, he has demonstrated beyond doubt that he has chosen the role of strategic competitor. He appears intent on destabilising eastern Europe with the threat of a new and highly dangerous form of hybrid asymmetric warfare.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Before my right hon. Friend moved on from the middle east I wanted to catch him on the nuclear verification programme for Iran. Is he really happy with it, and does it capture the potential military uses that it could be put to?

Mr Hammond: The programme as agreed at Lausanne does indeed capture that and provide very good levels of protection. Of course, we have now got to translate that into a detailed written agreement. That is the process that is going on at the moment.

Rehman Chishti: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Hammond: I must make some progress.

The Russian assault on our stability in Europe has been met with a robust response and Britain has been at the forefront of delivering it. We now need to maintain unity in the European Union and alignment with the United States to renew the sanctions until such time as Russia delivers on the pledges it made at Minsk. Sanctions must remain in place until it does so. If there are further violations, the EU has made it clear it will impose further sanctions. Nor will we forget Crimea: Russia's annexation of Crimea was illegal and illegitimate in 2014; it remains illegal and illegitimate now.

On Europe, the concerted response in Europe to Russia's aggression has shown how the European Union can leverage the muscle of 28 countries coming together to send a clear, unified message of willingness to use its economic power to protect Europe's security. We must also recognise, however, that in a rapidly globalising world, the European Union has demonstrated fundamental weaknesses that have to be addressed. The Common Market we joined 40 years ago has changed out of all recognition since then. For many people in Britain, the EU too often feels like something that is done to them, rather than for them.

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

Mr Hammond: I have to make some progress, because many Members wish to speak this afternoon.

We are clear that to be successful in the future the EU has to change course. It has to become more outward looking, more competitive and less bureaucratic. I am confident that that vision is increasingly shared across the continent. Through the renegotiation process, which the Prime Minister has now started, we have the opportunity to deliver change that will benefit all EU citizens, as well as addressing the long-standing concerns of the British people.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Does the Foreign Secretary share my concern at the forecast that in the next five years the share of world GDP by the EU will be just 60% of the level it was back in 1990? It is not just in the interests of the United Kingdom that we reach a settlement; it is in the best interests of the sustainability of the whole EU that it is reformed.

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There are two parts to this agenda: reform of the European Union to make it more competitive, more accountable, more effective and more outward looking, which is in the interests of all of us; and Britain's

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specific requirements for its relationship with the European Union. We will negotiate a package that embraces both those concepts, and crucially it is in everyone's interests that we settle the issue of Britain's relationship with the EU once and for all, and that it is the British people who make that important decision in 2017.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): The Foreign Secretary has spent a great deal of his comments talking about inertia and lack of change under the last Labour Government, and action under the last coalition Government. However, at the end of the last Labour Government there were some moves to discuss and move forward on restricting the freedom of movement of regular petty criminals. How much progress did the coalition Government make on that issue, and is it on his agenda now?

Mr Hammond: I am not aware of those discussions at the end of the last Labour Government. However, I can tell the hon. Lady that that the issue she referred to is on our agenda; in our negotiation with Europe, we will ensure that we deal with it.

Promoting prosperity was an important part of our agenda during the last Parliament and it will remain so during this Parliament. We cannot separate our economic success from our diplomatic profile—one supports the other—and so, too, our values. At the heart of our foreign policy is the recognition that protecting our security and promoting our prosperity increasingly rely upon a stable world order, which depends on there being a values-based system in the world. Our own story is one of evolution over revolution, and of perseverance over impatience, and we must never shy from telling it and sharing our experience with others who are making their own journey towards a modern and democratic system.

We will promote stable and prosperous societies as the foundation of the rules-based international system that underpins our own security and prosperity, so projecting our values is at the heart of our strategy to protect our security and promote our prosperity. It is not an afterthought; it is a core part of the agenda.

Ours is a country that is making a decisive contribution to the global agenda. We are leading reform of the European Union; drawing a line with Russia in defence of the international rules-based system and doing our share to reassure NATO's eastern members; playing a central role in the global coalition against terrorism; tackling Iran on its nuclear programme; and helping to bring stability to Somalia and an end to piracy. We are also working to secure a global climate deal in Paris later this year, and time and time again we play a leading role in bringing the world together, whether it is to overcome Ebola, to end sexual violence in conflict or to tackle the illegal wildlife trade.

To those who say that our ability to tackle the challenges of globalisation has waned, I say, "Look at our record." Our economy—the foundation of everything we do—is outperforming our peers; our armed forces are taking the fight to ISIL, and they are backed by what is the second largest defence budget in NATO and the largest in the EU; and our overseas aid budget is helping to save millions of lives, literally

making the difference between life and death in some of the poorest countries in the world. However, now is most certainly not the time to rest on our laurels. Now is the time to build on the foundations we laid in the last Parliament, using all the many tools at our disposal to shape the world around us, to broaden and deepen the rules-based international system, to meet head-on the challenges to our national security, to promote relentlessly the advancement of our national prosperity and to project confidently our values around the globe. And that is exactly what we intend to do.

3.48 pm

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on having been reappointed as Foreign Secretary, and I wish him well with his important responsibilities. From the start I assure him that where we believe it is right to do so, I and my colleagues will fully support him and the Government in matters of foreign policy.

I shall also say something about my predecessor as shadow Foreign Secretary, Douglas Alexander. For nearly 18 years, he was committed to serving his constituents, and as a Cabinet Minister and as shadow Foreign Secretary he made a distinguished contribution to public policy and our debates; he will be much missed.

I pay tribute to the men and women of our armed forces. Whether it is their courage and sacrifice in Afghanistan, conducting air missions in Iraq, helping the people of Sierra Leone affected by Ebola or saving the lives of frightened families in overcrowded boats in the Mediterranean, their unflinching bravery, professionalism and dedication are in the finest traditions of our nation. I would also like to acknowledge all those who serve in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development, here and abroad, for their outstanding work on behalf of our country and the world. In all my dealings with them as a Minister, I was unfailingly impressed.

In this century more than ever before, we as human kind are having to come to terms with our interdependence and what it means for relations between countries and peoples. One hundred and fifty years ago, when the British empire was at its height, Parliament was much concerned with what was happening overseas, but, unlike now, much of that debate focused on what Britain's unilateral diplomatic or military response should be. Today's world is very different. The empire has gone. New global powers and trading blocs have emerged and grown in strength and influence—most notably China—as power and wealth have shifted from north to south and from west to east. Events across the globe are seen and reported as they happen and their effects are felt and debated by people in this country as never before, as the imperial interests of the past have been replaced by the community of interests that reflects our nation today.

The challenges we face are changing too, and the end of history is nowhere in sight. Who would have thought that 25 years after the fall of the Berlin wall, we would see fighting between Russia, through its proxy forces, and Ukraine? Who would have believed that 350 years after the Enlightenment dawned, an ideology bitterly hostile to other faiths and the rights of women would rise up and use brutality and terror to

conquer and seek to roll back progress in countries as diverse as Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Somalia and Nigeria?

Rehman Chishti: In tackling extremism, one has to create a tolerant world, but in 130 countries there is persecution of people based on their faith. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that we have to do much more to protect religious freedom, whether it is reforming blasphemy laws in Pakistan affecting Christian and other minority communities or in respect of Burma and the Rohingya community? Does he agree that that should be a key pillar of our foreign policy?

Hilary Benn: I agree with the hon. Gentleman and shall have a word to say about it a little later.

Who would have thought we would be grappling with the potentially catastrophic consequences of loss of biodiversity and climate change—a threat that is the ultimate expression of our interdependence as human beings, because no one country on its own can deal with it? Make no mistake: if drought causes crops to fail or families to go thirsty, if flooding and rises in the sea-level wash people's homes away or if conflict breaks out, human beings will do what human beings have done throughout the whole course of human history; they will move somewhere else to try to make a life for themselves and their families.

Despite these changes, Britain retains influence and reach in global affairs. We are part of the Commonwealth; we are members of the European Union, NATO, the G7 and the G20; and we have a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Our history and our exports, material, political and cultural—democracy, human rights, the rule of law, the BBC, the English language—give us a voice that makes itself heard, and because of that heritage and good will, the Government have a particular responsibility to use Britain's place in the world for the greater good by showing that we aspire to continue to be an outward-looking, not an inward-facing, nation.

That is why the mess the Government have got themselves into over the Human Rights Act is so damaging to Britain's reputation internationally. Does the Foreign Secretary really believe it helps his cause when he raises human rights issues with other countries that back home his Cabinet colleagues talk about leaving the European convention on human rights, which we helped to draft after the second world war?

Sir Gerald Howarth: Does the shadow Foreign Secretary accept that the European convention on human rights was set up to prevent a repetition of the holocaust, that it was not set up to allow foreign judges to usurp the authority of this Parliament to decide whether prisoners in this country should have a vote, and that it should not be entitled to impede the lawful authority of this Government or any British Government to decide whom to deport or not?

Hilary Benn: Let me gently say to the hon. Gentleman that the convention was part of Churchill's legacy and that we should be proud of the part Britain played in asserting the primacy of human rights—indeed out of the ashes of that terrible conflict that was the second world war. It is one of the reasons why a number of voices now say that Britain is not pulling its weight.

It cannot have been much fun for the Foreign Secretary to get his press cuttings delivered over the last few months, when General Sir Richard Shirreff, the former NATO commander, told *The Times* that the Prime Minister was

“a bit player”, a “foreign policy irrelevance” and that

“Nobody is taking any notice of him”,

when *The Economist* described “Little Britain” as

“a shrinking actor on the global stage”,

and the *Washington Post* ran a piece headed “Britain resigns as a world power”. In fairness to the Prime Minister, he has been a little distracted by the problems in his own party over the European Union.

Boris Johnson: I may have missed something. Could the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether he has changed his mind about having a referendum on the European Union, and if so why, and when he did so? What reforms does he hope to achieve in Europe?

Hilary Benn: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that question, and if he will bear with me for a just a moment longer, I shall address exactly the points he has raised.

The Prime Minister might temporarily have stopped his Back Benchers banging on about Europe, but I fear that many of them will be a bit disappointed when they discover that the Prime Minister is not the Eurosceptic they wish he was.

To answer the question of the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), as my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition made clear in the opening of this Queen's Speech debate, we will support the European Union Referendum Bill next week. [*Interruption.*] Well, circumstances have changed. There has been a general election and we listened to what people said on the doorsteps. [*Interruption.*] Before the hon. Gentleman gets too excited, he should reflect on the time when the Prime Minister and the former Foreign Secretary were bitterly opposed to holding a referendum—they, too, changed their minds, did they not? The issue now is what is the Government's strategy for the renegotiation, when will the referendum be held, and who is going to make the argument for Britain remaining part of the European Union?

I listened very carefully to what the Foreign Secretary had to say just now about renegotiation, and I hope he will forgive me if I say he was a little hazy on the detail, especially given that he told the “Today” programme last week that we have

“a very clear set of requirements”.

It would be very nice if he shared them with the House.

On treaty change, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary seem to have been in different places at times. Shortly after the general election, the No. 10 spokesperson briefed the newspapers to the effect that the Prime Minister was committed to securing treaty change. A few days later, however, the Foreign Secretary told the *Financial Times*:

“It does not mean we need treaty change for the politics”.

Which is it? The Foreign Secretary also told the “Today” programme last week:

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“if we are not able to deliver on these big areas of concern that the British people have, we will not win the referendum when it comes.”

Could the Foreign Secretary clarify, for the House’s benefit, that when he said

“we will not win the referendum”,

it meant that he would, after all, be campaigning for a yes vote when the referendum comes, notwithstanding the contrary impression he has given in recent years?

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): On a point of clarification, does the shadow Foreign Secretary agree with me that the leader of the Scottish Labour party, Kezia Dugdale, has seen the light, as she backed the SNP position that EU nationals should have the opportunity to vote in the EU referendum?

Hilary Benn: I do not agree with that proposal because I think the basis on which we take that decision should be the same basis on which every single one of us was elected to this House. That was the basis on which we took the decision in 1975. If the hon. Gentleman cared to do his research and look at the franchise in other EU countries that have held referendums on matters to do with Europe, he would find that they have not allowed EU citizens from other countries to participate. If it is good enough in the rest of Europe, it seems to me that it is good enough for the United Kingdom.

That is not to say that the European Union does not need to change. Like many people, we wish to see reform in Europe on benefits, transitional controls, the way in which the EU works, and the completion of the single market to boost services, jobs and growth. The EU also needs to recognise that it must work for the countries that are, and will continue to be, outside the euro, and that there is growing demand from countries throughout Europe that want a greater say. When global politics are caught between the pull of nationalism and the necessity of internationalism, the global institutions that will prosper in the years ahead will be those that are able to respond to the cry for more devolution of power where that is possible

Andrew Bridgen: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, at the last election, political parties that did not trust the British people with a referendum on their relationship with the EU were ultimately not trusted in the ballot box—except in Scotland, whose population have, I believe, had enough of referendums for a generation, if not a lifetime? His party is now suggesting that 16 and 17-year-olds should vote, but four weeks ago he did not want anyone to have a vote. He has no credibility in relation to the EU referendum, and neither does his party.

Mr Speaker: Order. May I encourage Members, in the kindest spirit, to be economical with their interventions? Given that 56 Members wish to speak, some consideration of each other would be appreciated.

Hilary Benn: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I shall deal shortly with the hon. Gentleman’s point about that part of the franchise.

Let me also say to the Foreign Secretary that reform in Europe is not solely down to what one country asks for at one moment in time. It is about building alliances and making friends, as the Prime Minister is now discovering, and that approach too can bring big change over time. The fundamental challenge that we face now is to make the case that Britain’s place lies in a reforming European Union. Why? Because this is about jobs, investment, growth, influence and security.

Last year we marked the centenary of the outbreak of the great war—the muddy slaughter that claimed the flower of a generation from Europe—and this year we commemorate the end of the second world war. We should never forget, bearing in mind that what we thought would never happen again is now happening in other parts of the world, that as the leaders of post-war Europe looked upon the names of the fallen carved on their gravestones, row upon row upon row, they resolved they would bring the nations of Europe together in the interests of peace. Seventy years on, that has lasted, but we can never take it for granted, and we can never take for granted the other benefits that membership of the EU has brought.

The removal of barriers to trade has helped to create and sustain jobs. It gives us access to a market of 500 million people. Nearly half the trade and foreign investment in this country comes from the EU, and competing in the single market with the best companies in the world helps to drive innovation and creates new markets for British businesses. The EU has improved living standards throughout Europe and for British workers by giving them, for instance, the right to paid holiday and equal treatment.

Given all that, it makes no sense for us to turn our back on Europe, and to leave it on the wing and a prayer of a better deal outside. Those who point to Norway and Switzerland should note what the Foreign Secretary himself told the House recently, when he drew attention to the terms that those two countries had negotiated for access to the single market. He said:

“those terms require the Swiss and Norwegians to accept wholesale the body of EU law without having any say in the making of it, to contribute financially and to abide by the principles of free movement.”—[*Official Report*, 3 March 2015; Vol. 593, c. 807-08.]

Those are some of the many reasons for Labour’s belief that the European Union is central to our future prosperity, and by the end of 2017 the British people will make the most important decision about our place in the world that they have faced for 40 years when they vote on our membership of the EU. We will campaign for a yes vote, and we will argue for British 16 and 17-year-olds to be given a say in that decision, because it is about their future too—just as we argued in the general election so recently fought that the franchise for all elections in this country should be extended to them.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Would the right hon. Gentleman argue that 16 and 17-year-olds should be sent into battle? I think it wrong that although we do not allow our soldiers to go into battle until they are 18, we—or some people—are quite prepared to envisage 16 and 17-year-olds voting to send them into battle.

Hilary Benn: No, I would not change that age, but I say to the hon. Gentleman that, when one thinks that the law allows a 16 or 17-year-old to give full consent to

medical treatment, leave school, enter work or training, join a trade union, pay income tax and national insurance, obtain tax credits and welfare benefits, consent to sexual relationships, get married—albeit with the parents’ consent—change their name by deed poll, become a director of a company and indeed join the armed forces, it seems to me that we ought to be able to trust them to participate in that democratic decision.

Ensuring peace and security around the world must be at the heart of our diplomatic and security efforts. We live in a differently dangerous world today, with a multiplicity of threats, military, political, natural and cyber. The ultimate responsibility of Government is to defend the nation, and we remain committed to a minimum credible independent nuclear capability delivered through continuous at-sea deterrence while supporting global, multilateral disarmament negotiations and further reductions in stockpiles and numbers of weapons. We are also committed to upholding the rights of the Falkland islanders to remain British, including by ensuring the defence of the islands.

Alex Salmond: I have just heard what seems to be a support for renewal of the Trident nuclear system. The shadow Foreign Secretary has already disagreed with Kezia Dugdale on the question of the participation of European citizens. Is the shadow Foreign Secretary aware that the sole remaining Labour MP from Scotland does not share his opinion on Trident renewal?

Hilary Benn: I am setting out for the right hon. Gentleman what the policy of Her Majesty’s Opposition is, and I know he takes a different view, but a decision about the defence of the nation is not a matter for any one part of the United Kingdom: it is a matter for the whole of the United Kingdom and for this House.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con) rose—

Hilary Benn: I am going to make a little more progress as there are many who wish to speak.

The crisis in Ukraine, which the Foreign Secretary referred to, has demonstrated how an aggressive Russia can threaten its neighbours and reminds us of the importance of NATO and of the EU in standing up to external threats in Europe’s eastern and southern neighbourhoods. As he said, the Minsk agreement represents the best hope of progress, but it needs to be implemented.

We support the action the Government have taken to participate in the high readiness NATO force in eastern Europe, including sending four RAF Typhoon jets to be part of the Baltic air policing mission, because that is a clear demonstration of the UK’s commitment to collective security.

The threat from al-Qaeda and the growth of ISIL and other Islamic jihadist groups not just in the middle east but in Somalia with al-Shabaab and in Nigeria with Boko Haram, represent a considerable threat to global and domestic security. The flow of young British men and women into Syria via Turkey, some of their own volition and others having been groomed, is as inexplicable to their parents as it is alarming to this House. Recent advances by ISIL in Iraq, in particular the seizure of Ramadi, reveal the continuing weakness of Iraqi forces and of the Baghdad Government’s capacity to deal with this threat, despite the aerial support the Foreign Secretary

referred to. Sectarianism has caused great suffering to the people of Iraq and only an inclusive politics can overcome it. Back in October the Foreign Secretary told the House that, while there would be tactical ebb and flow in Iraq, the coalition air campaign had “stabilised the strategic picture”. Is that still his view given that what is being done at the moment does not seem to have halted ISIL’s advance?

Mr Philip Hammond: I am happy to respond briefly to the right hon. Gentleman on that point. Of course Ramadi is a setback, but it is not a strategically significant point. Ramadi was already partly occupied by ISIL and the town itself is not of strategic significance.

Hilary Benn: I am grateful to the Foreign Secretary for that response.

Meanwhile, as we have heard, the humanitarian crisis grows in Syria, Iraq and the neighbouring countries of Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, which are bearing a huge burden. There are now over 4 million Syrian refugees, which is the largest exodus of people since the end of the second world war—that is the scale of what we are having to deal with. I welcome the Government’s significant contribution to meeting the needs of these refugees, but the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs appeal is still way short of the funding it needs and we must continue to encourage other partners to live up to their responsibilities.

Keith Vaz: I remind my right hon. Friend of the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) about those who are seeking to cross the Mediterranean to come into Europe because of the crisis in north Africa. A thousand Syrian refugees have now arrived on the island of Kos. Is it not essential that the EU has a plan to deal with the Maghreb countries? The answer is not quotas. All quotas will do is play into the hands of those who exploit vulnerable refugees.

Hilary Benn: I agree with my right hon. Friend that both the EU and the United Nations need to have a plan to deal with that. The UN special representative, Bernardino León, said at the weekend:

“Libya is on the verge of economic and financial collapse”.

He also said that Libya is

“facing a huge security threat”

from ISIL. The movement of migrants across the Mediterranean has indeed reached crisis point. As we know, thousands of innocent people have died and hundreds of thousands of others have been put at risk. It is clear that the traffickers are to blame for the conditions in which people make that perilous journey, but it is important that any action taken to deal with that trade is backed by the UN Security Council, has clear rules of engagement and has the consent of the relevant Libyan authorities. The Foreign Secretary will no doubt have seen the comments made over the weekend by the head of the rival Government in Tripoli about defending Libya’s sea and land from any EU operation.

I welcome the negotiations that have been taking place to reach a deal with Iran. After many years in which Iran has chosen to exploit regional tensions by supporting terrorist groups, under its new leadership there is an opportunity for it to play a more positive role. A nuclear-armed Iran would clearly pose a threat

[Hilary Benn]

to peace in the region and the world, which is why a deal that ensures that Iran's nuclear programme is purely civilian is so important, but for a deal to be concluded it must encompass all the elements: limits on Iran's nuclear programme; strong and credible inspection; and assurances about the breakout period.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Hilary Benn: I will give way, but I will then make some progress.

Bob Blackman: I thank the shadow Foreign Secretary for giving way on the issue of Iran. Is he confirming that the policy of Her Majesty's Opposition is that no deal is better than a bad deal? That would allow Iran to acquire nuclear weapons and therefore threaten the stability of the region.

Hilary Benn: The policy of Her Majesty's Opposition is that we need the right deal to address the threat and to offer the opportunity of a way forward. We should support those talks as they continue. One reason for that is the situation in the middle east where, as the whole House would acknowledge, the only way forward is a comprehensive two-state solution: a secure Israel alongside a viable and independent state of Palestine. There can be no military solution to that conflict, and all sides must avoid taking action that would make peace harder to achieve, including firing rockets and building illegal settlements, but we should also be straight about where things are. There is no peace process to speak of at the moment, and the fear is that, with each passing day, the window on that two-state solution is closing. That is why every effort must be made to press for an immediate return to negotiations, but the blunt truth is that nobody can want that, or an agreement, more than the parties to the conflict themselves. That is going to require compromise and courageous political leadership on the part of both Israel and the Palestinians, which sadly is not currently evident.

Sir Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he, as shadow Foreign Secretary, stands by the official Labour party vote last October to recognise the Palestinian state?

Hilary Benn: I am happy to give my right hon. Friend that assurance.

Each of these conflicts has its own causes but, as well as being about who has power in a country, one of the threads that runs through many of the conflicts is the uneasy relationship between the secular and the religious. We should understand that all too well in this country, given our history of power struggles, religious intolerance and persecution, but we have now reached a state in which we have shown that it is possible both to uphold universal human rights and to enable people to be absolutely free to practise their religion. That is one of the reasons why Britain is admired by many countries across the world for its genuine freedom, but we cannot be complacent here and we have to be on our guard against the rise of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia as we stand up against religious and other persecution across the world, whether it be of Christians, of those

who are lesbian, gay, transgender or bisexual, or of the Rohingya who have been affected by the recent crisis in Burma.

I welcome the work that Ministers have done to highlight the terrible effects of sexual violence on girls and women in armed conflict. Anyone who has visited the Panzi hospital in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as I had the privilege of doing when I was International Development Secretary, will have been deeply moved by the stories told of rape, sometimes by children too young to understand what had really happened to them, and inspired by the work of Dr Denis Mukwege and his team as they provide care and treatment with the utmost compassion.

The most important human right is the right to life, and this year marks the 50th anniversary of the suspension of capital punishment in Britain, which was followed by its abolition four years later. I hope that, as we oppose the use of the death penalty in all circumstances, as do the Government, the number of people on death row should lead us further to strengthen our efforts around the world to abolish the death penalty.

No debate about Britain and the world can ignore the threat of climate change. As the impact of floods in Britain has shown, climate change is now an issue of national, as well as global, security. We have seen drought in California, floods in Texas and typhoons in the Philippines—these are things the world thought would be experienced only by our children and our grandchildren. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is clear that, if we are to hold global warming below 2°, emissions need to peak in 2020 and then rapidly decline. That is why we need a strong agreement at the United Nations framework convention on climate change conference in Paris in December that sets ambitious targets; has a goal of net zero global emissions in the second half of this century; has common rules for measuring and verifying; and has a fair deal in which richer countries help to support poorer nations to combat climate change. Britain's development and climate change assistance will help.

Britain's record on development assistance and the passing into law of the 0.7% target are shining examples of the power of political movements to change things, just as those who advocate slashing our aid budget are narrow-minded, selfish and wrong. The work we do as a nation to help to send children to school and to vaccinate kids against diseases that our children do not die of, and the help we give to fragile and conflict-affected states, are powerful examples of what being a good neighbour means in this century. The sustainable development goals summit later this year will be a chance, after seven years in which the world has faced inwards because of the global economic crash, to turn our face back outwards and renew our commitment to our fellow citizens.

Ultimately, this is about political will. Progress will depend on our ability as a world to come together and co-operate in tackling poverty and conflict—the two great engines of the movement of people around the globe. We know that civil wars result, on average, in 20 years of lost development. It is no accident that Afghanistan has the highest rate of infant mortality in the world and that many of the Earth's poorest people live in countries at risk of, or recovering from, war. In the years to come, we may well see people fighting each

other not about their politics and their religion, but about water, energy and land. Whatever their character, what these conflicts have in common is that the countries in which they are happening have been unable or unwilling to secure the lives of their citizens. The way forward is clear: replace violence with good politics—its your choice; compromise; build good governance, security and the rule of law; promote economic opportunity, land rights, and trade; improve transport and telecommunications; and encourage openness to the world.

Those are the characteristics of successful states, and the responsibility of the rest of the world is to help this happen. That does not mean the United Kingdom has to do everything—we should not and we cannot—but we should seek to build the world's capacity to do so. Nor does it mean that, if we propose to act somewhere, we should feel reticent for fear of being accused of inconsistency. Not doing the right thing somewhere because you cannot do the right thing everywhere has never struck me as a compelling reason for inaction.

Martin Luther King put it like this:

“On the one hand we are called to play the good Samaritan on life's roadside; but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway.”

That is why we should stand by the United Nations, despite the fact that it too often lacks the will of its member states and the means to act, because it remains the best hope of a new world order. We face a very simple choice as a world. We cannot shut the door, close the curtains and hope that the rest of the world will go away, because it will not and we will feel the consequences anyway. What we should do is seize the opportunities that our increasingly interdependent and interconnected world offers Britain: new export markets, investment, jobs and a voice. That is why an outward-facing country is what we must continue to be.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I advise the House that the six-minute time limit does not apply immediately—there is a Front-Bench spokesman from whom the House must hear and a number of other contributors—but I ask Members contributing early in the debate to take account of the fact that the application of that limit is imminent. I know that the Member to whom I am looking can be relied on for that purpose, because he, like me, is inclined to be short.

4.20 pm

Sir Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) (Con): I thank you, Mr Speaker, for calling me and welcome the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) to his important role as shadow Foreign Secretary. I have not followed him since I used to monster him across the Dispatch Box when he was International Development Secretary, but now that I am a trainee old buffer I resolve to be much kinder.

I was told this morning that I made my maiden speech 23 years ago. It is with that thought that I can both congratulate in advance those who are about to make theirs and look back over the past two decades to set into context the debate we are having today.

The biggest two things that are now clear and almost unstoppable in the world on an unprecedented scale, which have arisen over those past 20 years, are globalisation and the movement of people. We could also add increased conflict with non-state actors. It is in that context that I would like to say a few brief things about our economy, about Europe and about the middle east.

There were some dangers in the election that we have just had. Those dangers, which are inherent in democracy itself, were that, in order to win votes, we all needed to promise things. The danger in democracy, which can almost be self-consuming, is that an election becomes an auction of promises. I think that the people saw through that and made up their own minds and perhaps concluded that it is better to trust the politicians who promise them less. But there was far too little talk of wealth creation, and perhaps too much talk only of wealth redistribution.

Another thing, or large influence, to emerge from the election, which we must bear in mind over the next five years, is that our tax base is very much up to its buffers. People and capital can move. Some 1% of taxpayers pay 28% of all income tax. Business rates are increasingly outdated, as those who have a business in premises cannot compete with those who run their business online, and property taxes—there was talk of a mansion tax—are looking increasingly flawed because we should tax a flow of money and not just a stock of wealth.

I welcome measures in the Queen's Speech that will cap income tax, VAT and national insurance, but imposing such a cap illustrates the problem I have just outlined. An economy determines our standing in the world, as does our unity. No country ever became greater by getting smaller. After the fall of the Berlin wall, Germany unified. As we look at the success of that country, I simply cannot understand why anyone here might be thinking of breaking us up—I do not understand the logic of it. The EU is not a country; it is an agglomeration of states. It is more than 40 years since we joined it, and 40 years exactly since the referendum—the first time I ever voted. But we must be clear from the rise of the UK Independence party and the last European election results that membership has left people and this Parliament permanently unsettled.

The relationship is not comfortably defined, nor is it universally accepted. A solution will not lie in a short-term fix about benefits limits or immigration quotas but has to lie, because this is where the problem is, in the scope and reach of who makes our law and therefore in the standing of this House as a sovereign Parliament. I suspect that that will need treaty change but lots of it is home-grown and I urge the Government to look at the implementation within our Government of the instructions that come from the European Union, because it is essential that we get to grips with the problem and excesses of implementation. I hope that there will also be well-qualified debate of a high standard on everything we are doing and talking about—on the referendum legislation, on the Prime Minister's negotiations and on the referendum. Let us all resolve to pitch it at a high level and not just have an auction of tired clichés.

There is a problem to which the right hon. Member for Leeds Central referred, and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary also addressed his remarks to it. Perhaps because of the focus on the EU or perhaps because of an unfair perception—although my hon.

[*Sir Alan Duncan*]

Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth) may differ in opinion on this point—of our commitment to defence and deployment in the wider world, there is growing muttering on the world stage that the United Kingdom is in retreat. It is being talked up as a country that is losing its world role. We must disprove this accusation. I believe it to be unfair, but the accusations are there and the right hon. Member for Leeds Central listed a number of the recent press reports from America and the middle east that say so.

I hope that we will have a better functioning partnership with the EU but that we will also maintain a distinctive policy approach to the middle east and be more confident and assertive about it. As the Foreign Secretary stated, the middle east is in turmoil and there is division within the Gulf Co-operation Council, particularly on Iran. During the election campaign, we lost out to the French in massive defence sales, Yemen has totally crumbled and illegal settlements in Palestine are being built at a greater pace and in greater numbers. All these issues need a confident British view, so I hope—

Keith Vaz: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Alan Duncan: I am finishing my speech, but as it is the right hon. Gentleman, I shall give way very briefly.

Keith Vaz: I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on having the biggest majority in the whole of Leicestershire—just—[HON. MEMBERS: “Who’s second?”] Modesty forbids me from saying who is second. The right hon. Gentleman was a very distinguished envoy from the Prime Minister to Yemen. Will he continue in that very important role for the next five years, and what does he see as the solution to the problem in Yemen? [*Interruption.*]

Sir Alan Duncan: The advice that I have just received is that if I say yes the appointment is confirmed, but that would be jumping the gun. I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for pointing out what I am doing in Yemen, and whatever happens I shall continue to take a lifelong interest in that country.

I hope that in the next five years we will be able to assist economic prosperity and national unity, have a more comfortable relationship with the EU and retain and build on having an authoritative role for the UK in the middle east and beyond.

4.28 pm

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan), who spoke graciously, as ever, but when he was listing the institutions in this country that are unsettled by our relationship with European Union he should, I think, have included the Conservative party. After all, he and I were both in the 1992 Parliament in which that unsettling looked to have reached extreme proportions. I fully expect to see a huge amount of unsettling of the Conservative party in this Parliament on the European issue.

I am happy to contribute to this debate as the lead spokesperson of the Scottish National party for international and European matters. As you noted last

week, Mr Speaker, I have brought a few friends along with me since I last spoke in this House to help me out in case I encounter any difficulty. It may help the House if I introduce some members of the SNP team who hope to catch the Speaker’s eye later in the debate.

My hon. Friends the Members for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh) and for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) have the trade and investment and the international development briefs, respectively. They both bring extensive personal knowledge to those briefs.

The European brief is handled by my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins), who has already made a very impressive maiden speech, and the climate change brief by my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), who has both a constituency and a personal interest in that hugely important issue.

My deputy in these matters will be my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil), who is on his way to join our proceedings by ferry, plane and train. I hope the Hebridean realities of transport will be borne in mind in future by Government Whips when they table Scottish business. I have a great fondness for my hon. Friend. Back in the 2005 election I was convinced that he would romp home in his constituency, so I spent an entire week practising how to pronounce Na h-Eileanan an Iar because I was confident that on election night I would be asked to pronounce it by David Dimbleby or some other interrogator. I went through that entire election night after my hon. Friend romped home and not once was I asked to pronounce the name of the constituency, so hon. Members will forgive me if I mention Na h-Eileanan an Iar a great deal in our coming debates.

The team is completed by my hon. Friends the Members for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) and for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Stuart Blair Donaldson). In that 2005 election we had great success. We increased our numbers in this House to six. We now have 56 Members and we intend to make Scotland’s voice heard on international and European affairs across the range of responsibilities.

I shall contribute today mainly on European matters, but first I want to say a word about Iraq and make a contribution on human rights. I heard this morning on Sky News the American commander say that it is important that we learn the lessons from the fall of Ramadi. That American commander did not seem to share the Foreign Secretary’s complacency about the importance of that development. The American commander seemed to think it was a very important reversal and that lessons would immediately have to be learned. I was surprised that not until provoked by the shadow Foreign Secretary did the Foreign Secretary mention what has been happening over the past few days in Ramadi.

These lessons are important to learn and I hope there is no complacency on the part of the Foreign Secretary. If it is important to learn the lessons of what is happening in Ramadi, is it not even more important to learn the lessons of what provoked this nightmare in the first place? It is now 12 years, two months and 13 days since this House voted for the illegal invasion of Iraq. It is five years, 11 months and 14 days since the announcement of the Chilcot commission. I hope that when summarising this debate, the Front-Bench spokesman will be able to give us some indication, after five years, 11 months and 14 days, when the country and Houses of Parliament

are going to be informed of the findings of that commission, and whether there has been a foreclosing of any possible legal consequences for those who may or may not be criticised.

It is important that we make a serious attempt to learn those lessons. It is less than two years since this House almost voted for a ground incursion in Syria. If that had happened, it is entirely possible that right now British forces—

Bob Stewart: I do not think we voted two years ago for a ground incursion in Syria. We voted to keep the military option on the table.

Alex Salmond: I said “almost voted for a ground incursion in Syria.” If the Government had not been defeated, make no mistake, there would be an extreme likelihood of British troops in Syria. If British troops had been in Syria at present, they would perhaps have been simultaneously fighting against President Assad and some of the opponents of President Assad. Keeping that option open can be called many things, but it could not be called a coherent military or foreign policy. I hope that we learn the lessons that Chilcot has to teach and that there is a proper examination of that report, and indeed of those whom it might criticise.

Mike Gapes: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Alex Salmond: I will make some progress first.

Mike Gapes: Will he give way on that point?

Alex Salmond: If the hon. Gentleman will just—Och, I had not realised that it was my old friend and colleague. Please.

Mike Gapes: I am very grateful. On the question of learning lessons, it is now 15 years since Milošević was removed from Kosovo. Does the right hon. Gentleman recall saying in 1999 that it was unpardonable folly to bomb Serbian forces in order to stop ethnic cleansing in Kosovo? Does he now accept that he was wrong and that that is a lesson he has learned?

Alex Salmond: May I just refresh the hon. Gentleman’s memory? It was the Serbian people who removed President Milošević in an election. The lesson I would learn from that particular episode is the extreme folly of pursuing military action without a United Nations mandate. Unfortunately, that lesson was not learned, which is why we have the present nightmare in Iraq.

On the European convention on human rights, those of us who were in the Chamber last Thursday afternoon were treated to a remarkable cock-crowing three times for the Justice Secretary. The right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) questioned him three times about withdrawal from the European convention on human rights, and she got three different answers. First, he said:

“The right hon. Lady is getting ever so slightly ahead of herself.”

Secondly, in the same column in *Hansard*, he said that she was

“evasive when asked about immigration numbers”.

Thirdly, when asked,

“One simple question: European convention—in or out?”,

he said:

“We are in the European convention at the moment.”—[*Official Report*, 28 May 2015; Vol. 596, c. 291–292.]

That lack of clarity from the Justice Secretary contrasts with the statement we heard from the Foreign Secretary earlier today, in which he seemed to suggest that the option of withdrawing from the European convention was not on the table. That makes it all the more puzzling to see the headline on the front page of today’s edition of *The Daily Telegraph*, a newspaper that I will not cite too often in these debates—it lives in a parallel universe as far as Scotland is concerned, but no one can doubt that it has sources deep in the heart of Conservative party. It suggested today that both the Justice Secretary and the Home Secretary were lifting the flag of rebellion and telling the Prime Minister that withdrawal from the European convention was absolutely necessary for fulfilling the objectives of the Conservative party and repatriating the powers of the judiciary. Having heard the Justice Secretary refuse three times to give the answer that the Foreign Secretary gave today, I am interested in how deep these divisions run in the Conservative party.

I have known the Justice Secretary for many years, since he was a striking young journalist on *The Press and Journal*. I am not talking about his copy; he was literally on strike at the time, on a picket line. I remember the occasion well. It was 1989 and he was clutching a copy of the *Socialist Worker*, or perhaps it was “Das Kapital”—it could have been any one of a range of publications. What I do remember is that on that occasion he was eloquently in favour of both human and workers’ rights.

I must declare an interest, as I now write a column for *The Press and Journal*. I have encountered no bullying behaviour by management there in recent years, but that was not the case for the Justice Secretary. I recently came across an article from *The Guardian* on 5 October 2012, in which the then father of the chapel, Iain Campbell, wrote very favourably about the Justice Secretary. He wrote:

“We knew he was a Tory, and our concern was to have a united front. So we spoke to Michael, and he was happy to come on board. He wasn’t a typical striker by any means, but he was very articulate, so we asked Michael to come to the European parliament in Strasbourg to lobby MEPs.”

I accept that the Justice Secretary was a young man at the time, but it is pretty clear that back then he was asserting for himself human and workers’ rights that as Justice Secretary, as regards the European convention and his attitude to trade union legislation, he now seems intent on denying to others. It is therefore reasonable to ask to have clarified in early course whether the Conservative party and the Government stand behind the Justice Secretary and the Home Secretary, or whether the more loyal expression of Europeanism we heard from the Foreign Secretary carries the Cabinet at the present moment.

The implications of withdrawing from the European convention or revoking the Human Rights Act are of course serious. There is no majority in this House for withdrawal and no majority in the House of Lords for withdrawal. There is absolute opposition in the Scottish Parliament, where the European convention—the Human Rights Act—is embedded into the devolution legislation. There is little support for it in Northern Ireland, where the European convention is part and parcel of the

[Alex Salmond]

Good Friday and St Andrews agreements. With all that clearly impinging on the Government's abilities, then surely it is time to abandon this nonsense of renegeing on these obligations to human rights.

I am not certain that many Members will know this, but there is in the Strasbourg Court a framed copy of the Declaration of Arbroath. There are also, if I remember correctly, plaques to Ernest Bevin and to Winston Churchill in the walkway to the Strasbourg Court. It is at least arguable that many of the justices in the Strasbourg Court know rather more about the Scottish legal system than many Members of this House. There would be huge implications for how our legal system, our Parliament and our society relate to the European convention, even if the rather sleekit option were pursued of revoking the Act as opposed to withdrawing from the convention.

I want to turn to the European issue. In the past few days, the Prime Minister embarked on a grand tour of Europe, although as far as I can make out only four European capitals were visited over the weekend. However, I did see a favourable release on his activities saying that he had breakfasted in one capital, lunched in a second and dined in a third. Never have so many menus been translated for any single Prime Minister in history. It was considered a success that the German Chancellor seemed to indicate that it was not impossible that a treaty change could be effected. Therefore, in fairness, on the conclusion of this debate, we should be told by the Government whether a treaty change is the objective of the negotiations. What is the treaty change that the Government want to see effected? I would rather hope that it is a treaty change to substantially change the common fisheries policy. I would support that treaty change, but I have not seen the Prime Minister mentioning the common fisheries recently in any of his utterances. We should be clear what is the treaty change that the Government seek and the German Chancellor seemed to indicate might, under some circumstances, be possible.

What is the Government's negotiating position? We are told that negotiations have started, with the whirlwind tour of the Chancellor and the Prime Minister of European capitals, but what is the negotiating position? Are we going to be told the negotiating position after the negotiations have taken place? If my memory does not betray me, in the 18th century there was launched in the South sea bubble a company whose purposes were to be hereafter determined. The Prime Minister seems to have launched a negotiation whose purposes will be hereafter determined. The endgame in the South sea bubble was that it burst, and I think that the Prime Minister's European negotiations will burst as well.

Mr Baker: It may help the right hon. Gentleman to know that Business for Britain has very helpfully laid out 10 points of the Prime Minister's negotiating strategy and anyone can read that.

Alex Salmond: Now we have it! Business for Britain is now the European Secretary of the Conservative party in government. When we want to ask questions in the House, we do not ask the Foreign Secretary or the Prime Minister—we summon Business for Britain to tell us how on earth they are going to effect a European strategy. I know the Conservative party is interested in subcontracting and contracting out, but I have never heard of an entire policy being subcontracted out to

Business for Britain. If I may say so, unless we are going to create a new Ministry, I think that instead of Business for Britain, it would be better to have a rather more accountable organisation, if Members of Parliament are to question policy.

Talking of questions, I notice that in the referendum question—we have the question before we know the negotiation strategy, never mind the results of the strategy—there is no actual mention of negotiation. Is that not to be in the question? When the Electoral Commission looks at the question, will that be debated?

I learned earlier, in an interesting exchange, that the Labour party in Westminster, as opposed to the Labour party in Scotland, does not believe that the 100,000-plus European citizens in Scotland should be entitled to vote in a European referendum. Christian Allard is a Member of the Scottish Parliament—he is a regional Member for the north-east of Scotland—and a French citizen. He has been in Scotland for the better part of quarter of a century, paying his taxes and working hard, but he is to be deprived of his vote in a European referendum while Members of the House of Lords are to be given the vote. I know the Conservative party, in terms of its attitude to the European convention, is very wary of prisoners being given the vote, but now ex-prisoners in the House of Lords are to be given the vote in a European referendum while Christian Allard will have his taken away.

I say to Labour Front Benchers that the whole purpose of giving European citizens and citizens of other countries resident in Scotland the vote in the Scottish referendum was to say that such matters should be taken civically—not according to nationality or ethnicity—by communities of the nation.

The shadow Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) managed, in the course of one speech, to disagree with the acting leader of the Labour party in Scotland on the issue of who should vote in the referendum, and with the one remaining Labour MP from Scotland, the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray), who is opposed—he confirmed this to me by nodding only last Thursday—to the renewal of the Trident nuclear deterrent. I have heard of splits in political parties, but for the right hon. Gentleman, in the course of a single speech, to open up a division between the leader of the Labour party in Scotland, who has not even been elected yet, and his colleague the hon. Member for Edinburgh South—a member of the shadow Cabinet—on the issue of the renewal of the Trident system is a remarkable achievement by a party that is trying to bind up the wounds of a divided election campaign. On the issue of Europe, there are important questions that require to be answered.

Andrew Bridgen: The right hon. Gentleman has spoken eloquently about the need for clear answers to clear questions in this place. I saw him and his SNP colleagues wearing a beautiful buttonhole on the day of the Queen's Speech. They had all the appearance of a wedding party, so I hope that divorce is now out of the question. Will he confirm that the issue of Scottish independence has been settled for a generation?

Alex Salmond: The white rose worn for the Queen's Speech was, of course, the white rose of Scotland. I will send the hon. Gentleman a copy of the poem by Hugh MacDiarmid, which I am sure he will find very interesting.

On the question of the Scottish referendum, the First Minister has been very clear. It depends on two things: first, the reaction of the Prime Minister and, indeed, the Foreign Secretary to the overwhelming mandate received by the Scottish National party a few weeks ago in the election; and, secondly, the attitude of the Scottish people and how they react to the material change in circumstances that would occur if, for example, Scotland was dragged out of the European Union against the will of the Scottish people.

On the question of the European referendum and how it can be won, the very worst thing that could happen to the yes campaign to stay in Europe would be for a parade of the Chancellor's establishment flunkies to tell the people of the country that they cannot possibly withdraw from and survive outside of the European Union. I am a European Union supporter to my fingertips, but I would never countenance, or see an argument for, a parade of the establishment saying it would be impossible for the UK not to be in the European Union. That sort of top-down establishment campaign would be a great source of grievance and would be likely to bring about a counter-reaction from any self-respecting person.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con) *rose*—

Alex Salmond: I give way to an extremely self-respecting person.

Crispin Blunt: Does the right hon. Gentleman therefore think it would be appropriate for the Foreign Affairs Committee of this House to carry out a cost-benefit analysis of both the options—of staying in and of leaving the European Union—so that the House is informed by a Committee that could not possibly come to an agreement unless it properly reflects the balance of opinion in this House, rather than to leave it to the organs of Government, as he warns?

Alex Salmond: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent proposal, to which the House should pay very close attention. The last thing we need is some cost-benefit analysis carried out by Sir Nicholas Macpherson at the political behest of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The benefit of a Select Committee doing so is that would require an analysis across all shades of opinion on the issue, and such an analysis would therefore carry much more authority than any set analysis, or any following of, the rather poor precedent taken in the Scottish referendum campaign, which, as the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) has quite rightly pointed out, compromised the integrity of the civil service. I hope that the House has listened very closely to the suggestion from the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt).

If people are fighting a yes campaign, it has to be a root-and-branch yes campaign; it cannot be a campaign based not on what Europe should be doing, but on stopping Europe doing other things. It has to be a genuine, positive yes campaign; otherwise the message is hopeless and conflicting.

The SNP Members and party want to see positive things from Europe. We want a Europe that deals with the migrant crisis and the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean. We want a Europe where the living wage is promoted as part of a social Europe, not

impeded by competition policy. We want a Europe that acts on climate change, as opposed to losing its credibility by inaction on climate change, as one of the European Parliament's Committees recently said. It is on that positive Scottish campaign—the Scotland in Europe campaign—that we on these Benches and in this party will found our arguments, which will be vastly and overwhelmingly supported in the referendum by the people of Scotland.

4.52 pm

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): I am delighted to follow the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), whom I welcome back. He is a formidable operator, but I am sure I am not alone in finding it quaint that he devoted so much of his speech to making the case for Scotland remaining wedded to the European Union at the same time as wishing to break up the United Kingdom. It simply does not make sense, but he will no doubt argue that corner with vigour in due course.

I must say that it is a great relief to sit on these Benches as part of a Conservative Government for the first time since 1992, 23 years ago. The majority is small, but it is a majority, sparing the nation the prospect of another Labour Government committed to a policy of spend, tax and borrow. It is particularly pleasing to see so many new colleagues sitting around me, not least my successor in Cannock Chase, my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling), who did fantastically well and follows our good friend Aidan Burley in that seat. I of course pay special tribute to my son-in-law, my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartledge), who brings a wealth of political as well as business experience to the House. He will be the beneficiary of advice from his wife Emily, just as I have been from her mother for the past 30 years.

I have been delighted and humbled to be able to secure my fifth mandate from the electors of the Aldershot constituency, who did me the honour of giving me more than 50% of the vote for the first time in eight general elections. For us, with the largest Nepalese population in the United Kingdom, the election period was of course marred by the earthquake tragedy in Nepal. However, I am pleased to say that people rallied round fantastically, delivering bedding and clothing to local Nepalese welfare centres and raising thousands of pounds for the victims, not least the £22,000 raised in just three days by the local Rotary clubs, a collection I and my Labour opponent Gary Puffett joined in. It is a great pity that Joanna Lumley could not see that and chose instead to insult the good people of Aldershot, for which she should apologise publicly.

Immigration was the No. 1 issue at the election, and I welcome the renewed vigour shown in tackling it, but we must be more determined. Our services simply cannot continue to accommodate a quarter of a million new arrivals a year, quite apart from the serious cultural issues arising from people taking advantage of our liberal society while seeking to impose their medieval ways on us. We are a Christian country: if you despise our Christian values, please leave and go somewhere else.

Constitutional issues abound in the Gracious Speech, and we have heard about some of them already. I welcome many of the measures, not least the Prime

[*Sir Gerald Howarth*]

Minister's fulfilment of his promise to hold a referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union. So many people in the country doubted his word on that, but he gave his word, and he has fulfilled it. The people of Britain will decide, not the Government of the day. The Prime Minister is right to seek to renegotiate, but the issue is way beyond tinkering with provisions for benefit claimants. He really needs to press the case he outlined in his Bloomberg speech two years ago. As he said, it is

"national parliaments... which are... the true source of real democratic legitimacy and accountability in the EU."

As my great friend Daniel Hannan, a Member of the European Parliament, said:

"We could amend Sections 2 and 3 of the 1972 European Communities Act to reassert the supremacy of Parliament. We could make clear that, in any conflict between Westminster and Brussels, Westminster has the final word."

This year, as we mark the 750th anniversary of Simon de Montfort's first Parliament, we in this House must have the final say on implementing EU legislation.

On the Human Rights Act, I shall simply say that it is wrong for judges in Strasbourg to decide matters that should properly be decided here. For 750 years, this has been the place where the redress of grievance has ultimately resided. It is simply unacceptable that a convention designed to prevent a repetition of the holocaust has been subverted to prevent us from deporting people who have no right to be in the UK or to demand that we give prisoners the vote. I therefore hope the Prime Minister will not backtrack on his commitment.

I particularly welcome the Government's explicit commitment to continue to play a leading role in global affairs and, to quote from the Gracious Speech, to

"do whatever is necessary to ensure that our courageous armed forces can keep Britain safe."

Those are fine sentiments, and they are wholly compatible with the deeply embedded Conservative philosophy that the first duty of Government is the defence of the realm. However, words alone are not enough. We in the United Kingdom face a series of potential threats to our kingdom and to our broader interests around the world. As the Foreign Secretary said, our prosperity relies on trade, but for trade to flourish we need international stability.

Russia continues to rebuild its military might. It is constantly testing our air defences and endeavouring to track our nuclear deterrent. President Putin's overt military intervention in Ukraine, where he has been able to annex territory with impunity, has emboldened him, although I note that I am not on his list of prohibited people, so perhaps I should make a diplomatic visit to Moscow.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): Is the hon. Gentleman not embarrassed by his Government's record on defence, given that the UK is the only northern European country with a significant armed force not to have a single maritime patrol aircraft?

Sir Gerald Howarth: The hon. Gentleman knows my view, and I will repeat it in a moment.

I was talking about the threats we face, and Islamic fundamentalism, in the form of ISIL or whatever my hon. Friends think we should call it, is another. ISIL threatens massive instability in the middle east, a region in which, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan) knows only too well, the United Kingdom has unparalleled experience, and which is vital to the stability of the world economy.

Other issues include Iran's nuclear ambitions, North Korea and China, which is building its military capability while flexing its muscles by threatening Japan's airspace and by persistently building airfields and port facilities on uninhabited and disputed islands, such as the Spratly islands in the South China sea. I particularly welcome US Defence Secretary Ash Carter's rebuke to China this weekend, which illustrates that the US is aware of the threat to regional stability from China's aggressive, expansionist policies. I have consistently warned of the dangers arising from China's policy and sought to remind my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, formerly the Secretary of State for Defence, that the United Kingdom has a locus in this matter.

Under the five power defence arrangements, Britain, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand undertook that

"in the event of any form of armed attack externally organised or supported, or the threat of such attack against Malaysia or Singapore, their Governments would immediately consult together for the purpose of deciding what measures should be taken jointly or separately in relation to such an attack or threat."

Commitment to the FPDA was renewed on its 40th anniversary three years ago. My own discussions last year, with my friend the Malaysian Home Affairs Minister Ahmad Zahid, confirmed that Malaysia still values the United Kingdom's regional involvement.

The uncertain and potentially very dangerous international situation invests the forthcoming strategic defence and security review with crucial significance. The 2010 SDSR—for which, as a Minister at the time, I held some responsibility—was inevitably Treasury-driven. It had to be: we inherited a catastrophic budget deficit of £156 billion, which required an urgent comprehensive spending review if we were to reassure the international capital markets that we had a serious plan to cut the deficit. Thankfully, we have made progress, so the financial constraints on our military must be relaxed if we are to meet the "whatever is necessary" tag in the Gracious Speech, including the renewal of our Trident nuclear deterrent.

I have repeatedly expressed alarm that my party has failed to make a commitment to spending at least 2% of GDP on Defence, as required under our membership of NATO. It has been bizarre to witness the Prime Minister quite rightly chastising those European members of the alliance for failing to meet the 2% target, yet refusing to commit the UK to it. We only just currently meet the target and the House of Commons Library warns that Defence spending is likely to fall to 1.9%.

This is not an academic issue. We face another Budget next month. We are told that various Departments, such as those for overseas aid, health and education, have been ring-fenced. I read over the weekend that the Ministry of Defence is being asked to find a further £1 billion of cuts. The Prime Minister has rightly ruled out any further reductions in Regular Army numbers from the already perilously low 82,000, so where else are

the savings to be made? The Royal Navy is down to 19 frigates and destroyers. Would savings be made by reducing that further by ordering fewer than 13 Type 26 global combat ships to succeed the Type 23 frigates? The RAF is down to seven frontline fighter squadrons—it would have been six if my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence had not insisted that one Tornado squadron be rerieved. Further cuts here? Our lack of a maritime patrol aircraft is a national scandal that not only places us in breach of our International Civil Aviation Organisation obligations for eastern Atlantic search and rescue, but puts at risk our very nuclear deterrent. This capability gap must be plugged immediately.

It is not just the impact on our own self-defence which is at stake. As has been referred to by a number of right hon. and hon. Members, in particular the shadow Foreign Secretary, a succession of US leaders have expressed alarm similar to my own. This very day, US Defence Secretary Ash Carter said it would be a “great loss to the world”

if the UK chose to disengage. His concerns follow those expressed by the head of the US Army, General Odierno, not just this year but two years ago on his appointment. The United Kingdom needs to take this very seriously indeed. The relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States is our most important international arrangement.

Any further cuts would damage our ability to respond to threats to the UK and risk irreparable damage to our relationship with our key ally, the US. Accordingly, I plead with the Chancellor to reassert proper Tory priorities and give the Ministry of Defence the funds it needs to rebuild our country’s defence capability.

5.3 pm

Sir Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I thank you, Mr Speaker, and right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House for the courtesy they have shown me since the start of this Parliament. May I also make clear that I owe my role here to my constituents, who gave me the biggest majority since the Gorton constituency was founded in 1885? I never forget that I am only here because of them.

In this Parliament, as in previous Parliaments, I will continue to concentrate on the basic issues—the national health service, jobs, schools, pensions, law and order and housing—that mean so much to my constituents. They made it clear during the election that they support my being involved in overseas issues as well, especially Kashmir and Palestine. Those two issues are the oldest unsolved problems on the planet. They date back to 1947 and 1948 respectively, and Britain has a particular role in both because of the consequences of the partition of India in 1947 and the consequences of the end of the British mandate in Palestine in 1948. On both of them, as well as on many other issues that have been discussed in this debate, there is unfinished business from the last Parliament. We cannot afford to waste another five years, as those two vital issues are issues of life and death for millions.

The adherence of Jammu and Kashmir to India was not decided by the head of state until two months after India and Pakistan became independent, in October 1947. It was an illogical decision, in view of the preponderance of Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir.

However, it was India and Pandit Nehru who took that to the United Nations. The Governor-General of India, Lord Mountbatten, had been Viceroy of India and was very close to the Indian Government, but he believed that the consequence should be a referendum of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Sixty-eight years later, we are still waiting for that referendum, but in those 68 years there have been three wars between India and Pakistan. Both countries are nuclear powers and the head of the CIA told the US Senate that the confrontation between India and Pakistan over Jammu and Kashmir was the most dangerous flashpoint in the world.

India has 500,000 or more troops in Jammu and Kashmir, despite the enormous poverty suffered by huge numbers of Indian citizens. Since the partition, which was a result of fighting between the two countries, there has been torture—a Channel 4 documentary showed the torture of Kashmiris by the Indians—as well as rape, killing and destruction. When I went to Srinagar, people lined up for seven hours to tell me about what they had suffered. Yet the international community stands aside from this horror and from this flashpoint. It has to be said that this Government specifically have stood aside from it, with the Minister responsible saying that the Government do not intend to get involved in the Kashmir issue.

The Government cannot and must not stand aside for another five years. Only a few days ago, India’s Internal Affairs Minister refused to negotiate. It is essential that we make our presence and our policies felt and that those are the right policies. We should not take sides between India and Pakistan. We should take the side of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, who have the right to decide their own future.

The problem of Palestine has existed since May 1948. It began with the creation of Israel and what the people of Palestine call the Nakba—the catastrophe. After the six day war in 1967, there was a huge upheaval. Refugees fled across the Jordan. There are refugee camps in Jordan, on the west bank, in Lebanon—dreadful, appalling conditions there—and in Syria, too, where people are going through incredible traumas.

Having created the refugee problem, the Israelis have followed up by building hundreds of settlements—every one of them illegal—in the occupied territories; by fighting a war that is also illegal; and by setting up checkpoints that make it almost impossible for Palestinians to travel freely around what is supposed to be their own country. In addition, there have been two intifadas—uprisings—and three fruitless Israeli military attacks on the Gaza strip resulting in thousands of casualties, including huge numbers of civilians, and the intolerable destruction of homes, schools and the Palestinian Parliament in Gaza itself, none of which can be properly reconstructed because of the Israeli blockade of what the Prime Minister himself called the “prison camp” in Gaza.

Efforts have been made, but they are being abandoned. Tony Blair has resigned as the envoy of the Quartet and John Kerry, who has just suffered a dreadful accident, made an enormous effort, as United States Secretary of State, but was not given the backing of President Obama. The situation is now more immobile than it has been for decades. One reason is that Israel now has the most extremist Government in its entire existence. On election day in Israel a few weeks ago, Prime Minister Netanyahu

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referred, in a racist statement, to the “hordes” of Palestinians going by bus to vote. He refused and threw himself back from any notion of a two-state solution, yet the UK Government support Israel proactively.

The Foreign Secretary talked about what he called the Government’s work for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, yet last month, at the nuclear non-proliferation review conference, an attempt to hold a conference next year to review the situation of non-proliferation in the middle east was blocked by three countries—it was blocked by the United States, by Canada and by the British Foreign Office, whose Foreign Secretary today claimed to be working for non-proliferation.

As the Foreign Secretary mentioned, this country makes a huge commotion about wanting to stop Iran gaining nuclear weapons. Well, I am against Iran gaining nuclear weapons, and I am against the Iranian Government, which are one of the most odious in the world. Yet there is no evidence—a book was written about this by a journalist from *The Daily Telegraph* not long ago—to show that Iran is preparing to obtain nuclear weapons. It is nevertheless right to try to prevent it from doing so, but Israel has nuclear weapons. Israel has hundreds of nuclear warheads and hundreds of missiles in the Negev, in what used to be called the Dimona textile factory, yet no action is being taken. Iran is a signatory to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, but Israel refuses to sign it. Yet this Government support that nuclear power’s refusal to participate in talks. The non-proliferation treaty is the most widely subscribed to disarmament treaty in world history, yet Israel refuses to sign it.

I therefore say that this Parliament must see a new United Kingdom policy on Palestine and Israel. This House voted last October by an overwhelming majority to recognise the Palestinian state. The Government have shuffled aside a position on that, so I am very pleased that my right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary has today reaffirmed that recognition continues to be the official policy of the Labour party.

A solution is in Israel’s interests just as much as it is in the interests of the Palestinians, because the Israelis will never know peace and security until there is a settlement. The only alternative to the two-state solution is a one-state solution. With the number of Palestinians set to outnumber the number of Israeli Jews, a one-state solution would not necessarily be an Israel. It is essential for the Israelis to get a negotiated settlement. For the Israelis, for the Palestinians and for peace, this House must make itself felt during this Parliament. This House must make a difference.

5.17 pm

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): It is with real pleasure that I note that becoming Father of the House has done nothing to dampen, soften or ameliorate the rigour with which the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman) pursues his causes. Indeed, I recall that, many years before I entered the House, in the period of 1988 to 1991, when the right hon. Gentleman was shadow Foreign Secretary, I greatly admired the skill with which he manoeuvred to try to extricate the Labour party from some difficult defence positions in which it had managed to entangle itself. I

am sure he will feel some satisfaction at that achievement, even though—sadly from his point of view—he still has to address the Government from the Opposition Benches.

I want to say a few words of appreciation for the electors of New Forest East, who did me the honour of electing me for the fifth time since the seat was created—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, Hear”.] I am pleased to get such ringing endorsement from my colleagues. As well as thanking the electors, I would like to pay tribute to the candidates of the four other parties that competed in the election, who, without exception, conducted themselves with good humour and integrity. It was pleasant to take part in a general election on that basis.

It was notable that the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) repeatedly asked “Who would have thought this would have arisen?”, “Who would have thought that would have arisen?”, and “Who would have thought the other would have arisen?” In making those rhetorical observations, the right hon. Gentleman arrived at the heart of the problem that affects defence policy in times of peace. In times of peace, those who try to predict the way in which peaceful times will be disrupted will almost invariably fail. Invariably, when conflict arises, there is little or no warning. That is why, in peacetime, it is always a struggle to persuade the Government of the day that they ought to invest as much in defence as defence-minded Members of Parliament would like.

In my brief remarks, I shall touch on just three topics: decision making in defence, the nature of defence reviews, and the issue of NATO and deterrence. Decision making in defence has suffered in recent times. It is no exaggeration to say that the chiefs of staff have become the chief executives rather than the heads of their services, and that is not good for defence and strategic planning.

In a report published just before the election, which therefore was not given the attention it might otherwise have received, the Defence Committee said that “the...Chiefs of Staff Committee is too detached from the central policy-making process in the MoD and also, crucially, from the NSC”

—that is, the National Security Council. We recommended “that the roles of the Chief of Staff should be redefined to give greater weight to their function as strategy advisors. We recommend that the Chiefs of Staff...should become the official military sub-committee of the NSC, in order to tender to it joint military advice”.

That is important, because in recent decades too much responsibility for the tendering of strategic advice has fallen on the shoulders of the Chief of the Defence staff, his vice-chief, and the Chief of Joint Operations. A more effective vehicle is one in which the heads of the armed services sit in committees and tender joint strategic advice to the politicians. I believe that that partly explains why some of the decisions made by those politicians have been rather shallower, and certainly more reactive to events, than they ought to have been.

The second aspect of decision-making difficulty arises from what has happened in the higher reaches of the civil service. There is a parallel with the arrangement whereby someone can become head of the Royal Navy, the Army or the Royal Air Force, but end up with no major role in the tendering of strategic advice. People are no longer required to be domain-competent to hold the highest jobs in individual Departments. In other

words, someone can rise to very near the top of one Department, and if a vacancy arises for a permanent under-secretary in, for example, the Ministry of Defence, the person's next promotion can be to that post, although he or she may have absolutely no defence background.

Bob Stewart: Just like Ministers.

Dr Lewis: We, however, rely on the combination that involves lay people who become Ministers being guided by the expertise of the professional civil service. Now, the civil service has adopted a policy of opening up the possibility of more top jobs to its most high-flying people, but if they are not to be the experts, who is?

I shall now say something about my second topic—the nature of defence reviews—which may not make me entirely popular with those on my own side. I have said it before, and I intend to go on saying it: the 1997-98 Labour strategic defence review went about things in a better fashion than our review did in 2010. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth) was good enough to acknowledge that ours was Treasury-driven. By gum, yes, it was.

Mike Gapes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr Lewis: Of course I will, but only briefly.

Mike Gapes: Is it not a fact that the Labour Government's review, which took about a year and a half, had a foreign policy focus at its centre and was not just about bean counting?

Dr Lewis: The answer is yes, and the hon. Gentleman has saved me from uttering the sentence I was going to utter next, but the point about that review, of course, is that although it was truly strategic, it was not properly funded. Ours went to the other extreme of being properly funded but not truly strategic. We have to try to get a balance between those two methods.

Mr Baker: I would just observe that, having conducted their review, the Labour Government went on to overstretch our armed forces in conflicts that did not comply with the review itself, and not only that, but they seem to have put in place at least the precursor military operations to the mess we now have. They seem to have been a thoroughgoing failure.

Dr Lewis: While not disagreeing with my hon. Friend, I am trying to explain to the House the means of conducting the review. That is the point I am interested in—not the way in which Labour may afterwards have carried out its defence and foreign policies, about which I would have a large measure of agreement with my hon. Friend. The fact is, it is one thing to fail to live up to a good plan, but it is another not to have a good plan in the first place; and if we want to have a good plan, we need to take our time over the strategic defence and security review, and not rush it, and not simply say, "You've got X amount of money; how much defence can you give us for that sum?"

I want to say a quick word about NATO and deterrence. We have heard a lot about the 2% and I do not intend to waste the House's time by reiterating the arguments we have all heard many times, but I would just make one point on the subject: the 2% is not a target, it is a minimum, and therefore there should be no question of our failing to meet the minimum. The question is how

much above that minimum we can safely manage to use as the basis for the future shape and size of our armed forces.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): But does my right hon. Friend not acknowledge that perhaps the bigger challenge is the fact that 26 members of NATO are nowhere near meeting the 2%, so, regardless of what we do, is it not imperative that we influence those other nations to reach that commitment in the first place?

Dr Lewis: That is a very good point, because even when I said that it is not a target but a minimum I was debating whether to add the sub-clause "but it is of course a target for those countries that have not even met it." My hon. Friend is absolutely right: if we stop what we have done consistently, which is comfortably to meet, and indeed exceed, that minimum, what sort of a disincentive is it to other states—for whom it is an aspiration yet to be achieved—when they see we are beginning to lose our grip of our own hitherto much more successful allocation of resources to defence?

We should also remind ourselves that every Government say defence is the first duty of Government. If so, it does not make sense to ring-fence other areas of Government and not to protect defence. If we are going to do that, then come clean and say, "Okay, it isn't the first duty of Government any more" and try to defend taking that position. I do not like this selective ring-fencing of different Departments. A Government ought to have the guts to order their priorities, to set them out, and to stand up in the House of Commons and defend them.

Finally, I just want to say a word about deterrence. I am talking not about nuclear deterrence—unless provoked, the word Trident shall not pass my lips—but about deterrence in the context of the very sad situation whereby Russia, whom we all hoped would continue down the democratic path, has decided to revert, if not to a permanent type, to a type that was all too familiar to us during the cold war years. We see that not only in its behaviour in Ukraine but in the way in which opponents of the regime are being assassinated. We recently had the assassination of Boris Nemtsov, and now we find that Vladimir Kara-Murza, who was a close associate of Boris Nemtsov, has been suddenly struck down with a very serious and undiagnosed illness and is now fighting for his life in a Moscow hospital. Those are not the features that we wish to see in a modern state that wants to play its part on the world stage; they are more of a reversion to a type of regime that held the world at bay for more than 50 years. We hoped that we were entering a new era after the events of 1989 and 1991 so, when we are deciding our priorities, let us remember that in the dark years of the cold war we thought it necessary to spend between 4% and 5% of GDP on defence. I am not calling for that now, but I am certainly calling for us comfortably to exceed the NATO-recommended minimum. I hope that mine will not be the only voice on either side of the House, and I am sure it will not be, saying that we must meet that obligation and carry out our commitment so that the peace that Europe has enjoyed for so long can continue indefinitely.

5.31 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your re-election as Speaker of the House. I also put on record my deep thanks to the

[Jeremy Corbyn]

people of Islington North for electing me to Parliament for the eighth time and for their support. I pledge to represent them on all issues, and I hope that in this Parliament we begin to see some justice for them, particularly on issues relating to housing and to the poverty levels that are sadly so rife and serious in much of inner-city Britain.

This debate is on the sections of the Queen's Speech covering international affairs, and I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), particularly for the latter part of his speech in which he pointed out the issues facing the globe. The wars of the future will largely be about resources, water, food and food security. We have to face up to global inequality and the widening chasm between the wealth of the minority in the wealthiest countries and the poverty of the majority in the poorest countries of the world. If we are complaining about refugee flows at the present time—awful as the conditions from which those people are escaping are, and tragic as the deaths in the Mediterranean, the Andaman sea and elsewhere are—the situation will get worse as global inequality becomes greater, particularly on issues of food and environmental security. We have to be far more serious about how we approach inequality.

The right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) and I have a slightly different view of the way in which the world should be run, as I think he would be the first to acknowledge. Is he, and anyone else who proposes this measure, really serious in saying that the most important thing facing Britain is not only to get up to spending 2% of gross national income on defence but, in some cases, to consider going above that level and to insist that every other NATO country does the same? We would then have a built-in accelerator of arms expenditure in a world that is already a very dangerous place. Can we not think of a way of solving the world's problems other than more weapons and more wars, and more disasters that follow from them? Can we not pursue a serious agenda for peace?

I heard on the radio this morning that the US Defence Secretary is very concerned about Britain's position in the world and that we might be becoming a laggard—he wants us to boost our expenditure. Presumably, the US is giving the same message everywhere else, so that it can carry on influencing NATO policies, including in Europe, while building up its military might all over the Asia-Pacific region, which in turn encourages China to do exactly the same, just as NATO expansion eastwards has been paralleled by increasing Russian expenditure. Surely we need a world dedicated to disarmament and rolling down the security threat rather than increasing it. I see a huge danger developing in the current military thinking.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) made a point about Labour's strategic defence review, which largely included a foreign policy review. I agree that we do not just need a strategic defence review; we need a serious foreign policy review to apprise ourselves as to what our position and status in the world actually is. We once had an empire, but we no longer have one—that might be news to some Government Members, but I can let them know it in the confidence of this Chamber. Our influence in the world ought to be

for good, peace, human rights, environmental protection and narrowing global inequality. We might delude ourselves that the rest of the world love us—they do not. They think we have a predilection towards arms, intervention and wars, as we did in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

Let us think about what influence in the world is about. Last week or the week before, I was in New York for the last two days of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty review conference. It was a desperately sad occasion, as Britain and the other permanent members of the Security Council lined up together to protect their expenditure on and the holding of nuclear weapons. They did not do anything positive to bring about a good resolution of that conference, and no good resolution has come out of it. A conference on a weapons of mass destruction-free zone in the middle east, first called for more than a decade ago, still has not happened. Because it has not happened, encouragement is given to proliferation by other wealthy countries in the region that could afford to buy nuclear technology and develop it. Why is the UK not helpful on this issue? Why do we not accept that, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman) pointed out, the non-proliferation treaty is the most supported treaty anywhere in the world?

That treaty has reduced the spread of nuclear weapons. It has not completely eliminated it, as India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel have nuclear weapons outside that treaty, but the countries that gave up nuclear weapons have some clout in the world. The respect with which South Africa was listened to at the conference because it is the most industrialised country to have specifically given up nuclear weapons was interesting. Abdul Minty, its representative at the conference, was treated with enormous respect. He pointed out that the conferences on the humanitarian effects of war held in Vienna, Mexico and Norway had all shown exactly how dangerous nuclear weapons are. So why are proposing to spend £100 billion replacing the Trident nuclear missile system when we could be doing something far more useful in the world?

I do not have much time, so I shall briefly cover the other points I want to mention. I have talked about intervention and wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, and I ask the Foreign Secretary or, as he is not in his place, the Foreign Office to reply. When are we going to see the Chilcot report published? When are we going to know the truth of the Iraq war? This is the third Parliament since there was, tragically, a vote to go to war in Iraq, and we need to learn the lessons. We need to learn the lessons of the abuses of human rights in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya and of the tragedy of the victims of war—all the wars—who have fled, tried to find a place of safety and been greeted with brutal intolerance in many of the places in which they have arrived. There is a refugee crisis around the world that has to be addressed very quickly.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton talked about the situation in Palestine. Some of those people dying in the Mediterranean are Palestinians; they are the ones who have managed to get out of Gaza or the west bank. There must be serious concern that, after all the horrors that have happened in Gaza—I have been there a number of times—there is still no real rebuilding going on. What message does that send to the poor and unemployed young people of Gaza? They

sit amidst the rubble of their existence, watching the rest of the world on their television screens or computers. Surely, real pressure must be put on both Israel and Egypt to lift the blockade of Gaza so at least the rebuilding can take place and there can be some sort of process there for the future.

I want to draw the Foreign Secretary's attention to two specific cases. I was on an all-party delegation to the USA—it was a very strange delegation because it included the right hon. Members for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) and for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) and me—to plead the case of Shaker Aamer. It was with some interest that we were received by Senator John McCain who realised that there truly was a breadth of agreement on Shaker Aamer if the four of us could enter his office, as we did the offices of Senator Feinstein and a number of other senators, and make the point that this House of Commons voted with no opposition that we should press for the return of Shaker Aamer to this country.

Shaker Aamer has been in Guantanamo Bay since 2001. He was sold to bounty hunters in 2001, brutally treated in Bagram airbase, and taken by a rendition process to Guantanamo Bay. He has been there on hunger strike and been making other forms of protest ever since. He has never been charged, never been prosecuted and never been through any legal process. He has twice been cleared for release by President Bush and later by President Obama. He has never seen his 13-year-old son whom I had the pleasure to meet when he came to Parliament. I also met him last Friday evening at a meeting in Battersea, at which we called for his father's return and release. The meeting was also attended by the hon. Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison). Will the Foreign Office undertake to follow up our visit with real vigour and press the Obama Administration to name the date when Shaker Aamer will be able to come home and join his family in this country? That is the least it can do at the present time.

The other case involves my constituent, Andargachew Tsige, who was an opposition figure from Ethiopia. He was kidnapped at Sana'a airport in Yemen and taken to Addis Ababa and has been in prison ever since. He was tried in absentia, sentenced to death and is on death row in an Ethiopian prison. He could not have been extradited there because of the death penalty. No extradition process was ever sought or followed. He is an entirely peaceful person who wants to see peace, democracy and development in Ethiopia. I know that he has been visited by the British ambassador on a couple of occasions. I hope that the Foreign Office will be able to inform me that it is making real progress on his release.

We live in a time when there are serious human rights abuses all around the world. I have been an officer of the all-party human rights group ever since I was first elected to this House. The abuse of human rights is legion all around the world; we know that because we all take up many, many such cases. If we as a country leave the European convention on human rights, which is the human rights system in Europe, what message will that send to the rest of the world—that we do not care about human rights and that we do not think they are important? How could we proselytise against human rights abuses or call on countries to improve their human rights process if we are walking away from the

international process ourselves? We need a world of peace, not of war. We need a world of human rights and justice, not of injustice and imprisonment. We achieve those things not by greater militarisation but by trying to promote peace, human rights and justice all over the world.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. A six-minute limit now applies.

5.44 pm

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): I feel a real sense of humility speaking after the hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), who gave an accomplished speech in the best traditions of this House. I congratulate him.

On a cold February morning in 1968, a young man, not yet 21, stepped off a plane at Heathrow airport, nervously folding away his one-way ticket from Kenya. He had no family, no friends and was clutching only his most valuable possession, his British passport. His homeland was in political turmoil. Kenya had kicked him out for being British. My father never returned. He made his life here in Britain, starting on the shop floor of a paint factory. My mother, recruited by the NHS in Mauritius as a girl of 18, passed her 45th year of service last year.

My family had nothing but hopes and dedication. They were so proud to be British and so proud to make our country even better. If I succeed in making some small contribution during my time in this place, it will reflect only a fraction of my gratitude to this country for the abundance of education, culture and traditions that have made Britain great, for the tolerance and fellowship of the British people, and for the opportunity and liberty that we all enjoy.

Before I turn to the subject of today's debate, I should like to pay tribute to my predecessor, Mark Hoban. Mark served for 14 years in this House and during that time set an example as a conscientious constituency MP and a principled member of the Government. I have met many constituents for whom Mark was an indefatigable campaigner. He set a standard that it would be difficult to match. Mark played an invaluable part in the previous Government, initially as Financial Secretary to the Treasury and latterly as Minister for Employment. His brief covered financial services in the aftermath of the credit crunch and he embraced the challenge of banking reform. As Minister for Employment, he was responsible for Universal Jobmatch, an excellent service matching jobseekers and employers online.

Following Mark is not only daunting but inspiring. I will be a strong voice for Fareham. More than 1,000 young people travel too far for A-levels, and I hope to see more sixth-form provision within the constituency. As an increasing and ageing population puts pressure on local GP services, schools and roads, I plan to be an advocate for all my constituents as we face the challenge of building more homes.

Fareham is nestled on the Solent coastline between Portsmouth and Southampton. In the south of the constituency lies Titchfield, famous for its abbey. It is on the route to the Isle of Wight, and monarchs often visited. In 1625, Charles I, just married, arrived with his

[*Suella Fernandes*]

new bride, the French Princess Henrietta Maria. It was the 17th century equivalent of a honeymoon. However, all was not well between the newlyweds: instead of their enjoying the first days of a new life together, arguments that had been brewing between the French and English courts came to a head in Titchfield. Disputes about status, religion and money culminated in melodramatic outbursts between Charles and his new wife, altercations and even the attempted murder of the local vicar. It is fair to say that that European union was not going so well. Thankfully, all was lovingly resolved and the Hampshire honeymoon marked the beginning of a decade of marital bliss for Charles and his wife. No doubt the European renegotiation that this Conservative Government are driving forward will be judged successful if our marriage remains happy and prosperous in the decades ahead.

It is fitting that I make my maiden speech during the debate about Britain in the world because if you take away only one fact about Fareham today, Mr Speaker, let it be the bravery of the men and women who gave so much in the name of freedom. Warsash on the Hamble river was the disembarkation point from which hundreds of British and allied naval and commando units sailed for the D-Day landings on the Normandy beaches. It was an ambitious operation. Just before he left for Normandy, one officer wrote:

“the local rector arrived in the camp and there was a parade. We all attended and knelt in the main road coming into the camp, the rector stood on a box and gave a short speech “God teach us not to show cowardice, God give us the strength to face the enemy””.

At times of threat and in the face of evil, Fareham was courageous. We will never forget.

As the new MP for Fareham, I hope to build on a legacy of enterprise, for Fareham is at the forefront of technology in the aerospace and marine sectors, with companies such as Eaton Aerospace, National Air Traffic Services and Raymarine headquartered locally.

It is a stroke of luck to be born British, and my indebtedness goes to the heart of why I am a Conservative. Our party rewards endeavour, enables compassion and liberates people from the shackles of the state. Our party says, “It doesn’t matter where you start. You can make your life and that of others better by taking responsibility and through self-empowerment and generosity.” I will do all I can to serve the people of Fareham with humility, integrity and warmth.

5.50 pm

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Fareham (*Suella Fernandes*). I was struck by the fact that her father arrived in 1968, and I arrived some six years later under my own steam but also carrying only a suitcase. I was an immigrant by choice rather than necessity, but what brings us together is a supranational concept of being British, so whether born in these isles or having decided to live in these isles, we can call ourselves British. That is something we should never forget, and it takes me to the subject of my speech.

The Queen’s Speech talks about Britain in the world. I wonder whether the time has come for us to pause occasionally and see how the world sees us. The divergence

in the way we see ourselves and the rest of the world and how the world looks upon us is becoming greater. Elections are quite often viewed in Germany—the country of my birth—through journalists following me around on the campaign trail. Invariably, when I do radio interviews, one of the first questions I am asked is, “Well, Mrs Stuart, just how long have you been on these isles?” I suddenly realised that for the rest of mainland Europe, these are islands, whereas we have largely forgotten that we are an island. The most telling evidence of that forgetting was the mention of our maritime surveillance aircraft and the fact that the strategic defence review did not start by saying, “We are an island, therefore we need a navy.” That is part of our forgetting who we are.

We assume that we have natural advantages, one of which is the English language. I want to warn Members. There was a wonderful programme not long ago in which a young American woman attributed the breakdown of her marriage to an Englishman to the simple fact that she did not speak English English. For example, she would say, “I would like children” and he would say, “Yes, let’s think about that.” She would suggest that they move to another part of the country and he would say, “Yes, we can discuss that.” She said it took her about 20 years to realise that this was just a very polite English way of saying, “No. No chance. I just don’t want to have an argument.”

When we talk about hard power and soft power, we assume that part of our soft power is the export of our culture, our values and the English language, but just listen to many an interview. The English language as spoken on these islands is no longer necessarily the English that is spoken in the rest of Europe and at many of the negotiating tables. We think of ourselves as being, as of right, permanent members of the UN Security Council. Yes, in terms of the institutional structures, we are there as of right, but if we do such things as lecture NATO members in Wales about not meeting the 2% standard on spending and tell them that they are no-good crummy allies by failing to do so, when we ourselves fall below the 2% standard, the gap widens between our posturing and the reality, and our credibility is diminished.

We are a force for good. It is not just the supranational concept of Britishness, but it can be traced back to Queen Elizabeth I who, when dealing with the Catholics, said, “I will not make windows into men’s hearts.” That was her way of saying, “If you live in these islands, I expect from you certain behaviour in your public life, which includes compliance with the rule of law, but there is a part of you—your inner beliefs—which are yours.” I therefore make a plea that we do not often get a chance to make in this House: let us start looking at ourselves a little more carefully.

The rest of the world sees these islands as fragmenting, and sees a startling rise of nationalism. Whether that is the Scottish referendum, the call for English votes for English MPs or other causes, the world sees us not as pulling together but as fragmenting. Unless we start to be conscious of that and deal with the consequences, our negotiating positions will become much harder.

Above all, as a member of the Defence Committee in the previous Parliament, and after two Sessions on the Foreign Affairs Committee before that, I believe that unless we start to define what British national interests are and formulate a foreign policy accordingly, all the

discussions about defence will be meaningless. There is a natural hierarchy—we do not know what forces we need unless we know what role we wish to play in the world. If we wish to play a positive role in the world, that will occasionally mean that we need significant military capabilities, because when war breaks out we have to fight that war before we can do the peace.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): I apologise for interrupting a fantastic speech, but I remind my hon. Friend that during our last inquiry one of the most frightening pieces of evidence given to us was when we asked about strategy and were told that, unfortunately, the speaker thought that the Prime Minister's concept of strategy was "What's next?" Is not the great problem of this House that perhaps we become more focused on what's next than on what is the grand strategy for the UK, where we aim to be and where we aim to take these islands?

Ms Stuart: I do not disagree with a word my hon. Friend has said. I ask new Members of the House to take note. Too often, we spend time on all the important things in life such as rubbish not collected, the potholes in our constituencies and the hedges not being cut, but we do not spend enough time on what the role of this House should be: taking a strategic view of what this nation is about, what the requirements of this nation are and whether the Government are fulfilling them.

5.58 pm

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart). She is always interesting and original and I entirely agree with her peroration.

What a delight to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes). Her personal story and the way in which she promoted her constituency in a remarkable first contribution here make me enormously proud to have her as a colleague on the Conservative Benches.

I want to disagree gently with my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), who said there were problems with making policy in peacetime, and that that has implications for the armed forces. We are facing the most challenging foreign policy environment since the end of the second world war. It is pleasing that so many Members want to take part in the debate today, and it is perhaps unsurprising that in the media the issue did not rate the interest and concern that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston has just asked us to show.

There was an agreeably standard speech from my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. Accompanied by the Secretaries of State for Defence and for International Development, he laid out the aspirations for our foreign policy. However, it was ever so slightly punctured by my right hon. Friend the Member for Broadland (Mr Simpson) asking him about the money. In the end, our position in the world depends on three legs. The first is the policy and our aspiration for the role we wish to play in the world. Secondly, there are the instruments of power with which we deliver that position: hard power, in the form of the armed forces and intelligences services; and soft power, in the form of international development, the British Council, the BBC World Service, and all the

voluntary and private sector manifestations of British soft power. But thirdly, we must resource those resources, particularly those that come from the Government.

It is a pity that the Chancellor of the Exchequer was not on the Front Bench to hear the Foreign Secretary's speech. One message that I will give to all right hon. and hon. Members, particularly those on my side of the House, is that if they want to support expenditure on maintaining our position in the world, they must look not to the Ministers now on the Front Bench but to the Treasury Ministers, ensuring that they fully understand how important those of us on this side of the House believe those issues to be.

If the rest of my remarks sound rather like a proposed programme for the Foreign Affairs Committee that is largely because that is what they are. Let me turn to the European Union. We have a strategic decision to take as a nation, and so profound is that decision that it must be put to the people in a referendum. Enabling that referendum was a key part of the Queen's Speech. That measure gives us a chance to address a sore that has run through British politics, arguably since the Single European Act. That changed the nature of the then European Community and gave socialists an opportunity to use—some would say abuse—the role of the European Union to pursue both market and social objectives. The nature of the deal and of the Union changed, and it is now necessary for our country to decide either to recommit to the European Union or to come out of it. We therefore have to analyse the costs and benefits of those options. I believe that, as the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) said, that can be done by a Committee of this House that does not agree on what the outcome should be but ought to be able to analyse properly the exact costs and benefits of either option.

The background to that immensely important decision includes issues such as our relationship with Russia. Russia has gone from being a potential partner that was emerging from the cold war to a strategic competitor. We have to give proper attention to Russia and to the situation in Ukraine, and to what that might mean for the cold war that appears to be enveloping our relationship again, and for our armed forces and the necessity to use them. We will have to look at issues relating to China, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth) suggested in his contribution.

I am delighted, in one sense, that the Foreign Secretary is no longer in his place, because he has gone to Paris for a meeting of the core coalition group on ISIL. Why is an intelligent regional policy towards ISIL not being pursued by Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey and Egypt? They are the key regional powers. What are we doing, as one of the major powers behind them, to ensure that they get their act together and co-ordinate as far as they can, because ISIL is as much their enemy as it is ours?

We must also address difficult issues concerning values and interests in the United Kingdom. We have had the Jenkins review of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. What do we do when people vote for parties we do not like, and where does that put our values, as against our interests? Finally, we must examine the chaos that Libya has fallen into and the consequences for the European Union.

6.3 pm

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): I am very pleased to follow the greatly experienced hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), whom I had the pleasure of meeting on my first day in this Parliament. I stand before the House today as only the fourth Member of Parliament for Great Grimsby since the end of the second world war. Members will find that I look and sound distinctly different from my predecessor. They should not be alarmed; it is that I am the first woman representative of that truly great town, and the first in modern times to be born in the shadow of our famous Dock Tower.

In keeping with tradition, I have turned to the maiden speech of my predecessor, Austin Mitchell. It was made two years and one month before I was born. I say that not to point out the difference in age between Austin and me, but rather to highlight his extraordinary length of service and the commitment he gave over 38 years not only to the constituency, but to this House. His maiden speech mentioned the often “perfunctory” references to preceding representatives of a constituency. Having had our differences of opinion over recent months, it may well surprise him and others to learn that I will not be limited in my praise of him.

Austin’s passion for Grimsby, its people, heritage and future remained strong throughout his tenure. He lobbied for what he believed best served the town and its people, whether that was a lengthy struggle for fishermen’s compensation packages or, more recently, supporting local people facing the demolition of their high-rise homes without a proper plan to re-house them. He was firmly on Grimsby’s side. That passion often led him into conflict with his own party, but I suspect that history will be kind to Austin, his independent thought and steadfastness in the face of opposition.

The short film that Austin and his wife Linda have recently premiered, “Great Grimsby”, was produced to counter the often negative perception that others have of the town—the social difficulties that exist have been broadcast to the nation in Channel 4’s “Skint”. Their film gives everyone a chance to see the delights that our corner of the country has to offer, as it is freely available on YouTube. I urge hon. Members on both sides of the House to take the time to view it.

Austin’s scepticism over Europe is well documented, and the local resentment towards a perceived poor deal from Europe for our former main industry of fishing led to a significant challenge from the UK Independence party during the election. UKIP laid all the ills of society at the door of Europe: “You can’t get an appointment to see your doctor; your child hasn’t got into your first choice of school; you can’t find work; you can’t get a flat.” All those issues—domestic issues of the NHS, education, jobs and housing—are for the current Government to tackle. They were wrongly set at the feet of Europe and European migration. Indeed, just as Nigel Farage blamed congestion on the M4 on immigrants, my UKIP opponent challenged us all to ask, “What happens when the renewables run out?”—a European conspiracy to steal our wind, perhaps?

The issue of wind, or more specifically wind energy and renewable energy, is where the future lies for our town. While UKIP sought to look back and return to the days of a port filled with deep-sea trawlers, with the

town’s young men taking their lives in their hands with each three-week voyage to sea, local businesses, the council and individuals have turned to look outwards and to the future. Our future clearly lies in the prospects of a strong renewable energy sector, in partnership with our European neighbours. There is now an opportunity to draw more businesses to an additional port and to the port complex along the south bank, and that brings with it the hope of 4,000 new jobs.

I stress in the strongest terms how important those jobs are for rejuvenating our area, offering something new and exciting for our young people to be proud of. Some 25% of our young people are not in employment, education or training, and that cannot be allowed to continue; our young people deserve better. I have heard it said in the House over the past few days that employment is the best route out of poverty, but I suggest that it is a safe and secure environment for independent young people to live in, coupled with supported access to continued education, that would best prevent poverty being the guaranteed outcome for so many.

If, as so many in the town hope, we are to take Great Grimsby forward and truly become a 21st century port town, political support for the renewables industry is essential. Our other traditional industries of food manufacturing and petrochemicals have shrunk in recent years and there is an increased reliance on short-term jobs, which provide no security for people or their families. Redundancies and relocations have hit the town hard. I meet more and more people who are working two or three jobs simply to make ends meet, and they are the jobs not of mayor and MP, but of cleaner, carer and factory worker.

The people of Great Grimsby want to work. Nearly a thousand have applied for 30 new hotel jobs in recent weeks. My campaign slogan was “Pride, Passion and Belief in Grimsby”. Although I doubt that I will be changing my surname to Haddock, I will use my time in this House over the next five years to champion my home town.

6.10 pm

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow such a superb maiden speech by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn). As a former fisheries Minister, I listened many times to her predecessor giving the same speech in the fisheries debate. Whatever was rightly or wrongly attributed to him—he allegedly said that anybody in a red rosette would win the seat of Grimsby—the hon. Lady has proved those words to be incorrect, because she gave an exceptional performance in this debate. She should feel huge pride in her initial contribution to our proceedings.

Frederick the Great once said:

“Diplomacy without arms is like music without instruments.”

We need to contemplate that as we decide how Britain plays its role in the world. People in all parts of this House have an internationalist view. In that spirit of working together, much as was outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), we can find a way through the difficult decisions that we have to face. Too often in this House we use phrases such as “projecting power” and “punching above our weight”. I urge hon. Members to treat those phrases with caution. Our constituents are suspicious when we use such phrases.

They are weary of Britain playing an eternal role of international policeman. They are suspicious of phrases that might lack humility following some of the interventions in the post-9/11 period, which—whatever the undoubted professionalism and courage of our armed services, and through no fault of theirs—have not been the success that we were led to believe they would be or might have hoped they would be. Too often, too high a price was paid in blood and treasure for those interventions. However, while I have a deep suspicion of those kinds of high-octane interventions, I remain, and this House and this Government should remain, absolutely committed to Britain playing a leading role in the world.

Over the next few weeks the Government will be working on their National Security Council risk assessment, so this is an absolutely crucial moment. Anybody who knows me will know that I have a generally sunny view of life—I am a ready listener to the Prime Minister when he talks about bright sunlit uplands and the great future that awaits this country—but I must confess that as I contemplate the world today an awful bleakness comes over me. It is a more dangerous world than has existed at any time in my lifetime, and I speak as somebody who served in the armed forces during the cold war.

I hope that the National Security Council risk assessment reflects an arc of insecurity around Europe's south and eastern borders that extends from northern Nigeria through the Maghreb and the Sahel into the horn of Africa, and includes the chaos in Yemen and the tragedy in Iraq and Syria. As we look at Russia's western border, we see Russia's actions destabilising countries, some of which we are duty-bound—treaty-bound—to defend if they are attacked. We hear today about threats in the South China sea. We know of emerging threats in different parts of the world. I entirely agree with the shadow Foreign Secretary that climate change is an instigator of instability and that wars that may have been fought over the egos of leaders, or oil or territory will perhaps in future be fought over natural resources such as water, energy and food.

As we look to the future, the important point is to look back to the past. Five years ago, we did not predict that a jihadist group would hold an area the size of France, where they are trying to create a state with levels of barbarity unknown since medieval times. We would not have been able to guess that Russia would actually annex part of a sovereign state. We need to look at how we resource our influence in the world, first understanding the mistakes we made in the past, but then looking to flexible and properly resourced services for the future.

Our armed forces have a societal value to us that we do not value enough. They have the immense value to this country of deterring potential enemies and supporting our allies, but most importantly they exist to counter the threats we face. I hope an intellectual thread will run through the National Security Council's risk assessment that will feed through to the strategic defence and security review and, from that, to the comprehensive spending review. It is almost impossible to conclude that we can achieve what we need to achieve in the world without spending at least 2% of GDP on defence. We need to make that a factor of honour. As recently as last September, in Wales, the Prime Minister was right to extol the virtues of Britain doing that. Our constituents

will want us to keep the Government's feet to the fire on the most important duty of any Government—the defence and security of the United Kingdom and its interests.

6.16 pm

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) on a superb maiden speech that will, I am sure, be echoed by important contributions in many years to come. During it, I reflected on her emphasis on the importance of renewable and sustainable energy to the economy of Grimsby. It is many years since I made my maiden speech, but over those years—the five terms for which I am grateful to the electors of Southampton, Test for returning me as a Member of Parliament—I have tried to champion that cause in this House, as well as championing the pressing need to take action on climate change. The sort of new future that could be available for Grimsby with renewable and sustainable energy at its heart is one of the positive outcomes of that championing.

In this Queen's Speech, we saw a brief reflection of the importance of action on climate change and the need for a very firm and positive outcome to the upcoming talks in Paris in December. It is important that that was in the Queen's Speech, because it is on our watch that these talks will take place, with an outcome that could be crucial for the whole future of our world. If there is one thing that we might want Britain to do in the world, and for the world, it is to press at the climate change talks for the conclusion that could make such a big difference.

In that context, I worry about the difference between the words that are in front of us and the actions that have to go with them. One of the key Bills proposed in the Queen's Speech is an energy Bill that appears to point in precisely the opposite direction from the way we need to go on climate change by institutionalising the extraction of mineral energy at its maximum and taking punitive action against renewable and low-carbon energy, particularly onshore wind, which it places in the arms of a system that is already bankrupt. If the Bill has its way, there will be very little new renewable energy coming forward over the next period. That is important. Britain has a lot of money in the bank to contribute towards tackling climate change. We have to walk the walk and not just talk the talk and leave it at rhetoric.

The Government have said that the unique selling point of Britain's contribution towards tackling climate change is the targets it has set and how it has met its carbon budgets. Indeed, we recently met our first carbon budget and have set a number of future carbon budgets, which I hope we will be able to meet. However, if we end up attending climate change talks having abandoned that particular trajectory, our influence in the world will be immeasurably diminished.

We could put in legislation the requirement to decarbonise our energy supplies by 2030. That was a grave omission from the Queen's Speech. We could do that in the run-up to the climate change talks to demonstrate that we are serious about a future low-carbon economy. If we end up at the climate change talks dithering about whether we are going to do that and reach our future targets, our influence will be gravely diminished and our attempts at a low-carbon future will be undermined as a result.

6.22 pm

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I am very grateful for the opportunity to make my maiden speech. May I first congratulate other hon. Friends and Members on their splendid maiden speeches? They have made me quite nervous, and I wish very good luck to all the others who will follow me.

I pay tribute to my Liberal Democrat predecessor, Jeremy Browne, who represented Taunton and Taunton Deane for the past 10 years and was a distinguished Minister of State at the Foreign Office and for Home Affairs. He was known as a straight-talking Minister who got things done. He promoted a private Member's Bill on organ donation and was involved in the Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013, which shows his diversity. On termination of his office, he remarked that he had heard it said that he was

"the only Minister in history to have been sacked for being too supportive of the Government."—[*Official Report*, 18 March 2015; Vol. 594, c. 816.]

I personally knew Jeremy and had a great deal of respect for him. He built a reputation as a caring and conscientious constituency MP and I really hope that I will follow in that vein.

Apart from occasional interludes, Taunton Deane has traditionally been Conservative and I am honoured to have reinstated that tradition and to have been part of the incredibly successful wider Conservative campaign in the whole south-west. I am also proud to be the very first woman Conservative MP for Taunton and, indeed, for Somerset.

As an MP and working mum who has latterly run my own business, I was delighted to see in the Gracious Speech the enterprise Bill giving support for small businesses and, in particular, measures in the education and childcare Bill to double the hours of free childcare for three and four year olds, which will really help working women.

Taunton Deane has one or two colourful characters in its history. Hon. Members may not know that Disraeli stood for election in Taunton in 1835, but he lost. He did not even have so many doors to knock on in those days, but obviously he went on to be a great one nation Tory. How apt that is today.

Still fondly remembered in the constituency for his larger than life approach is Sir Edward du Cann, who in May 1959 said in a debate in this House that the A303 from London to the south-west had bottlenecks and that it was totally inadequate and in need of improvement. We have debated the issue ever since. I am delighted that years on it is this Government who are so committed to upgrading the A303 and, indeed, the A358, which runs right through my constituency, as well as junction 25 of the M5 and are committed to the wonderful transformation of Taunton railway station. It is going to happen and I will work to ensure that all those things are addressed.

What of Taunton Deane today? Of course, I am rather biased because I have lived there for nearly 30 years and think there is no better place to hang one's hat. Between the beautiful Blackdown hills and the Quantock hills runs the fertile vale of Taunton, right in the centre of which is the county town of Taunton itself. Right in the heart of the county town, one can go to watch Somerset play cricket at the County Ground. I was there just yesterday afternoon, watching Chris Gayle hit 15 sixes in an innings. Much money is being spent turning the ground into an international cricket ground,

and I hope that in the coming years I will be able to invite Members from both sides of the House to the County Ground to watch Somerset thrash their home sides.

Taunton is also home to the UK Hydrographic Office, which is globally renowned for producing naval shipping maps and which I very much hope will stay there, and to Somerset's main hospital. We also have the beautiful town of Wellington, home to international companies, including Swallowfield and Relyon bed company, and fashionable, high-end cloth makers, Fox Brothers. I know that you are known for your sartorial elegance, Mr Deputy Speaker, so perhaps you will come to purchase your next suit there.

Farming is the lifeblood of our rural areas, with livestock and dairying still very much predominant. Farming is my background, so I understand the challenges and, yes, I have milked many a cow. The Pows have farmed in Somerset for more than six centuries, rivalling even the claim to longevity of my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg). I hope that nature and wildlife can be interwoven into the way in which we produce our food. In that respect, I am so supportive of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Let us bring on the bee pollinator strategy.

Penultimately, I have to mention flooding. I am sure hon. Members will all remember the devastating flooding on the Somerset levels just a year ago, when thousands of acres of precious land were underwater. Thankfully, the area is blooming again and the rivers are dredged. I pay enormous tribute to the entire Government at that time for the great work they did combating the flooding.

Finally, I have an overriding ambition to see Taunton Deane become the gateway to the south-west and, indeed, to see the whole south-west pull together, with all the right infrastructure and education and skills, to make us the south-western powerhouse and, indeed, the engine room of this country, playing a much greater role than ever before in the great economy under this Government. I really look forward to playing a part in that myself.

I am exceedingly grateful for the time you have given me, Mr Deputy Speaker, and for your indulgence for the past few minutes as I made my maiden speech.

6.28 pm

Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to make my maiden speech. I pay tribute to the Members who have made their speeches before me today. Many of them are very experienced Members, but what I lack in experience I make up for in enthusiasm.

In the early hours of 8 May I was honoured to be elected the Member of Parliament for Burnley. I would like to thank the people of Burnley and Padiham for the trust they have placed in me. As is customary, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to my predecessor, Gordon Birtwistle. In 2010 Gordon made a name for himself being the oldest newly elected MP. He was unquestionably a hard-working MP who, like me, wanted the best for Burnley. Members might not be surprised to hear that we have not always seen eye to eye about everything, but we do share a love of Burnley and a commitment to providing strong representation and I wish him well in his retirement.

It is a privilege to represent Burnley because it is a special place. During the industrial revolution, Burnley came to prominence as the town that produced more cotton than any other town in the world. It undoubtedly played its part in making Britain the richest country in the world at that time, with the biggest empire that the world has ever seen.

Even now, in the 21st century, much of the industrial landscape has survived and we are keen to protect our heritage. That does not mean that we want to turn our town into a museum. We are moving forward, using our past to provide the foundations for our future. Our old mills, sitting on the banks of the Leeds and Liverpool canal, are being sensitively adapted to serve the new industries and businesses of the future in what is one of the largest heritage regeneration schemes in the country.

Burnley used to be home to single large companies that each employed thousands of people. Our future will consist of some large companies, but also, importantly, some small and medium-sized companies. We are already home to several manufacturing companies with international reputations for quality and innovation, not least Aircelle, Veka, AMS Neve, Futaba Tenneco and Kaman, all of which are well-established, successful businesses providing growth and—as a proud trade union member, I am pleased to say—offering quality employment opportunities for local people.

After many years of campaigning, we have at long last secured—only this month—a direct rail link to Manchester. This link to the UK's second biggest economic centre will be hugely beneficial to Burnley, attracting business, jobs and investment. Month by month, we are attracting new forward-looking businesses to town, most recently Panaz, Vodafone Automotive and Exertis. Burnley is a major centre for the aerospace and automotive industries, but we are also a town of many talents. Most people will not know that 90% of the sound systems used in Hollywood studios are made exclusively and entirely in Burnley, and most people will not know that we are home to Crow Wood, the global spa of the year for 2015.

Burnley has a future as a centre of excellence for advanced manufacturing on the world playing field and can play a key central role in the development of a northern powerhouse. I am passionately committed to working to make this vision a reality. I am committed to making Burnley prosperous, and my working-class roots drive me to fight to ensure that everyone benefits from this prosperity.

In order for Burnley to fulfil its potential, we need Government support. We do not want handouts; we want investment in infrastructure and we need fair grant funding. Frankly, this did not happen under the coalition Government. We need to have a fair share of resources, and we need delegated powers to shape our own destiny. The stakeholders of Burnley, the borough council, the local business community and educational institutions—collectively known as Burnley bondholders—have already demonstrated a record of delivery. This was formally acknowledged in 2013, when I was council leader and Burnley was officially recognised as the most enterprising town in the UK.

If Burnley is to continue to develop as a centre for manufacturing excellence, I know as a former teacher that high standards in training and education are essential not only to fulfil the life potential of every individual

but to provide the skilled workforce needed for Burnley's growing economy. As a result of the Building Schools for the Future programme, Burnley has five new secondary schools and a new sixth-form centre. As the MP, I will strive to ensure that these institutions get the investment and support that they need and are not put at risk by the free school programme, which I have long opposed as a parent, teacher and school governor.

With all this talk of industry, manufacturing, mills and factories, hon. Members could be forgiven for imagining Burnley as a dark, grim place, but they would be mistaken. Burnley and the little market town of Padiham, which I am proud to represent, are surrounded on all sides by the most beautiful countryside. The rolling hills that are visible everywhere truly are a paradise for walkers and provide a very pleasant living environment.

In Burnley, we are renowned for many things, not least our football team: Burnley football club, a founder member of the Football League—the mighty Clarets—play in the same colours as the Prime Minister's football team, Aston Villa—[*Laughter.*]—or is it West Ham United? Even though we have played some magnificent football this season, we will unfortunately not be playing in the Premier League next season, but watch this space—the season after we will be back, because that is the measure of the place and the people. We are proud, ambitious, determined and we often punch above our weight. As the MP, I am determined to play my part in ensuring that that continues to be the case.

I thank the House and you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the courtesy I have been shown.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): Order. There are 13 more maiden speeches that we need to accommodate. Those of us who have been through the process know that it is a little harrowing to have to wait too long. To try to be generous to those making maiden speeches, I will cut the general speaking time to four minutes with immediate effect.

6.35 pm

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I love you too, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper) on her excellent maiden speech, and other hon. Members on the excellent speeches we have heard in the House today. It is a real pleasure to participate in this debate. Many subjects have been covered, but to meet the three-and-a-half minute deadline I have been set, I wish to raise an issue that so far has not been covered—the loss of expertise within our foreign policy-making process because of successive budget cuts under different Governments.

That issue is perhaps best illustrated by our recent military interventions. There can be no doubt that we went to war in Iraq on a false premise, and that in Afghanistan post-2006 we allowed ourselves to lose sight of the bigger picture and let the mission morph from one initially of combating al-Qaeda, which we did successfully, to one of nation building, which caused problems and which we under-resourced. Then there was Libya, which has turned into absolute chaos and civil war.

[Mr John Baron]

Such interventions have ushered in a host of unintended consequences with which we are still contending, but I suggest that they have also distracted us from the greater threat to Britain's security both at home and abroad—potentially hostile nation states that are not just rearming, but reasserting force. Russia and China particularly come to mind. As an ex-soldier, I am not saying that military interventions are never warranted. There have been successful and appropriate interventions—the first Gulf war, Afghanistan in 2001, Sierra Leone and the Falklands—but our most recent interventions seem to suggest we are incorrectly assessing when and how best to use the military instrument. To counter this, we need greater investment in our policy-making process. It is important that our policy makers have the resources.

Mr Baker: Does my hon. Friend agree that even when our armed forces perform superbly, as in Libya, the politics can still fail afterwards?

Mr Baron: I agree. This is not the fault of soldiers on the front line; it is, in many respects, the fault of the military, diplomatic and political leadership.

We need to fund better our Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the policy-making process generally. Continual budget cuts have resulted in a hollowing out of staff with specialist regional knowledge, specialist expertise and language capability. That has eroded our ability to understand what is happening on the ground, and it must be put right. Our unconvincing response to recent Russian aggression and the Arab spring is not unconnected to the fact that we had no Crimea experts in the FCO at the time and we had too few Arabists in place, to such an extent that we had to recall retired diplomats into service. It is therefore no surprise that Parliament has raised the bar before consenting to intervention.

However, I suggest to the House that being better informed is of little use if policy options are restricted. Britain is not spending enough on defence and is cutting back on key defence capabilities. I suggest that strong armed forces are an essential component of foreign policy and often underpin a successful diplomatic strategy. In addition to spending more on defence, I believe we should increase our spending on our soft power capabilities. In this information age, winning the story will be just as important as winning the battle. Our soft power assets, such as the British Council and the BBC World Service, tend to be excellent value, out of all proportion to their positive effect; yet, they are under-resourced.

In conclusion, cutting the FCO and soft-power budgets is a false economy. Diplomacy and soft power can pay for themselves many times over, especially when we are trying to increase our understanding of what is happening on the ground and to avoid conflict. Without strong and capable armed forces, diplomacy and soft power can achieve only so much in the face of potentially hostile and powerful countries, and a step change in defence spending is required, as is the political will to sustain it. However, we also need to better understand the forces at work on the international stage: more than ever, we need a well-resourced foreign policy apparatus so that we can face the challenges in this increasingly uncertain world.

6.40 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron). He and I served on the Foreign Affairs Committee in the last Parliament, and I want to begin by paying tribute to two other of my colleagues from that Committee, Frank Roy and Sandra Osborne, who were assiduous Members of the House, but who were, sadly, swept away by the nationalist tsunami in Scotland.

In the four minutes I have, I wish to concentrate on something very sad: the total lack during the general election campaign of debate about Britain's role in the world and about foreign policy—there was not even a serious debate about our future in Europe. We were obsessed with micro-issues, and, from the Labour side, we had no narrative, no vision and no sense of where our country was going. Unfortunately, that allowed our opponents to set the agenda far too much.

I made my maiden speech 23 years ago during the Queen's Speech debate on foreign policy. I am pleased that, at this election, my constituents in Ilford South gave me the best result Labour has ever achieved. I got 64% of the vote—up from 49%—and a majority of 19,777. That is in London—multicultural, multiracial, diverse London, which is the greatest global city in the world.

Labour did not do badly everywhere in the election. We did not lose the election in Scotland, but in England. [Interruption.] We lost it overall to the Conservatives in England. The Labour party has to win back a majority in England, but we will not do so by chasing an agenda that fails to recognise that globalisation is a fact, that immigration is a good thing and that, if the brightest and the best from Europe and elsewhere in the world wish to come, as they have for centuries, to live, work, contribute and study in our country, we should welcome them. There is no future for a party of the left in following a mean and nasty agenda.

There is also no future for the Labour party if we concentrate on a debate about the past. We must have a vision for the future, and we must talk about Britain's place in the world—yes, our role on the Security Council, our role in the European Union, our links with the Commonwealth and our role as a global trading nation. However, foreign policy is more than that. We have a narrow, mercantilist Government, who believe that the role of the Foreign Office should be simply to boost trade with the BRICs—Brazil, Russia, India and China. The reality is that this country has a moral responsibility: we defined international standards in 1948, and British diplomats played a key role in establishing the United Nations and the universal declaration of human rights, so we should be at the forefront of trying to defend and strengthen those today.

Labour should be proud to be a global, internationalist party, and we as a country should be internationalist and open in our approach. I am delighted that UKIP got only 5% of the vote in my constituency, and I look forward to that being the case elsewhere in the country in years to come.

6.44 pm

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): We have listened to four fantastic speeches from four hon. Ladies—my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes),

the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn), my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) and the hon. Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper). I had better get my game up a bit to try to match their eloquence.

The last strategic defence and security review, in 2010, imposed an 8% cut in the overall defence budget, which resulted, arguably, in a 30% reduction in capacity across all three armed forces. For our military, SDSR 2010 was an excruciating exercise and hurt deeply. For instance, the RAF, shockingly, sacked a quarter of its trainee pilots—many just as they were awarded their flying wings.

In 2010, the SDSR negated two factors: first, the military threat from Russia, which has grown enormously since then and, secondly, the explosion in upheavals in the middle east following the so-called Arab spring, which had not, of course, begun five years ago. Both those factors must now be placed into the planning assumptions for SDSR 2015, and I will say a few words about each.

In real terms, the Russian defence budget has increased by about 53%. The weekend before last, Dmitry Rogozin, Russia's Deputy Prime Minister, remarked on television that tanks do not need visas, and he has a point, given that we see Russian T-72 tanks cruising through eastern Ukraine.

According to MI5, the current threat level for the UK is classified as severe. That means that our security services believe an attack is highly likely, partly from supporters of al-Qaeda or Daesh. I do not want our Army to go abroad to fight and to lose lives again, but it may have to do just that if our enemies pose a sufficient threat to the people of our country.

Mrs Moon: I should just warn the new women who have joined the House of Commons that they will hear the hon. Gentleman's gallantry many times when he is referring to the women of this House—he is well known for it. However, does he agree that two threats really face this country? Russian Bears and Russian submarines have been seen off our coasts numerous times. Also, in terms of the successors of IS, jihadi groups across the middle east and north Africa now see IS as the group to follow if they are to gain any foothold in their own countries. We need to address those issues urgently.

Bob Stewart: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention—she has given me an extra minute, which I will not use. *[Interruption.]* Will the SDP just keep quiet? *[Interruption.]* The SNP—sorry. *[Interruption.]* You have actually used my minute up now.

The most crucial question we have to answer in SDSR 2015 is how much military power we need to generate for operations abroad, whether high-intensity symmetric campaigns, probably as part of a coalition, or asymmetric operations, probably at a lower level. Our armed forces must still be designed to deter state-on-state conflict, and Russia's actions in eastern Europe are signal warning of that. The thought of war between states is not dead—we may hope it is, but we must not count on it.

In the last Parliament, the Defence Committee called for at least 2% of GDP to be allocated to defence. So did I, and I do so again. France is increasing its defence

budget by €4 billion, and Germany by €8 billion. In this SDSR, what we need for defence, and not for cost cutting, must be the paramount assumption.

6.49 pm

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): I am grateful to have caught your eye, Mr Deputy Speaker, and to be able to deliver, in this important debate, my first speech. I hope that in the days and weeks to come this will become a regular occurrence. I should add at this point—indeed, it will come as no surprise to my hon. Friends—that it has not normally been my way to seek a man's permission to speak, but I am endeavouring to learn this, and other skills, as I settle into the House. I had initially thought that as well as being a lawyer, by being an actor I could possibly bring something new to the House, but, as the last few days of debate in this House have shown, there is clearly no shortage of aspiring candidates in that respect.

I am most proud to represent the diverse constituency of Ochil and South Perthshire. I would like to pay tribute to Gordon Banks, my predecessor, who served before me as the MP from 2005. I hope that I will be able to continue his hard work in diligently serving my constituents to the best of my ability. I am proud to have been chosen by voters from three of Scotland's counties to come here to represent their interests.

Clackmannanshire, the wee county, has a proud industrial past. Today, its main employers include: the glass works in Alloa, which has a history dating back over 250 years; and Diageo, where I had the pleasure of meeting apprentice coppersmiths in one of my first engagements as the new local MP.

Kinross-shire is a growing part of the constituency, where the population has doubled in the past 40 years. It has a thriving tourism economy, and is building on this work with recent developments to improve facilities around Loch Leven.

South Perthshire, too, has some iconic businesses. The food and drink sectors are well represented by Highland Spring in Blackford, while visitors to Crieff can enjoy the Famous Grouse Experience. Farming remains a core industry, and tourism plays a leading role in the local economy, from hosting T in the Park to the iconic Gleneagles Hotel in Auchterarder. Gleneagles provided a working model of European integration and harmony when it hosted last year's stunning Ryder cup victory for the European team—perhaps the one and only issue concerning Europe that unites this House!

As the Scottish National party's spokesperson on trade and investment and in my role as deputy shadow Leader of The House, I am delighted to have the opportunity to champion Scotland's economy and to propose measures that will allow businesses in Scotland to grow and succeed on an international level. I want to build on the good work already under way in Scotland to create jobs—not part-time disposable zero-hour contract jobs, and not jobs that perpetuate poverty.

I have had the privilege of seeing the vital work carried out by staff and volunteers at The Gate food bank in Alloa, but it is frankly unacceptable that so many of its clients are either families who are in work but cannot afford to put food on the table at home for their loved ones, or, heartbreakingly, children living in abject poverty. That is why I want to see high quality,

[Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh]

well-paid employment, which builds on the great skills base of the people of Scotland. That is why I will be joining my colleagues on the SNP Benches in committing to becoming a living wage employer in the days and weeks to come.

Scotland already has a fantastic story to tell on trade and investment. An Ernst and Young report last week showed that in 2014 Scotland attracted the most foreign direct investment of any part of the UK outside of London for the third year in a row. We on these Benches will make the case for the measures and policies Scotland's economy needs for the future, including the devolution of key tax and investment powers to the Scottish Parliament.

I have run out of time, but I am pleased to say that the Scottish National party has proactively promoted gender equality in our domestic politics. The Scottish Government have a Cabinet composed of five women and five men, all appointed by Nicola Sturgeon, the first woman to hold the position of First Minister. I hope to work with my colleagues across the Chamber to ensure women are front and centre of politics in the House of the Commons and across the whole of the United Kingdom. In the words of Gandhi:

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world.”

I shall work hard with courage, conviction and humility, and strive to make a positive difference.

6.54 pm

Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh).

I want to start by thanking my predecessor, Ms Alison Seabeck. She worked hard in the course of the past decade to help some of the most vulnerable people in Plymouth. She never wavered in her commitment to her party, albeit a different one from mine.

The great city of Plymouth, which I have been sent here to represent, has a history and stature to rival our nation's capital. Some of our country's defining moments have occurred in the “jewel of the south-west” that is Plymouth. It has a recent character defined in some of the darkest days of the conflicts that dominated the previous century.

In the carnage of the second world war, the sacrifices of those on the home front in cities outside London cannot always be first recalled. During the war, more than 1,100 souls perished on Plymouth's streets, with a nightly exodus to Dartmoor keeping as many children alive as possible. I mention this because that period of war defined our modern history in Plymouth. From the ruins of those dark days sprang the spirit of a modern Plymouth. A huge period of regeneration saw the building of 1,000 homes a year in the 1950s under the Homes for Heroes plan.

It was those days of regeneration and rebirth and the spirit of discovery that engendered what we affectionately call our Janner spirit. In the general election just passed, I tried to knock on every door in my constituency—and I almost succeeded. I am pleased to report that the Janner spirit is truly alive and well: from local community projects to saving our football club; from pioneering mental health and substance misuse treatments to a world-class hospital at Derriford; and from cutting edge

businesses growing an increasingly resilient local economy to the plethora of ambitious and socially aware social enterprises in the city, we truly have a special place on the southern shores of this country that has recently seen a new dawn and is in serious danger of realising its potential.

We in Plymouth have contributed to this nation's history as much as any other major city. This has continued through recent conflicts. It cannot be right that our transport, health and other spending settlements are less than half of what they are elsewhere. In a seat that once elected Michael Foot, I do not underestimate the burden of trust that the people of my city have placed at my door to ensure that we as a Government deliver a more resilient, stable and fair economy that must include better funding settlements from central Government for our core services in Plymouth.

I want to speak briefly about my two main missions in this Parliament. First, mental health provision in this country remains poor. There are some extremely dogged and determined characters who fight night and day to improve the services offered to those who struggle with mental health problems. Often, those who struggle with mental health problems cannot shout for themselves and suffer in silence because of the ridiculous stigma placed on mental health. That stigma ends in this Parliament. It is not good enough to have sympathy, empathy even, or simply to understand these issues when they affect someone close to us. It is time to get this right and I look forward to starting this crusade in Plymouth.

Secondly, the past decade and a half has defined a whole generation of us in often unseen wars against enemies of the state that only seem to grow darker. We have no complaints about the duty that we have chosen. It formed many of us; indeed, it made many of us who we are today. We were proud to defend this great nation in the same traditions of the immense sacrifices of our forefathers. However, last week my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spoke of the gravity of the end of combat operations in Afghanistan. For many families, that marks the end of the sleepless nights by the phone and the ever-dreaded knock at the door.

I am sorry to report, however, that there remains a great stain on this nation of ours when it comes to conflict. In 2012, we reached a very unwelcome threshold when, tragically, more soldiers and veterans killed themselves than were killed on operational service in defence of the realm. It goes without saying that there are some genuine heroes in our communities and charities up and down this land who work tirelessly night and day to look after and assist those who have found returning to a peaceful life the biggest challenge of all. A great many of these veterans are not only from Afghanistan.

My key point is this: there has been a fundamental misunderstanding by Governments of all colours over the years that veterans' care is a third sector responsibility and that the great British public, in all their wonderful generosity, support our troops well enough, and any new initiative is met with the response, “Well, there must be a charity for that.” That is fundamentally and unequivocally wrong, and I make no apologies for pointing it out to anyone of any rank or position who may be offended by my candour.

I am not a charity and neither were my men. We gave the best years of our lives in defending the privileges, traditions and freedoms that this House and all Members

enjoy. It is therefore the duty of this House to look after them and, crucially, their families when they return. I would be grateful if you would grant me your patience, Mr Deputy Speaker, to bring just two of them to the attention of the House this evening.

Lance Sergeant Dan Collins of the Welsh Guards was typical of the soldiers I was privileged to command in my tours of Afghanistan. His story had a profound effect on me. I implore Members to look him up tonight before they go to bed and to read his story. He endured events that were atypical of a fighting man's deployment in that theatre. He returned to Britain's arms a deeply scarred man and entered a dark, dark place that too many are familiar with. Dan worked hard to try to find treatment that worked for him, but repeated changes of staff and six-hour round trips for appointments did very little indeed. He fought his demons with the same spirit and courage that he had demonstrated on a daily basis against the enemies of the state in foreign fields. When he returned home, however, unlike when he was in his battalion, we did not have his back.

Dan liked to take on his demons alone in the mountains, where perhaps the outside arena made him feel more empowered. However, in 2012, during the period of new year's celebrations—that time of year when all the world is celebrating—Dan recorded a video message for his mum on his mobile phone. He said:

"Hey Mum. Just a video, just to say I'm sorry. Ever since I came back from Hell I've turned into a horrible person and I don't like who I am anymore."

He went on to say:

"I've tried everything, and there's nothing that seems to be working. I love you, and I'll see you, okay? I love you."

With that, our nation failed one of her bravest sons once more, as yet another victim of the Afghanistan war lost his life, not bleeding out in some dusty foreign field in the intense pressures of combat but in his homeland, which he had fought so hard to defend.

Next Monday, it will be five years to the day since I conducted a particular dawn patrol in southern Afghanistan with my troops. We were enduring one of the most contested fighting seasons of that campaign in 2010, and fear was rife. I was particularly blessed to have with me in my small team a man of colossal courage called Lance Bombardier Mark Chandler, who in our role was duty-bound to protect me in close-quarter combat while I continued in our primary trade. While most people in this country were still in a morning slumber, we closed in on an enemy position, and in an intense close-quarter gunfight Mark was shot in the face right next to me and died in my arms.

In the five years since, I have become intimately familiar with another quiet yet very stoical group of casualties of this country's war. Mike and Ann Chandler, Mark's parents, like parents, wives, sisters and brothers up and down this land, now endure a daily sacrifice. It is very difficult for those of us who have not experienced it to truly grasp the bottomless well of grief that comes from losing a child, husband, brother or sister in war as a result of a grave decision made in this House. There is the greatest sacrifice on the altar of this nation's continuing freedom, and it is a price that is paid daily. For many families up and down this land, it is indeed at every going down of the sun and every morning that we remember them.

I come here unapologetically to improve the plight of veterans and their families. The last Government under this Prime Minister did more than any before it in this cause, but there is still some way to go. It is a deep privilege to come to this House with the hopes of tens of thousands of Plymothians, and I do not underestimate the duty that is incumbent upon me in the years ahead. I cannot promise anything but noble endeavour, relentless positivity and an abounding sense of duty to look after those who, through no fault of their own, find themselves on the fringes of society, and who find life an interminable struggle. I look forward to the challenge.

7.2 pm

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): The hon. and gallant Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) spoke with great passion, great eloquence and great courage, and he has clearly come here with a mission to support mental health and our veterans. I was privileged to listen to him and I look forward to seeing him achieve his mission in this Parliament, as he achieved his mission on the battlefield.

Exactly one week before Her Majesty opened this Parliament with the Gracious Address, President Obama gave a speech not in London but in New London, Connecticut, to the United States Coast Guard Academy. He said:

"I am here today to say that climate change constitutes a serious threat to global security, an immediate risk to our national security. And make no mistake, it will impact how our military defends our country. So we need to act and we need to act now."

He said that climate change posed risks to national security, resulting in humanitarian crises and

"potentially increasing refugee flows and exacerbating conflicts over basic resources like food and water."

Last summer, I was critical in this House of the Government's decision not to provide financial support to the Italian Government's coastguard operation to rescue refugees from Libya. I recall the Minister's response to me then, which was that such rescue operations acted as a "pull factor" and were only increasing the number of attempts at migration. I thought that an obscene argument then, and in the intervening months we have seen that it was not only obscene but wrong. The number of attempts has increased. On Saturday, the Italian coastguard announced that more than 4,000 migrants had been rescued off Libya's coast on Friday.

My purpose is not to berate the Government for their lack of compassion; I want to look more deeply into why those migrants are coming in the first place. The Libyan civil war was part of a much wider pattern of regional upheavals that we called the Arab spring, which began in Egypt in 2010 with the uprisings in Tahrir Square. However, if we track those disturbances back, we come inexorably to the 2010 drought in Russia's wheat belt. It was the longest and most severe drought in Russia in more than 50 years. Russia lost 25% of its crops, leading it to impose an export ban on wheat that it had traditionally exported to Egypt. The food crisis in Egypt was the precursor to the Arab spring; the situation was the same in Tunisia and the rest of the Arab world.

On 9 September 2010, when the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation warned that Syria's drought was affecting food security and had pushed two million to three million people into "extreme poverty", few people took any notice. In fact, Syria had suffered four

[Barry Gardiner]

successive years of drought, causing the longest and deepest crop failure since records began in 1900. The losses from these repeated droughts were particularly significant for the population in the north-eastern part of the country. Experts warned at that time that the true figure of those living in “extreme poverty” was even higher than the official estimate of two million to three million people. What is astonishing in military terms is that in September 2010 nobody predicted that such a tinderbox might give rise to civil unrest and the civil war that began only six months later.

The International Institute for Strategic Studies is clear about the impact of resource shortages. In 2011, it published a report claiming that climate change

“will increase the risks of resource shortages, mass migration, and civil conflict”,

and the Ministry of Defence has said that climate change will shift the tipping point at which conflict occurs.

It has been a feature of recent debate to talk of the need for the UK, as a member of NATO, to meet the target of 2% of GDP on military spending. Our military do a superb job, but at the moment it is a job carried out within the limits of a very limited political vision. As politicians, we have to understand that the greatest threats to our security are no longer conventional military ones; nor do they come from fundamentalist terrorists. We cannot “nuke” a famine; we cannot send battleships to stop the destruction of a rain forest, but we can spend money on clean technology transfer that enables countries to bring their people out of poverty without polluting their future, and we can invest in adaptation measures that will protect communities from the effects of climate change that are already putting societies under stress.

Next month, at a UN conference in Addis Ababa, we must begin to align the global financial system with the real economy and the needs of the world’s poor. Then, we will have taken a major step towards achieving real security for our nation and for the people of the world.

7.7 pm

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): Today, the sub-theme has been maiden speeches in Parliament, and it gives me enormous confidence in the future of Britain in the world that we have representatives of our constituents who will speak up fearlessly and with great clarity.

For me, the concept of Britain in the world is a conundrum today. On the one hand, capitalism is priced for peace and confidence; on the other hand, never have our global structures seemed so ineffective in coping with the challenges we face today. Organisations that coped well with the cold war, the iron curtain and the transition from colonialism to independence seem much less able when faced with rogue states and organisations that control vast swathes of territory with arms greater than those of the nation states around them. That presents us with huge challenges.

In his speech today, the Foreign Secretary laid out the ambitions that were summarised in the Queen’s Speech. Surely all of us would want us to be ambitious about our role in the world and would want our nation to be able to play its part, as it has done for so long. However,

the challenges that we face are considerable, and my belief is that first of all we need to revisit those global structures and question whether they are still entirely fit for purpose and whether in this age—one in which Governments feel more fragile, less in control of our future and less sure about the value of our different unions—the world needs to change our organisations.

The specific challenges that were outlined today obviously include our future in the European Union, the future of Ukraine and the eastern border with Russia, and the whole of the middle east. Let me touch briefly on those issues.

On the EU, it has always seemed clear to me that we are at our most successful when we find allies who share our values and long-term goals, build our interests together and maintain the balance of power by overcoming the different threats, whether from sun kings, emperors, führers or Russian bears. That is what we must surely do if we are to win in our quest for reform of Europe in a renegotiation and present our constituents with a real option as to what future is best for us in Europe. As part of that, surely the Foreign Affairs Committee must play a role, alongside the Treasury Committee and the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, in analysing the pros and cons—a real cost-benefit analysis—to our country of being a member, without interfering on each other’s patch, but building a strategic diplomatic analysis of what EU membership offers us. That would include, for example, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership with America being negotiated at the moment.

On the middle east, the Foreign Secretary rightly said that President Assad was at the heart of the problem, but we have been better at analysing the rulers, organisations and terrorists at the heart of the problem, but not so good at winning the peace after we have removed them. That remains a great challenge for us, and the confidence of our constituents will not be great on action in the middle east until we can reassure them that we have real plans and ways of building nations after we have conquered them.

In summary, I believe that we can have a great future in the world—there is a great role for Britain to play—but we must refresh the international organisations, analyse carefully the pros and cons of being in the EU and play our part in the middle east in winning the peace.

7.11 pm

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you for calling me in this debate on the Most Gracious Speech. I appreciate the warm wishes of welcome and guidance that I have received from Members throughout the House, but most particularly from those other Democratic Unionists who join me here on the Ulster Benches.

I remain concerned that anything I might say, or anything that the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) did say, will encourage the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) to raise his game further still than he has already pledged. I fear the consequences of that for us.

It is an enormous privilege to address the House and to represent the good people of Belfast East. I am pleased to inform those in the House who have approached me in the last few days inquiring after the health of my mentor and friend, the right hon. Peter Robinson MLA,

our First Minister, that he was discharged from hospital on Friday, attended the Irish cup in Royal County Down on Saturday and joked that last week was a worse week for Northern Ireland's world No. 1 golfer, Rory McIlroy, than for him—but both will bounce back.

Belfast East has been for generations, and continues to be, the cultural, political and economic heartbeat of Northern Ireland. To anyone who takes the time to read maiden speeches, let me say that it is easy to reminisce about the success of our former glories, whether in the Harland and Wolff shipyard, the world's largest rope works, the world's largest cigarette manufacturers or the world renowned aircraft industry. Today, however, I can inform all Members, with privilege and pleasure, that Belfast East retains its status as the economic driver of our region and Northern Ireland as a whole. Bombardier, the aircraft manufacturer, continues to employ more than 5,000 people in my constituency. Harland and Wolff shipyard no longer does what it used to do, but is regaining its place, not only in the maintenance and repair of oilrigs, but in the manufacture of wind turbines for renewable energy. The story of Belfast East is one of continual renewal, and I do believe that there is much hope for the future.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, Naomi Long, who was the first Member elected to the House as a member of the Alliance party. Anyone who knows her will recognise that not only her tenaciousness but her talent did much for Belfast East. I have been contacted continually by people who recognised her ability and encourage me to take forward the great work she did on freedom of religion for persecuted Christians throughout the world. I pledge myself to do that.

Much has been said about the consequences and impact of the general election. For those who were in the Chamber 10 or 20 minutes ago, it could be summed up by the adolescent quest for *Lebensraum* within this quarter of the Chamber, but it is much more important than that. The general election in Northern Ireland has re-energised Unionism within Northern Ireland. I am delighted to have returned Belfast East to Unionist hands. My colleague, the new hon. Member for South Antrim (Danny Kinahan), retains his seat for Unionism, but his colleague, the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Tom Elliott), brings back a seat that was lost some 14 years ago. His is the most westerly constituency of this United Kingdom, and I am delighted to say that it is back in Unionist hands.

The lesson for everyone in the House is that the cerebral argument only took us so far last September. All those who value the Union—who recognise the benefits of the Union and are prepared to extol its virtues—need to rekindle the flames of passion and desire for this United Kingdom. Over the course of this Parliament, I pledge myself to advance that cause and to extol the virtues and benefits of the Union across the British Isles, and I pledge myself to the people of Belfast East and to this honourable House.

7.16 pm

Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): Having listened to the hon. Members for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) and for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn), my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) and the hon. Member for Ochil and

South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh), I am sure you will agree, Mr Deputy Speaker, that we are going to have a dynamic, robust and diverse Parliament.

In seeking to influence international events, we have to make the most of what we have. We have a lot going for us: an open, welcoming, free-trading, entrepreneurial economy; some of the world's best universities; a global financial hub; the fourth-biggest defence budget; ring-fenced aid spending; and, of course, the English language. Then we have our history, which, for better or worse, binds us to much of the rest of the world. This month marks the 200th anniversary of the battle of Waterloo, and much has changed since then.

Bob Stewart: At the battle of Waterloo, we had a stumbling problem with the French, but the Germans came to our assistance in the end. Does my hon. Friend think that that will work in our EU referendum?

Nadhim Zahawi: Indeed so. My hon. Friend has stolen my punch line. Back in 1815, the main issue confronting His Majesty's Government was how to prevent Europe from being dominated by a single over-mighty power hellbent on imposing one law across the continent, and as he rightly points out, with a little help from our German friends, we triumphed, to the benefit of all Europeans. I hope that this sets a precedent for our Prime Minister's renegotiation strategy.

The century and a half after Waterloo saw the rise and fall of a global empire. We are still living with that legacy. The question of what role a post-imperial Britain should play in world affairs has never been conclusively answered. I welcome the comments and commitment in the Gracious Speech that the Government will seek a political settlement in Syria and offer further support to the Iraqi Government, but if we are to make good on those commitments, we need to answer that question. It is not enough just to say that we might be a small island but we punch above our weight. It is very true, but it is not a substitute for a serious foreign policy strategy based on a realistic assessment of what we can achieve.

The nation-building approach of the 2000s was not realistic. We deposed dictators, we held elections and then we cut and ran. We know all too well that without a lasting political settlement, it does not work, yet the west's current approach to the world's trouble spots, while most realistic, is not serious. Now we do the bare minimum, acting piecemeal and always reactively. We can see that in the current conflict with ISIL. Despite the warnings of regional allies, the capture of Mosul took us by surprise. Our response has been, yes, a few airstrikes and some small arms grudgingly supplied to the Kurds. That approach does not deliver results. It leaves our regional allies high and dry and helps to feed the middle east's vast conspiracy theory industry. On the Arab street, the word today is that the west itself is behind ISIL's recent victories, and that we are employing the classic colonial tactic of divide and rule.

We need a new approach for foreign policy—one that recognises that, although we cannot design the world in our own image, we are not powerless to influence events and that it is still possible to play a constructive role through intelligent long-term engagement. That requires us to be more flexible, more innovative and, dare I say, more patient. We need to recognise that, although we cannot act alone, we occupy a unique position in

[*Nadhim Zahawi*]

international diplomacy, with disproportionate soft power as the closest ally of the world's only superpower and with the finest diplomatic service in the world, a tradecraft honed over many centuries of global engagement. As we seek to exert our influence, we need to bring all three advantages to bear.

We also need to get better at working with the reality on the ground rather than trying to fit the facts into a preconceived policy. In Iraq and Syria today, the reality on the ground is that the best the west can hope for is a form of loose federation, with high levels of autonomy for each of the region's communities, a fair division of the oil wealth and a federal Government that are seen to govern in the interests of all. Our middle east policy, which has always been based around unitary states with strong centres, now needs to reflect the reality. That means effectively arming the Kurds, who have proved to be one of our most reliable allies in the region. We should be talent spotting the next generation of Sunni politicians, whose support is vital to a lasting peace in both Iraq and Syria.

7.21 pm

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): I refer to my entries in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

We have heard seven fantastic maiden speeches this afternoon, so I would like to pay tribute to the hon. Members for Fareham (Suella Fernandes), for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) and for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh), to the hon. Members for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) and for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) and to my hon. Friends the Members for Burnley (Julie Cooper) and for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn). I am sure that all seven will have a fantastic time serving in this House.

This year is an important one for international development, with a summit next month in Addis Ababa on financing for development, a summit in New York on the post-2015 sustainable development goals in September and the Paris climate change conference in December. Those provide an important opportunity for the UK to play a leading and constructive role.

Ten years ago, I visited the African country of Rwanda for the first time. I saw for myself the remarkable progress that the people had made in the 11 years that followed the horrors of the 1994 genocide, and I saw the hugely positive impact that the Department for International Development had made in supporting Rwanda's progress. Rwanda is a great example of how development policy can help to rebuild countries riven by conflict. I welcome the Government's reaffirmation of the 0.7% commitment to overseas aid, and I urge the Secretary of State to use the opportunity of her closing speech today to challenge those EU countries that have not made the progress that we have made, and to say that it is simply unacceptable that the EU's timescale for the achievement of 0.7% is so slow.

Of course, international development is not just about aid. That is why the Addis Ababa summit on financing for development is so important, ensuring that we can expand the sources of finance available to grow businesses in the least developed countries. There is a focus on

infrastructure, including water, sanitation and energy, and a focus on promoting public services, including health care, education and social protection.

Like their predecessor, this Government have rightly placed support for women and girls at the heart of international development. I pay tribute to the former Foreign Secretary, William Hague, for his important work on tackling violence against women and girls.

Increasingly, conflict is both a cause and a consequence of the challenges we face in international development. I would like the Secretary of State to address two current situations in her closing remarks. The first is what is happening in the Central African Republic, where we have seen progress over the last month with the Bangui forum and the Brussels conference. There is a real prospect of national reconciliation led by the Central Africans themselves. Europe is committed to establishing a trust fund to support the Central African Republic, which is welcome. Will the Secretary of State consider making a UK contribution to that trust fund?

The second was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth)—the plight of the Rohingya people in Burma, who face extraordinary persecution. Many of them are now living in camps, while others have escaped on boats. This is an urgent humanitarian crisis, in which the Governments of Burma and its neighbours surely have a responsibility to protect the Rohingya people.

I believe that the work of DFID is crucial and that its impact will be maximised if a commitment to development is placed at the heart of Government—across all Departments and speaking with one voice. Parliament itself can play an important role through the Select Committees, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and other bodies. Let us resolve today to place international development centre stage in this Parliament, because it is both the right thing to do and in the best interests of our country, our economy and our long-term security.

7.25 pm

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), and I want to thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to contribute to today's debate. I am very grateful for the fact that I have been able to catch your eye to make my maiden speech. What a task I have to follow some of the most awe-inspiring individuals, with their stories about what led them to this House. Let me extend my thanks to you and your staff, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the warm welcome and help you have shown to me and indeed to all new Members.

Today's debate on the Queen's Speech is about Britain's place in the world. Speaking as the daughter of Irish immigrants, I take particular interest in the proposed immigration Bill. My parents came to this country at a time when resentment against immigrants and immigration was high, and for them, as for the parents of my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes), these were difficult times. My mum was a nurse, and my dad, who was a builder, had to face those signs saying "No blacks, no Irish" when they first came to the UK, looking for a place to stay or work.

The proposed immigration Bill sets out clearly a warm welcome to all those who want to work legally in this country, paying their taxes and contributing to their communities. It sends a clear message, however, to those who come here to work illegally and to those who aim to exploit the migrant worker.

I do not suppose that, during their first few difficult years living in this country, my parents ever thought that their daughter would become a Member of Parliament—and what an honour it is to be the Member of Parliament for the constituency of Lewes.

For those who do not know, Lewes is set in the heart of East Sussex and it is a very large constituency geographically. It includes the town of Lewes, but also the towns of Seaford, Newhaven and Polegate, and it is surrounded by some of the most beautiful countryside in the UK.

The constituency of Lewes has a long history in the political landscape of this country. As we have heard, as long ago as 1264 Simon de Montfort fought in the battle of Lewes to set up the first parliamentary system of democracy in this country. His motto was “England for the English”. How appropriate, then, it is that this Queen’s Speech proposes Bills to deal with the issues surrounding devolution. How sad it is, though, that nearly 751 years later, this Parliament is still fighting for English votes for English laws.

Lewes is probably more famous for its bonfire societies and big annual fireworks displays. Various effigies are burnt each year, and some notable current Members have had that privilege bestowed on them—including the Prime Minister and the former Deputy Prime Minister. Last year, it was the turn of the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), who was burnt not just once, but twice—just to make sure!

At this point, I would like to pay tribute to my predecessor, Norman Baker, who was the Member of Parliament for Lewes for over 18 years. Although we disagreed on a number of issues, his reputation as a hard-working constituency MP has to be admired.

The Queen’s Speech sets out a clear vision of what our country can be: a country of security and opportunity for everyone. As someone who grew up in an ordinary working-class family, who went to an ordinary state school, and who never had the chance to go to university, even when there were no tuition fees, I was taught by my parents the Conservative philosophy that those who work hard enough can achieve anything in life.

I know that I am running out of time, but I want to pay tribute to the people with whom I have worked for the last 15 years. From an early age, I wanted to be a nurse and follow in my mum’s footsteps. When I was a teenager and she died of breast cancer, I decided that I wanted to help to tackle the disease. For the last 15 years, I have worked under the guardianship of Professors Johnston and Smith and the whole team at the Royal Marsden Hospital, making a real difference to people suffering from that disease. It is certainly no coincidence that there are seven NHS doctors and three NHS nurses on the Conservative Benches, which proves that the NHS is safe in Conservative hands.

The Queen’s Speech is a programme that supports ordinary working families like mine. It encourages job creation, and provides tax cuts for individuals, more help for families with childcare, and a strong and properly

funded NHS. I am proud to serve as the Member of Parliament for Lewes, but I am also proud to be part of the Conservative team that delivered this Queen’s Speech.

7.31 pm

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for affording me the opportunity to make my maiden speech in this debate on the Gracious Speech. Let me begin by paying tribute to other hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches today. They have set a high standard for those of us who must follow them.

It is truly a special honour to speak in the House as the newly elected Member of Parliament for St Helens North. My constituency has the proud history and traditions that would be expected from a place born of the industrial revolution, built on mining communities, and situated in the heart of the north-west of England. Our towns, villages and parishes have unique and strong individual identities that have been forged over centuries. St Helens town has its reputation as the home of glass that gave the world the Pilkington process of float glass, and the famous Saints, our rugby league team, are the current Super League champions.

Our other town, Newton-le-Willows, was mentioned in the Domesday Book. It came to prominence in the 19th century as a railway town, and its Vulcan Foundry was one of the foremost locomotive manufacturers of the age. Along with neighbouring Earlestown, it has one of the oldest existing railway stations in the country. A memorial in the station commemorates William Huskisson, an MP for Liverpool who became one of the world’s first widely reported railway casualties when, in 1830, he was run over and fatally wounded by a train in my constituency. His distinguished career as Secretary of State for War and the Colonies was cut short on that fateful day. Perhaps to err on the side of caution, I shall resist the temptation to invite any members of the current Government to visit my constituency—or at least, if I do, I shall advise them to travel by road.

In the north-eastern part of my constituency, the hill and beacon tower at Billinge mark the highest point in Merseyside. To the west, Rainford and its surroundings are testimony to the overlooked rural and agricultural nature of much of the area. Haydock, I am sure, will be known to some Members as home to the eponymous racecourse, one of the finest in the country, which holds flat and national hunt meetings throughout the year.

St Helens North has a distinguished history and great potential for the future, but I fear that things will not be easy in the time ahead. I know that many of my constituents are worried about what lies ahead for them and their families. I can only assure them that I will fight every day for our community, championing jobs and investment, standing up for the most vulnerable, and always defending the interests of our area.

I do not wish to confuse you or the House, Mr Deputy Speaker. I can see from the puzzled look on some faces that there is bewilderment at this strange St Helens accent, which sounds remarkably like the dulcet Ulster tones that are more associated with Northern Ireland Members. There is a song called “The Boys from the County Armagh”, which contains the lines

“My heart is at home in old Ireland,

In the County of Armagh”.

[Conor McGinn]

I am one of those boys, and mine is, but if I might be allowed a somewhat metaphysical addition to the lyrics, I would say that my heart, along with my head and my feet, is also at home in the north-west of England, in the constituency of St Helens North.

If we are to describe generations as children of a seminal figure or defining events, I am most certainly a child of the peace process. The changed relationship between Britain and Ireland, and the end of the terrible conflict that caused so much pain to the peoples of these islands, have afforded me opportunities that were denied to many who came before me. I am in debt to all in the House and outside it who have, through their sacrifice, courage and leadership over many years, helped to build peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. I do not wish to disrupt the etiquette of the House, but I hope that I may be allowed to call them all my honourable friends.

Where previously there were suspicion and mistrust, today there are friendship and co-operation between the United Kingdom and Ireland. There is no longer any contradiction in being Irish and British, and having feelings of loyalty and affinity to both countries. The contribution made by the Irish in Britain to society here has helped to make that possible. It is valued and respected, and has helped to make this the great nation that it is. I hope that, in keeping with that tradition, I can make my own contribution through membership of the House of Commons.

My predecessor served the House and the people of St Helens North diligently for 17 years. Dave Watts is one of the finest men I know. He epitomises all that is noble about public service, and all that is good about politics. His work for his constituency, and his devotion to his constituents, are an example to us all. Dave served as the chair of the parliamentary Labour party. He is a solid Labour man in the best working-class traditions of our movement. I thank him, his wife Avril, and their family for everything they have done for St Helens North and its people, and for me as well.

Let me end by saying that I come to the House committed to representing my constituents, and determined to work hard for my constituency. I made the people of St Helens North a promise that I would do my best for them, and it is a promise that I intend to keep.

7.37 pm

Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn) on one of a series of fantastic maiden speeches that we have heard this evening. I stress that mine is not a maiden speech—I have been specifically instructed by Mr Speaker that whatever maiden status I may once have possessed has long since passed away—but it gives me an opportunity to pay tribute to my great predecessor in the office of Member of Parliament for Uxbridge and South Ruislip, Sir John Randall.

John Randall was one of the kindest and wisest people in this place, and one of the very few Conservatives to forecast with complete accuracy what would go wrong with the Iraq war. Members may recall that he stepped down from the Front Bench before the invasion, with absolutely no self-advertisement, and never drew

any attention to the fact that he had got it so thumpingly right. It is, incidentally, a measure of his popularity in Uxbridge that, at a recent electoral hustings there, virtually every candidate stood up to claim that he or she was the true heir of John Randall. “I am John Randall,” they kept saying, meaning them rather than me. I have to accept that I am not John Randall, but I will do my best to emulate him in his service to the constituency, and to London more broadly.

We are seeing fantastic success in this city. I am delighted to say that, as *Hansard* will confirm, during my final appearance in the House seven years ago I pointed out to the then Prime Minister that I had just banned alcohol on public transport. I was interrupted by the Speaker, and ordered to sit down. I do not know what objection he had to our policy. I now want to point out that, as a result of that policy, crime on London transport has fallen by 50%. Crime on buses has fallen by 50%, and we now have the safest tube network anywhere in Europe. As a result of the continual improvements we are seeing in our city we have the most dynamic urban economy anywhere in Europe—and I am grateful for the many excellent measures in the Queen’s Speech, which I will rapidly summarise as this 12-minute oration has been compressed to four.

I am delighted that we will see the stopping of the madness of a transport strike being triggered by a tiny minority—something City Hall has long advocated—and devolution to the great economic powerhouses of the cities of England. Fiscal devolution will enable us to build Crossrail 2 and many other wonderful projects—many hundreds of thousands. I also approve, by the way, of the decision to allow people to buy their own housing association homes, provided it leads to the rapid construction of more homes—low-cost homes—and it keeps the revenue raised for investment in housing in London.

Nadhim Zahawi: Can my hon. Friend tell us how many houses he has built in London during his mayoralty?

Boris Johnson: I am delighted that my hon. Friend reminds me that under this mayoralty, and indeed under this Government, we built far more homes than Labour did in 13 years. We have built a record number of affordable homes, and we will go on until May 2016 to build a record 100,000 affordable homes over eight years.

Thanks to the hard and successful work of the Conservative-led Government over the last four years, we have a strong, dynamic, successful economy, but the most exciting thing for me, as someone who came into politics more than 20 years ago, is that we now have a Tory-majority Government with a clear mandate to seek change, and therefore a Government in the most powerful position in our lifetimes to deliver reform and improvement in Europe. We can win that argument by being relentlessly positive and by making it clear that what we are advocating is in the interests not simply of Britain but of the entire European Union.

I congratulate the Prime Minister on the élan and success with which he has begun his pan-European schmoozathon in the chancelleries of Europe. I believe his efforts will be crowned with success, but I would remind him of something that I think all of us would want to remind him, our negotiators, the Foreign Secretary

and everybody else: if you are going to go into a difficult international negotiation, you have to be prepared to walk away if you do not get the result you want.

Dr Julian Lewis: I really feel that the next thought my hon. Friend is about to express deserves an extra minute in which to express it.

Boris Johnson: I am obliged, because it is absolutely right that if we do not get a deal that is in the interests of this country or of Europe we should be prepared to strike out and forge an alternative future that could be just as glorious and just as prosperous, with a free-trading arrangement.

I notice that, in the course of trying to settle this argument over the last few days, assorted speakers have invoked the memory of Winston Churchill in one way or another. Churchill is absolutely useless on this subject. He is biblical in this matter; we can find a text to justify almost any proposition about our relations with Europe that we choose, but one thing he believed in passionately was in Parliament as the expression of the will of the British people, and he would want to see that democratic principle upheld today.

If in the course of those negotiations the Prime Minister wants to invite any of our partners to see the contribution of this country to the prosperity and unity of modern Europe, he could do no better than take them to Uxbridge, where it is now possible to view the amazing bunker that housed Fighter Command No. 11 group operations room, one of the most moving and atmospheric places in this country.

7.44 pm

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): How do you follow that? We would love to see many of those houses being built in Northern Ireland. I have greatly enjoyed listening to the other hon. Members making their speeches and learning about their constituencies, and especially the very moving speech by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer).

It is an immense honour to have been elected to this House as an Ulster Unionist—the first Ulster Unionist here for 10 years—and I pledge to work tirelessly for absolutely everybody in the constituency of South Antrim. But first I very genuinely would like to thank Rev. Dr William McCrea for his many years of work as the MP and especially his staff, who suffer the consequences of losing an election, for all their hard work.

South Antrim is a typically farming, rural and also urban constituency, providing that great produce that is typical of Northern Ireland—Irish beef, lamb and pork. In 2016, Northern Ireland is going to have a year of celebrating our local produce, and I hope all Members will go there to taste our fare, especially the eels from Toombridge.

Within the constituency we have many enterprises of size that thrive. We have the world's top web-based bicycle company; we have the world's top pharmaceutical diagnostic company with 5% of the world's population using its diagnostics; and we have one of the world's largest vehicle tyre pressure gauge-producing companies. But I want to see many, many more businesses, small,

medium and large, moving to Northern Ireland, so that we can tackle the unemployment that is rife in so many places.

South Antrim is also brimming with history and historical sites, and it is timely to remember that towns and villages like Ballyclare and Randalstown with their long-established horse fairs were key to the supplying of horses for the great cavalry regiments and the artillery at Waterloo and in the first world war.

In sport, we are lucky to have the greatest jump jockey ever in A. P. McCoy, two of the world's top golfers, one of the world's top snooker players, and not long ago, but very much still with us, probably the greatest rugby player of all time—all from South Antrim.

I am born and bred in South Antrim and, despite the dulcet tones that do not quite match those of my colleague the hon. Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn), my life has encompassed so much of what is referred to by so many as the troubles, living only six miles from the Aldergrove military base, where the RAF, the Army Air Corps and many infantry and cavalry regiments were based, and through which most units entered Northern Ireland. Just close to home in Antrim is also Massereene barracks where the Royal Engineers were to make their home. The military presence in Northern Ireland was part of day-to-day life. Horrors and heroes abound, but with the mention of Massereene we should remember Sappers Quinsey and Azimkar, who were so cruelly murdered by dissidents on the eve of going to do their duty in Afghanistan.

Today I would like to ask everyone in this House to remember all those soldiers, sailors, airmen—some 250,000—and also the politicians, the civil servants, the businessmen, and so many more who over the last 45 years have done so much for Northern Ireland, 1,441 giving their lives. I would like every Member of this House to go back to their constituencies and say a huge thank you, because all those have helped us to get where we are today and we are phenomenally grateful.

I want to see this House carry on with spend on defence—2%, but even more—but I pledged to my electorate that I would do everything I politically could to make sure that the military covenant was put in place properly in Northern Ireland. The current situation cannot be allowed to continue, with some military veterans feeling like second-class citizens in their own country.

I had a 10-minute speech, which became an eight-minute speech, a six-minute speech and then a four-minute speech. The other great point I want to make is on the Union. Everyone here has a little bit of every country in them and, thinking back to the great Union Brigade charging at Waterloo, there were the Scots Greys, the Inniskillings, the Royals and many, many more. We need the Union to hold together, because it is the Union working together that will keep making this place great.

7.50 pm

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): I follow some truly brilliant speeches this evening, and I am grateful to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech.

Today's debate is about Britain's place in the world, but I would like to spend a few minutes talking about North Cornwall's place in Britain and the world, and

[Scott Mann]

how the Government of this country can help aspiring people in our area to get the best out of their life. Before I do that, however, I take a moment to praise the work of my predecessor, Dan Rogerson. Prior to my election, the North Cornwall seat was held by the Liberal Democrats and, before that, the Liberal party for 23 years. Gerry Neale was the last Conservative MP for North Cornwall, with Paul Tyler and Dan Rogerson following him. Dan Rogerson championed the cause of Cornwall during his 10 years in office. He talked in the House about rural affairs many times, and he was favourably considered on numerous doorsteps that I visited during the campaign. Dan was a hard-working local champion, and I genuinely wish him well in his future endeavours.

North Cornwall is seen by many as an idyllic coastal retreat, a place to escape the pressures of city life. Our glorious sandy beaches are enjoyed by thousands of visitors every year, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr Cameron). We have many strings to our bow. Our rugged coastal paths and inland walkways are enjoyed not only by British residents but by walkers from across the globe. Travelling further afield, people may stumble across Bodmin moor and its charming surrounding villages. The vast sweeping fields of gorse and granite are the perfect place for a spot of reflection after a hard working week.

Until three weeks ago I worked as a postman, a job I thoroughly enjoyed for 20 years. After being elected to Parliament I received national press when it became known that I was delivering leaflets not only for myself but for my political opponents. I never realised how vast the corridors of this place were. I spent more time walking during my first week here than I ever did walking the streets of Wadebridge with my delivery pouch.

I got involved in politics in 2007 when I heard my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney make his first speech as Conservative leader. At the time I had been fortunate to secure an affordable house in my hometown of Wadebridge. Some 200 people with whom I had grown up tried for it, but they were not so lucky. His speech delivered a message of less state intervention, giving people the ability to go out to seek their ambitions, making it better to be in work than out of work and giving people the opportunity to aspire to do the things they wish to do. I decided at that moment to get involved in local government, and now I am here.

Much has been made of blue collar conservatism in recent weeks. The overriding factor that unites our party is the drive for aspiration and the willingness to help people get on, such as the lobster fisherman from Port Isaac who wishes to sell his product directly off his boat; the farmer from Davidstow who seeks a good price for his crops, milk and beef; the young family from Blisland who are looking to purchase their first home; the pensioner from Camelford who seeks security in his old age; or the entrepreneur from Bude who is looking to set up and run a business for the first time. I am here for them.

During my candidacy, I literally delivered a six-point plan for North Cornwall. I now intend to put those words into action in this Chamber. Housing has been a big issue for a long time. Net inward migration to Cornwall places pressure on constituents on modest

wages who are reaching for their first home. There is no silver bullet to solve that problem. The previous Government did a huge amount with the Help to Buy scheme, but there is much more we can do. With the potential for 47,000 new homes in Cornwall over the next 20 years, many of those homes should be given to aspiring young people who are looking to get on. I wish to explore further self-build projects to help community land trusts to give people the ability to build their own home, instead of having someone else build it for them. I also want to see a halt to the industrialisation of our countryside. I want to see an end to onshore wind subsidy and a move to tidal and geothermal.

Support for small businesses must continue, and we have done a huge amount through small business rate relief. Small businesses are the lifeblood of our economy and, with the advent of high-speed broadband, we can nurture our farming, fishing and tourism industries and expand into new enterprises, promoting North Cornwall not only as a place to go on holiday but as a place to do business.

Many people in Cornwall are proud of their heritage, their traditions and their culture, and it gave me great pleasure in recent weeks to say my oath in the native tongue of the duchy. When my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) seconded the Queen's Speech, she referred to Cornwall's MPs as the Prime Minister's "six-pack". It was not always that way. Up until the reforms of 1832, Cornwall returned 44 Members of Parliament, as opposed to 45 for the whole of Scotland. With the greatest of respect to my Scottish colleagues, it would have been nice to refer to the 44-pack, rather than the six-pack. What we lose in number, however, we more than make up for in our desire to put Cornwall firmly on the map. Cornwall as a whole has been described in the past as the tail-end of the country. I see my job over the next five years as being to let people know that Cornwall is where the country starts, not where the country ends. During the next five years I am looking forward to getting my teeth into the Government's Bills to further the aspiration of my constituents, both young and old, and to deliver for North Cornwall.

7.56 pm

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): It is a privilege to follow the new hon. Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann), whom I congratulate on his maiden speech. Perhaps he could continue to do us a service by delivering Labour leaflets in future. It is also a privilege to follow the new hon. Member for South Antrim (Danny Kinahan), and I congratulate him on his speech. As a keen cyclist, I think I know the company to which he refers, but I am probably not allowed to mention it in the Chamber—it is a very good online company that I should think provides a lot of employment in his constituency. I also thank the electors of Leeds North East for returning me for a fifth time with the highest number of Labour votes ever achieved in the constituency, once the home of the late, great Sir Keith Joseph but now a solid Labour seat.

I am proud that, among the many good things that the last Labour Government did, they established the Department for International Development in 1997. That was the first time that development had a Minister at Cabinet level in any Government in the western

world. The coalition, of course, continued that support for international development across all parties. Earlier this year, the millennium development goal of 0.7% of gross domestic product being assigned to international development was enshrined in statute. I hope that the new Government will also continue that commitment to the wise spending of UK taxpayers' money to help fight poverty in the poorest countries of the world.

As a member of the Select Committee on International Development in the last Parliament, I saw first hand how effectively DFID works and the good reputation it has in all the countries in which it operates. Last February, for example, the Committee went to Nepal. We saw for ourselves not only the contingency work against earthquakes that DFID was paying for but all the other excellent projects that help to bring some of the poorest people in the world out of poverty. I hope that the work for which DFID paid saved lives when the earthquake came just two months later. DFID has also supported the fight against the spread of Ebola in Sierra Leone and Liberia. The Committee visited those countries in 2014 just before the terrible outbreak.

DFID also supports Syrian refugees, not in the UK but in the neighbouring countries to which they fled such as Lebanon and Jordan, where we went in March 2014. Jordan is one of the most water-poor countries in the world, yet it supports a 20% increase in its population from Syria. We went to the Zaatari refugee camp near Mafraq, where we saw how a city the size of Cambridge—100,000 people—had been created in just 12 days, largely paid for by British taxpayers' money and very well operated. We visited the poorest farmers in the Jordan valley, seeing how DFID cash was used there in the Occupied Palestinian Territories to support those farmers and ensure they could bring their produce to market.

Finally, I wish to say a word about the Independent Commission for Aid Impact, which was set up by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) when he was Secretary of State for International Development. In 2013, I took over responsibility for chairing the ICAI Sub-Committee of the International Development Committee. In that role, I was asked to be involved in the appointment of the new chief commissioner and three other commissioners to take over from Graham Ward, the first chief commissioner, who was appointed by the then Secretary of State in 2011. I am delighted that Alison Evans, the former chief executive of the Overseas Development Institute, has been appointed. She will do a good job to make sure that we get value for money for all our spending on overseas development and aid.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr George Howarth): Order. It might be helpful if I pointed out that there is a four-minute limit on speeches. Some latitude has been allowed and I will continue to allow a little bit of elasticity, but one of the properties of elastic is that it is not infinitely stretchable and at some point it will snap. Hon. Members who have still to make speeches should be aware of that.

8 pm

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): It is a privilege to follow so many new Members who have spoken so eloquently and who will undoubtedly be great champions

of their constituencies in the years ahead. I am proud to be sitting on the Benches of a majority Conservative Government for the first time in my 14 years as a Member of Parliament and to be able to reply in this debate to the speech by Her Majesty the Queen. We were elected as a majority Conservative Government and we must govern as a Conservative Government. We can now do the right thing; we no longer need to worry about the coalition or minority parties. We, as a Conservative Government, can and must do the right thing for our country.

I am also delighted to note that we have two new Unionist Members of Parliament, and so there are now 10 Unionist MPs from Northern Ireland. We were particularly inspired by the comments made by the new hon. Member for South Antrim (Danny Kinahan), who spoke so eloquently about the troubles in Northern Ireland and the sacrifices that have been made in that part of our United Kingdom. That reminds me of the great Ian Gow, who was murdered by the IRA 25 years ago next month, on 30 July 1990. He gave the first televised speech here, during the debate on the Queen's Speech in 1989, when he advised us all never to give in to terrorism and always to stand firm for our country's sovereignty and independence.

That is what we must do as a majority Conservative Government. We live in a dangerous world, but we must defend British subjects wherever they may be in the world. That means not only that we must do a lot more for our British overseas territories, particularly Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands, but that we must work to strengthen our links with the Commonwealth of nations. I know that the people of my constituency would support me completely in that. Of course Romford was the first Conservative gain after 1997, and I am delighted that so many more new Conservative MPs have been elected since then.

One thing we must do—we must not let the British people down—is deal with the issue of the European Union. Our Prime Minister has an opportunity to be bold and radical in the changes he seeks in United Kingdom-EU relations. It is a historic endeavour and an opportunity, for good, to set Britain's place in Europe and the world on the right track. We need a new and totally different relationship with the EU—not a minor change, but a fundamental one. We need trade and co-operation, and not political union. I hope and believe that the Prime Minister will rise to this great challenge as leader of the entire nation. We need to be a sovereign nation over our trade agreements, our laws, our border controls, our social and domestic policies, and our agriculture and fishing. Above all, this Parliament must be supreme. That is what the British people want and demand, and we must not let them down. Margaret Thatcher made it clear that it was a historic mistake to join a political union. Our current Prime Minister has the chance now to put that right and to ensure that Britain goes back to being a sovereign, independent nation of free people.

8.4 pm

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to speak in this debate, because we have heard so many excellent maiden speeches, along with those of other hon. and right hon. Members. It is also a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell),

[Albert Owen]

who came into the House on the same occasion as I did in 2001. We did so along with the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson). He and I shared accommodation in Norman Shaw North at the time, and I used to joke that I saw more of him on “Have I Got News for You” than I did in Norman Shaw North. But it is good to see him back, and in the meantime I have continued to be the full-time Member of Parliament for Ynys Môn. It is an island community and an outward-looking community at the heart of the British Isles. I am proud to be Welsh, proud to be British and proud to be a member of the European Community and of the international community. Today’s debate sets the scene in that regard. I shall come to the subject of the European Union—I prefer to call it the European Community rather than European Union—and the referendum shortly.

The Queen’s Speech said that the Government would “re-engage” Britain in international affairs. There has been some disengagement in recent years, and I hope that we can once again raise our profile on the international stage. I totally agree with the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) that the strategic defence review in the last Parliament was not strategic. I understand the reasons the Government have given, but our future direction must be strategic and our defence must be done on strategic grounds. We have a proud record, and, as has been indicated, the Department for International Development does excellent work. I am very proud that the previous Labour Government set up the Department and focused attention on international development, making Britain a leader on that in world affairs. We have been leaders in many areas, not least defending women and children in the world, helping the poorest children in the world get education and tackling Ebola. We have been leaders in all those areas and we must be very proud of our involvement in world affairs. I also welcome the shadow Foreign Secretary to his place and welcome his excellent speech about our place in the world.

I am very pro-European Union and I feel we have a role to play in it. It is not just me saying that, because during the general election I met many small businesses and farmers from my community, and many large businesses that had invested in my constituency, and they wanted Britain to be at the heart of the EU over the next few years. I will support the Prime Minister if he is clear on what kind of reform he wants. It is incumbent on Government Front Benchers in today’s debate—I know the Foreign Secretary cannot be with us, but I hope that the Secretary of State for International Development will do this in her wind-up—to make it clear exactly what we want in those reforms. This Parliament needs to know that early on, and I will be supporting a yes vote for Ynys Môn to be at the heart of not just the British Isles but the European Community. Wales, the nation that I am proud to represent, is a net beneficiary from the European Union, to the tune of some £200 million per year. Business benefits from it, and I want to be at the heart of it. Britain deserves to raise its profile and I hope we can all work together to ensure that Britain is the leader in the world, where it belongs: at the top table.

8.9 pm

Mrs Flick Drummond (Portsmouth South) (Con): I am delighted to be making my maiden speech during the debate on Her Majesty’s Gracious Speech, but it is with some trepidation that I follow so many eloquent and awesome Members of this Parliament, both new and longer-serving. I wish to thank my predecessor, another eloquent speaker, Mike Hancock, for his long service to the community in Portsmouth South. Mike, a Pompey boy, was a city councillor for 40 years and worked as the cabinet member for planning and regeneration while a Member of Parliament for 18 years. Juggling two jobs cannot have been easy. I have heard from many constituents of his good work helping them with their problems. I know that the House of Commons will miss his sartorial elegance. I also thank him for the well organised boxes of casework, which will make it easier for me to do my job.

Unlike Mike, I was born not in Portsmouth but in Yemen, but I shall say more on that later. I am very grateful to the people of Portsmouth for adopting me over the past eight years that I have lived there. I will be a fierce defender of their interests, always putting them first.

Portsmouth South is made up of a number of communities. It is 4 miles long and 2 miles deep, and I can cycle it within 15 minutes. It is a city of great contrast: rich and poor live side by side, making it a compassionate city with a caring community of people who help each other. Heavily bombed during the war, the city has beautiful Georgian streets next to brutalist 1960s and 1970s tower blocks. Our literary history belies the low education standards, which I am pleased to say are rising fast. Our proud heritage includes the birthplace of Charles Dickens, whose house is now a museum, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who also played for the first Portsmouth football club, Rudyard Kipling, HG Wells and Nevile Shute, who lived two streets away from me.

The first school in Portsmouth to become an academy, Charter Academy, has transformed the lives of people from one of our most deprived areas, and was the most improved school in the whole country last year, going from 3% to 85% of pupils gaining five or more GCSEs, which is a testament to the hard work and leadership of the teachers. The children are now getting an education that will take them out of poverty. They are involved in the Portsmouth Sail Training Trust, the boxing at the heart of Portsmouth Academy and other activities that are usually associated only with private education.

I am a proud governor of a rapidly improving school, Milton Park Primary. It provides for children with autism who are integrated in the mainstream school, and we welcome children with disabilities. I am determined that our education system will give every child the opportunities that they deserve and be a beacon in the country. Portsmouth University is in the top group of British universities for many of its faculties, and I was in awe of the creative arts graduates who held their show last Friday.

The city of contrasts can be seen in our historic dockyard where world-famous attractions such as the Mary Rose, HMS Victory and HMS Warrior lie next to the latest Royal Navy Type 45 destroyers and the new aircraft carriers, which we will receive shortly. Those

huge ships will be a boost to our defences, and I will be making sure that there are enough Type 26 frigates and other ships to defend our shores and interests around the world.

Contrast can also be seen in two new ventures in my constituency, the International Boatbuilding Training College, of which I am trustee, and Ben Ainslie Racing: one delivers craftsmanship with transferrable skills, and the other is involved in high-tech yacht racing, using all the latest materials. High-tech maritime expertise is one of Portsmouth's biggest exports, and we are looking forward to hosting the first America's Cup world series on the weekend of 23 July.

Along our sea front, we have a traditional funfair at Clarence Pier and a Victorian pier, South Parade Pier, that is being restored by local businessmen. We have streets of individual shops but also an outlet centre—Gunwharf Quays—with entertainment and restaurants that attracts people from miles around. We do need further investment in our commercial district as we serve a big community in Hampshire, Surrey and west Sussex, and our city is worth investing in. I could not finish selling the city in which I live without mentioning Portsmouth Football Club, which has won the FA cup twice, most recently in 2008, and which has a regular attendance of more than 15,000.

I am glad to be able to speak in this debate. As I mentioned, I was born in Aden in Yemen where my father was serving in the Army, in the Trucial Oman Scouts. He was then recruited into the intelligence services where he had a distinguished career in all the trouble spots—in Nigeria, the middle east, Pakistan and India—with his family in tow. He worked for this country for 46 years, joining as a soldier at the age of 18 and dying aged 64 of an aortic dissection coming home from work. I know that the House has paid tribute to those in the armed forces and I am sure that Members will agree with me that our intelligence services, both past and present, should be included in that tribute. Much of their work goes unseen and unrecognised while they continue to keep our country safe both here and abroad. I know that they need the resources to continue that good work and I will be supporting legislation that enables them to do so.

8.14 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Peace to this House. On the day I was selected as the candidate for Glasgow North and on the day of the Queen's Speech last week, the Gospel reading at Mass was from a passage of Luke which said:

"Whatever house you go into, let your first words be, 'Peace to this house.'"

It seems entirely appropriate to make my maiden speech now, and I am very grateful to have been able to catch your eye, Mr Deputy Speaker.

During a debate on Britain in the world, peace seems an entirely appropriate starting point. Peace, as many great thinkers have said, is not just the absence of war but the work of justice. Indeed, the Scottish National party's constitution states clearly that the independent Parliament that we ultimately seek will be bound only by the sovereign will of the people of Scotland, and

such agreements as it may enter into with other nations for the protection of the environment and the pursuit of world peace.

The aims of the SNP also encompass the furtherance of all Scotland's interests, and it was on that basis that so many of our candidates were elected on 7 May. It is the greatest honour for me to represent the people of Glasgow North in this House. Glasgow has been my home for nearly half my life, and Glasgow North can quite fairly be described as the city in miniature. It stretches from the banks of the River Kelvin in the west end, through the ancient university, the cosmopolitan Byres Road, and north to Firhill, home of the mighty Partick Thistle. Nearby is the Stockline Plastics factory, where we remember those killed in the explosion 11 years ago. It stretches west to the Forth and Clyde Canal, past the Wyndford—site of the old city barracks—to Ruchill and Summerston, and out to some of the only farmland in Glasgow, including a stretch of the Antonine Wall. Glasgow North contains every aspect of city life: high-density social housing, transient student populations, mature residential areas, supermarkets, business parks and rows of independent traders. I hope to represent all that diversity to the best of my ability.

The seat is home to many musicians, including, for now, despite the efforts of the Home Office, Dr Steve Forman, and artists, perhaps most notably Alasdair Gray, who popularised the saying that has resonated across Scotland in recent years:

"Work as if you live in the early days of a better nation."

It is for that better nation that I look forward to working with my colleagues who represent areas of Glasgow North in the Scottish Parliament: Bob Doris, Bill Kidd, Sandra White and Humza Yousaf. Of course I pay tribute to my predecessor, Ann McKechnie, who represented the constituency diligently and well for 14 years, and I know that she was respected by colleagues in this House and by her constituents. She was committed to international development. Last year, she and my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) were part of a delegation that visited Srebrenica. It is 20 years since that massacre, which should give us all pause to reflect on the progress that has been made towards a world of justice and peace. If the role of Britain in the world is not ultimately the achievement of deep and lasting peace, then what is it?

Our global economy and our environment are too fragile and too precarious to take the shocks that come from military adventurism and old-school projection of power. That is to say nothing of the obscene and obsolete maintenance and renewal of weapons of mass destruction on the Clyde.

My journey to the SNP began when I first saw my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond)—he represented Banff and Buchan at the time—at a conference as part of a school trip organised by my modern studies teacher at the Inverness Royal Academy. At that point, I was already a member—I still am—of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, but it became clear to me that the SNP had the right priorities for Scotland and the world. Nuclear weapons represent everything that is wrong about the policy and spending priorities of successive UK Governments, and that is why I am proud to represent a party, and I believe a constituency, that supports bairns not bombs, nurses not nukes, teachers not Trident.

[Patrick Grady]

This year, at three world summits we have the opportunity to promote a distinctive, progressive and, I hope, Scottish voice in favour of a more just world. I hope that the Minister will find common cause with our colleagues in the Scottish Government on that cause.

The tie I am wearing today is the Malawi Scotland tartan. It symbolises the friendship and solidarity between our two countries. Solidarity should be the mark of relationships between human beings and the basis on which we can end the scandal of poverty around the world and promote world peace.

8.19 pm

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) and my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond) on their speeches. Both the Clyde and Portsmouth have made a huge contribution to this country's influence around the world and it is fitting that the hon. Members spoke in this debate.

Oliver Colville (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that Plymouth has an historic place in all this, too?

Henry Smith: Plymouth is indeed another great British city that has projected that image to the world. I just wish that my hon. Friend had intervened slightly more than a minute into my speech so that I would have been given a little bit of extra time.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) for focusing on the importance of the Commonwealth and the British overseas territories. It is very pleasing to see the flags of the British overseas territories flying in Parliament Square today and I am very proud to have been part of a Conservative-led Government in the last Parliament that put the overseas territories at the forefront of our policy. The Government will, I hope, continue to do so, whether that means ensuring that the people of Gibraltar or the Falkland Islands who wish to remain British have that right defended, or investing in infrastructure such as the new airstrip on St Helena.

This evening, I want to address some unfinished business with the overseas territories—that is, the future of the British Indian Ocean Territory. About a decade ago, many Chagos islanders came to Gatwick airport in the Crawley constituency and, I am pleased to say, settled in Crawley. Crawley now has the largest Chagossian community anywhere in the world. As the House will know, the Chagos islanders, British citizens, were exiled from their homeland in 1968 by Orders in Council and by royal prerogative. The decision did not come through Parliament. A great injustice was done at that time. Of course, we cannot turn back time but we can start to right those wrongs.

I am delighted that the last Government initiated a feasibility study into the resettlement of the British Indian Ocean Territory and I call on the Government to implement that study. There are a number of pilots for the possibility of the Chagos islanders returning. The Chagos islanders were removed from Diego Garcia and some of the outer islands, such as Salomon and Peros

Banhos, to make way for a US airbase. That airbase is and has been important for the security of the democratic western world, both in the Soviet era and today with uncertainty in the middle east, but that should not preclude those islanders being able to return to their homeland should they so wish.

I am struck by the fact that in a fortnight's time we will celebrate the 800th anniversary of the signing of Magna Carta just a few miles upstream along the Thames. Article 39 states that no person should be imprisoned or exiled without due process, yet I fear that that is what has happened to the British citizens of the Chagos islands. Much has been said about why they should not be able to return, including much about the environmental reasons, and on the 22nd of this month the Supreme Court will determine a case on their right of return. I do not see any issue, however, with allowing subsistence living by a modest number of Chagos islanders back on Diego Garcia and some of the outer islands if possible. I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development is in the Chamber because I believe that we can use some of that budget to facilitate the return of the Chagos islanders.

In this 800th year of Magna Carta I hope that the Government's feasibility study on the right of return to the Chagos islands can finally be implemented so we can right a wrong of almost half a century.

8.24 pm

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) and two excellent speeches from the hon. Members for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) and for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond), particularly given the maritime connections between our three great cities and the mutual links we have with Malawi and Yemen.

The next five years present this House and this country not only with crucial choices about our public finances and public services but with fundamental decisions about Britain's role and capacity within the world. I would argue that the decisions we take on international issues over the next five years will have a far greater impact on the prospects for millions of Britons over the remainder of the century than the majority of the individual Bills that we will consider in this Parliament.

I fear much that the Tory Government have proposed in this Queen's Speech. I fear the impact of swingeing cuts to our social security safety net on the most vulnerable and I fear the continuation of systematic and partisan attacks on our civil society, trade unions and our fundamental rights and protections. What I fear most of all, however, is the risk that this House and this country will descend further into insular nationalism, whether it is Welsh, English, Scottish or British, which could leave us a broken, isolated and increasingly irrelevant rump on the fringes of western Europe, unable to stand up for the values of our citizens in an increasingly disordered, fragmented and challenging world.

This House, this Government and the citizens of the United Kingdom face a choice: do we stand together as a country in Europe and the world robust, equipped and engaged to deal with the challenges of poverty, climate change, conflict, human rights abuses, barbarous ideologies and changing technologies, or do we allow

ourselves to be overcome with fear or the misty eyed vision of empire past and break apart or break away from the co-operation and solidarity that allows us to face those challenges with optimism, hope and determined purpose, both as the UK and within the EU? I will say without hesitation that I believe that our future and the future prospects of people in my constituency and across Wales and the UK are best served by a positive vote to stay in the European Union.

The EU needs reform. Of that, there is no doubt. Whether it is the absurdity of the two-seat Parliament, the overbearing nature of the often poorly accountable European Commission, or the obsession of some European leaders with the project rather than delivering benefits for European citizens, many changes are needed. Let us not forget that, in the year in which we celebrate 70 years since the end of the most brutal world war, in which millions died—the second war to devastate our continent in the last century—the fundamental principles of the European Union are worth standing up for: peace and security; freedom and tolerance; economic co-operation and trade; a Europe of social justice that recognises that the whole continent prospers when we support the poorest and most fragile members; and a Europe with a voice of progressive values in the world, alongside the United States in a world faced by the threat of an increasingly belligerent Russian Administration and the uncertainties and opportunities inherent in the rise of the east and the south. Just over two decades ago, China and the EU traded almost nothing, but today we form the second largest source of economic co-operation in the world, trading more than €1 billion every day. We are the most open market for developing countries and in the face of one of the greatest global challenges, climate change, we have stood together for carbon efficiency and international co-operation to find a deal that delivers.

It is not just that global vision but hard economic facts that matter for my constituents. Some 500 firms from other EU member states are based in Wales, employing more than 54,000 people, and 150,000 jobs in Wales depend on access to the European single market. Companies such as Airbus, which employs more than 6,500 people in Wales, including some just over the border from my constituency in Newport, have cautioned that they might reconsider their investment in the UK in the event of Britain leaving the EU.

To leave the European Union would be the greatest act of economic, political and classic folly in the past 100 years. It would be a fearful and foolish response to a world of opportunity and challenge.

8.28 pm

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): It is an honour to make my maiden speech today, following the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty)—a great part of the country. I am very fond of it, though it is the other end of the country from the area that I represent. It is a very emotional day, following some extraordinary speeches from people who are clearly going to take on the challenges that this House affords.

As the new MP for Berwick-upon-Tweed, I am following in giant footsteps—those of my immediate predecessor, Sir Alan Beith, who was universally respected for his 41

years' devoted service both to his constituents and to this House, a man known as a committed Methodist, a speaker of five languages, one of which was Welsh, and the long-serving Chairman of the Justice Committee; those of Sir William Beveridge, elected in 1944 as Berwick's MP, whose work on a social security system that would eliminate the five "Giant Evils" of want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness paved the way for our modern welfare state; and those of Sir Edward Grey, who first stood up to speak in this place in 1887 to challenge Government Ministers on the Irish question. He went on to become Foreign Secretary in Asquith's Government in 1914 as our country headed into that great war. From the northernmost county of England, the Northumberland Fusiliers raised no fewer than 51 battalions for service in the great war, the second largest after the London Regiment, taking a whole generation of young Northumbrian men to war, of whom 17,500 never came home.

But perhaps the fact I feel most keenly is that I am only the second woman to be elected as MP for Berwick, the first having been Mabel Philipson, elected in 1923, also as a Conservative. She was only the third woman to enter this House as an elected representative, and no doubt she would be pleased to see that following recent elections we now have some 30% representation by female MPs across the House. Mabel was the mother of a disabled child and a vociferous champion for improved disability rights. She was an actress before she came to Parliament, and I sometimes think that she had better training than I have had, as a chartered accountant, to tackle the theatrical nature of this Chamber and its tough audience—both without and within! But I am encouraged by her success in her areas of interest, and am committed in my time here to work tirelessly to ensure that all children, whatever advantages or challenges their circumstances have thrust upon them, will be able to achieve their full potential. I believe passionately that all children have great futures, but sometimes the adults around them limit their potential. There is always more we can do to inspire, protect and encourage the next generation.

I have a unique advantage as the MP for Berwick-upon-Tweed—I am certain that I represent the most beautiful constituency in England. From the magnificent Cheviot hills in the west and the River Tweed in the north, both of which act as the border with Scotland, to 60 miles of coastline, with its ancient castles, endless beaches, and RAF Boulmer, from where our nation's air defences are monitored, my constituency, more than 1,000 square miles of it, boasts the ancient market towns of Alnwick—these days of Harry Potter fame, but historically associated with Harry Hotspur—and Berwick-upon-Tweed, which has changed hands between England and Scotland many times over the centuries. It has remained firmly English since 1492 and continues to prefer that position, in case Opposition Members were experiencing any acquisitory impulses.

Our ports at Seahouses and Amble still bring in fish and lobster from the North sea, despite decades of EU directives trying to kill off their trade, and our tiny villages are surrounded by traditional agricultural factories diligently producing food in all weathers for our tables and barley malted by family business Simpsons Malts for over 150 years for Scottish whisky and Northumberland's own Hepple gin.

[Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan]

Perhaps it was Northumberland's harsh winters that prepared Admiral Collingwood, a true Northumbrian, whose firing prowess from our great ships at the battle of Trafalgar is credited with Nelson's and Britain's victory against Napoleon, and whose belief in hard-won respect from his sailors meant that on his ships no corporal punishment was required.

Right at the top of the north-east, in Berwick-upon-Tweed, I am determined to help to build a vibrant economy, so that our young people can make Northumberland their family home, and to ensure that a new enterprise zone across our main towns opens up investment and jobs. What may seem unimaginable today for the future of our communities and our nation should never be dismissed as impossible. I hope fervently, as do so many of my constituents, that with the Scotland Bill and the European Union Referendum Bill and English votes for English laws coming forward, we will be creating a new framework for our four nations to take charge of their day-to-day lives while remaining firmly committed to a strong and united Great Britain.

8.33 pm

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): It is a great privilege to be elected again to serve the constituency of Clwyd South in this Chamber. It has been a delight to listen to so many maiden speeches, including those of my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn) and of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan), who may indeed represent the most beautiful constituency in England. There were many, many good speeches.

The EU will be part of the discussion on Britain in the world. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) referred to Airbus and to one of the reasons why the EU is so important for the economy of Wales—namely, the 6,000-plus jobs and their many spin-offs that are dependent on our membership of the European Union, as Paul Kahn, the president of Airbus, has made clear.

The Farmers Union of Wales, which never pulls its punches—it has criticised unnecessary bureaucracy and rules emanating from Brussels, and that was one of its milder comments—has made it clear that it recognises the value of remaining part of one of the world's largest common markets and trading blocs. It has been clear that there is no make-believe about it, because we know exactly what it would be like to be outside the EU; we saw that in the rural economy at the time of the foot and mouth crisis, and with BSE.

There are issues to address, of course. Globalisation and the free movement of labour have brought many benefits, but there are other issues. I think that is sometimes seen by people on zero-hours contracts and agency workers, as an agency worker living in Brymbo in my constituency made clear. I do not expect the Government to make changes because they are social democrats or part of a labour movement, but if they believe in one nation and in social cohesion, they must address the concerns about zero-hours contracts and agency work.

I would also like to make a point about religious liberty, which was referred to earlier in the debate. It is of huge importance around the world. In parts of the world we see Christians and other religious minorities

suffering persecution, and in many parts it is getting worse. Too often people think that religious freedom means a person's right to practise the religion they were born into, but it is more than that; article 18 of the United Nations universal declaration of human rights is very clear that it includes the right to convert, and the right to believe in something or in nothing. It is vital that we see those human rights as part of our vision of Britain in the world. I know that the debate on human rights and on what the Government will do is fairly open at the moment, but if this nation chooses to withdraw from international treaties, think of the message that will send. Think of what that would say to countries such as Pakistan, where so many people are already suffering under the blasphemy laws. I think that those are major issues. They are to do with communities such as mine, but they are also to do with this country and with the global community.

8.37 pm

James Heapey (Wells) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this House for the first time. The world around us is changing quickly; new threats emerge as readily as new opportunities. Therefore, for the sake of our security, our standing in the world and the good of our economy, it is important that we seek to shape the world around us, rather than waiting to be shaped by it. We must be proud of, and seek to maintain, the fact that Britain is a global power. That is about not only our ability to project military power across the globe, but the role we play in the UN, NATO, the Commonwealth and the EU. It is about maintaining our place as a global centre for business and trade. It is about recognising that British culture and values reach far further and carry more influence than even the largest military ever could.

Before entering politics I served our country in the Army, first in the Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment, and then in The Rifles. In that time I had the great privilege of serving alongside men and women from all parts of this United Kingdom, and indeed the Commonwealth, both here in the UK and overseas in Basra, Kabul and Sangin. Those who serve our country in the Royal Navy, Army and Air Force accept an unlimited liability. If the Government and this House ask them to deploy, they will. On land, at sea and in the air, we can have confidence that our forces will punch well above their weight, because I have seen at first hand just how courageous, determined and selfless our soldiers, sailors and airmen are.

However, we owe those men and women the certainty that we will always support them and their families, both at home and overseas. Since the last strategic defence and security review, the threats facing our country have become much more complex. If Britain is to meet those threats, we must be clear in our intent to fund defence properly. We simply cannot ask our forces, regular and reserve, to meet all those threats without resourcing them to do so. Therefore, as we progress towards the SDSR, we must understand that any further cuts in defence must mean a cut to our strategic ambition as a nation. I hope that neither is needed.

As this is my first time speaking in the House, I would like to pay tribute to my predecessor, Tessa Munt. Ms Munt was a committed supporter of our community in Somerset. Over a long and difficult campaign in a

marginal seat there has been much on which we have disagreed, but it is important to note at this first opportunity the hard work of Tessa Munt and her dedicated staff.

It is an incredible honour to stand here as the Member of Parliament for Wells, and I would like to thank my constituents for sending me here to speak on their behalf. Mine is a constituency that contributes greatly to Britain's standing in the world. The city of Wells is England's smallest city, but with the most complete ecclesiastical estate in Europe it is a major tourist attraction and the backdrop to many television programmes and films. In Street is the global headquarters of Clarks Shoes, a brand recognised around the globe and enjoying growth in new markets, while in Chilcompton is the fashion icon Mulberry. Shepton Mallet is the capital of cider production in this country. Only this weekend, the Royal Bath and West show hosted, once again, the largest cider competition on the planet. In Highbridge, Burnham-on-Sea, Berrow and Brea, we welcome well over 1 million tourists a year who come to stay on the magnificent Somerset coast and to journey inland to the Mendips area of outstanding natural beauty. Our local farmers produce the best milk money can buy; we just need to make sure that they are paid what it is worth. Glastonbury hosts the best music festival on earth. Cheddar is famed for its gorge and for lending its name to the world's most popular cheese.

I am so proud to represent such a beautiful and varied part of the world, but while there is much to celebrate, so is there much to do. The Prime Minister has called Her Majesty's speech a one-nation programme that will benefit all in our country. I am delighted about that, because for too long rural areas have not received the same investment as our large towns and cities. Our market towns and villages struggle with poor road connections, very limited access to the rail network, weak phone signals, and achingly slow broadband. To unlock the incredible potential for economic growth in rural communities, we must improve that infrastructure. The investment by this Government in broadband has already brought formidable results. Village by village, fibre-optic connections are being made and life is speeding up. However, the final 5% of the superfast broadband roll-out is disproportionately concentrated in constituencies like mine, and so I urge the Government to push on with that final phase as soon as possible. Within that final few per cent. will be some of Britain's most isolated communities; we simply cannot leave them behind.

8.42 pm

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to make my maiden speech. It is a great pleasure to follow so many great maiden speeches in the Chamber this evening—in particular, to follow the hon. Member for Wells (James Heappey). I have enjoyed the Glastonbury music festival in his constituency on many occasions.

I wish to record my sincere thanks to the people of Lancaster and Fleetwood for electing me. I very much hope that I can live up to their expectations and can faithfully represent my community over the coming years.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, Eric Ollerenshaw, who was well respected across this House. In particular, I want to single out and praise his work to improve

standards of diagnosis and treatment of pancreatic cancer—a subject close to his heart. He was prepared to put his constituents first, as shown by his opposition to the coalition Government's plans to ease the regulation of fracking—something I hope to continue with.

Lancaster and Fleetwood is a diverse constituency reaching from the Yorkshire border to the Irish sea and made up of town, city and rural areas. I can truthfully say that mine is the most beautiful constituency, spanning the forest of Bowland and the village of Wray, close to the Yorkshire border, through the Lune valley immortalised by Turner, to the Over Wyre villages of Pilling, Preesall and Knott End. I look forward to championing each of these very many varied communities over the coming years. It is also the only non-island constituency not to be contiguous with land, as one has to travel through three other constituencies to reach the city of Lancaster from the port of Fleetwood. Both these main populations come with a radical, progressive tradition.

Lancaster castle, which until recent years was Europe's oldest prison in continuous use, is famed as the site of the Pendle witch trials, but it is also, sadly, central to the stories of many radicals who campaigned for change. Many religious and political dissenters were held there or tried in Lancaster castle, including Chartist leader Fergus O'Connor and Quaker founder Margaret Fell.

Lancaster is famous for its nonconformist residents, so as a Methodist I feel I am in good company. I am pleased to be making my maiden speech in the debate on Britain in the world, because it was my faith that led me into politics, through the campaigns to drop third world debt and the campaign for fair trade.

My first act in this Chamber—to take an affirmation rather than an oath—was also inspired by this nonconformist tradition. As anyone with knowledge of the Bible will know, Matthew 5:34 was a central part of the Quakers' 17th-century campaign to allow for an affirmation so that Members could take their seats.

Lancaster has also been graced with radical residents such as Selina Martin, who was a leading suffragette, and Lancaster University, of which our city is very proud and of which I am a graduate, chose Charles Carter to be its first vice-chancellor. Carter, who was a Quaker and a pacifist, served time in prison for refusing to be conscripted into the Army.

As we discuss Britain in the world, it is also appropriate to highlight Lancaster's fair trade city status, which helps support sustainable development across the world.

By comparison, Fleetwood is a relatively modern town. Founded as a planned community in the 1830s, the intention was for the town to develop as an international port as well as a holiday resort. For a number of years it served as a transfer point between the railway network and steamers to Scotland, but since the 1850s the town's fortunes have been strongly linked with the fishing industry.

Fleetwood has its own radical history. The town's founder, Sir Peter Hesketh-Fleetwood, opposed monopolies, capital punishment and slavery, which it is appropriate to highlight as we discuss Britain in the world.

I am proud of my constituency's radical traditions and of the many famous names who have led pioneering political campaigns while being unafraid to speak out. I seek to serve in that spirit.

[Cat Smith]

Given that we are debating Britain in the world, I want to highlight the need for a consistent and ethically driven foreign policy. All too often, the UK has turned a blind eye to repression by regimes it considers its allies, but has all too quickly rushed to military action against those it opposes, resulting in catastrophic consequences.

Although the UK has been a major donor supporting Syrians displaced in their own country and in neighbouring states, I urge Ministers to reconsider the pitifully small number of refugees admitted to the UK under the vulnerable persons relocation scheme.

I had the privilege of visiting Palestine in 2012. It is shameful that Ministers have so far refused to heed this House's call to recognise Palestinian statehood. I call on this new Government to address that.

I am also gravely concerned about the UK's approach to Saudi Arabia, where our Government continue uncritically to support a regime currently on course to execute a record number of people in a single year.

I look forward to campaigning alongside my constituents to ensure that the UK plays a positive role in the world, acting as a leading advocate for peace, human rights and poverty eradication across the world.

8.48 pm

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech in this debate and to follow on from some exceptional maiden speeches by other hon. Members, even if they have set the bar unreasonably high.

It is, of course, traditional in such speeches to pay tribute to predecessors, but in my case it is a genuine pleasure to do so. Despite serving only a single term, Chris Kelly left his mark both locally and nationally. Speaking to people across Dudley South during the campaign, it was clear to me that Chris's independence of mind and determination to stand up for his principles were greatly valued by his constituents, if not always by the Government Whips.

Chris's work as founder chairman of the all-party group on combating metal theft helped to secure changes to the law, banning cash payments and introducing an effective licensing scheme for scrap metal traders. The resulting fall in metal theft, seen clearly in the west midlands in particular, is a fitting legacy for his tireless work in this area. Chris is steeped in the value of family businesses, and was a strong voice in Parliament for family firms. I know that many Members will wish him well, now that he has returned to work for his family company.

As a Dudley councillor, it is a particular honour for me to represent the community in Parliament. Despite its name, Dudley South does not actually cover the town of Dudley—perhaps something for the Boundary Commission to reflect upon—but is made up of a number of towns and villages in the south-western part of the black country. At the southern end, Brierley Hill and Wordsley includes much of the world-famous Stourbridge glass-making quarter, while in the eastern quarter, Netherton was at the heart of the black country's nail-making and then of the chain and anchor-making industries. The town still takes pride in having produced

the anchor for the Titanic, which was the biggest in the world at the time. [Laughter.] I hear some amusement from my hon. Friends and it may seem like an odd boast, but whatever criticisms people have made of the Titanic, I have never heard anybody say a bad word about its anchor.

Between the two towns is the Merry Hill centre, one of the largest indoor shopping centres in Europe. While Merry Hill is a major employer and its success is vital to our local economy, neighbouring town centres are still struggling to adapt and to define a role in the world of online shopping and out-of-town retail parks. It would be remiss of me not to mention the nearby quarry just between Kingswinford and Pensnett should house builders be looking for bricks to meet the Government's new house building programme or—dare I say it—should the Opposition need further supplies of large pieces of high-quality stone.

Dudley South is an industrial area. We are proud of our manufacturing heritage and of Dudley's role as the birthplace of the industrial revolution. We are an outward-looking area. As the workshop of the world, the black country's sights have never been restricted to our shores or to any political boundaries. For people in Dudley South, like much of the rest of the country, Britain's place in the world is not just about prestige, influence or tradition; it is about jobs, business and creating the prosperity that our communities need. That is why it is so important that we have strong trading relationships right across the world.

Whether Britain remains in the EU or we leave it will rightly be decided by the British people—that referendum is long overdue—but whatever the result, it is vital that more is done to facilitate free trade with countries around the world beyond Europe's borders. A strong European internal market cannot be a justification for tariffs or barriers that make it more difficult for my constituents to do business outside Europe. Even the largest and most successful of markets cannot barricade themselves off from the rest of the world.

8.53 pm

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): I add my congratulations to all those who have made excellent maiden speeches today. I particularly want to mention my hon. Friend the new Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) and her comments on Syrian refugees and Palestine, of which I hope the Government will take note. I congratulate the hon. Members for Wells (James Heapey) and for Dudley South (Mike Wood) on their enthusiasm in their new roles.

As time is so limited, I will keep much of my comments on Europe for another time. I just briefly acknowledge the importance of our overseas development work and the need for the UK to take a positive lead in this year's conferences on climate change and on sustainable development. I will focus instead on arms exports controls, the prevention of the use of sexual violence in conflict, and human rights and religious freedoms.

On the issue of arms exports controls, back in 2000, the right hon. Peter Hain, the former Member for Neath and then a Foreign Office Minister, confirmed it was Government policy that an

"export licence will not be issued if the arguments for doing so are outweighed by...concern that the goods might be used for internal repression".—[*Official Report*, 26 October 2000; Vol. 355, c. 200W.]

However, last October, during a debate on the scrutiny report of the Committees on Arms Export Controls, the former Conservative Member, the right honourable Sir John Stanley, who chaired the Committees, explained how, after repeated dialogue and correspondence with Ministers, it had become clear that the Government were taking a more “relaxed” approach to issuing arms export licences. That is very worrying. Indeed, the Committees identified 12 countries on the FCO’s list of 28 countries of top human rights concern where specific exports were feared to be in breach of one or more of the Government’s arms export criteria. Those 12 countries were: Afghanistan, China, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Libya, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Syria, Uzbekistan and Yemen. I urge the Government to examine carefully the issue of arms export licences; we should not allow a lax and careless attitude to arms export control.

Furthermore, we need much more transparency about not just which country arms are going to, but who the end-user is—Government, non-governmental organisation, civilian and so on. We also need to trace a lot of arms that are being exported through foreign subsidiaries hidden abroad.

The preventing sexual violence initiative was a priority during the UK’s presidency of the G8 in 2013, but it remains a major task to root out the use of rape as a weapon of war. Even if Governments sign the declaration of commitment to ending sexual violence in conflict, there is much to do to challenge and change the culture of violence against women. The UK has a reputation for providing high-quality military training. As a condition of providing such training, we must challenge those countries that want it to demonstrate a genuine commitment to eradicating from their military ranks the use of rape as a weapon of war.

I am glad the Government have not included in the Gracious Speech plans to withdraw from the European convention on human rights or to introduce legislation that would have meant human rights were okay only as long as the Government approved of them—what a slippery slope that would be. However, the very way in which the Prime Minister called into doubt the value of human rights considerably weakens the UK’s position on the world stage when it comes to challenging other countries. How can he challenge repressive regimes when they can retort that he has created newspaper headlines by talking about watering down human rights legislation and pulling out of the European convention on human rights?

With the horrific increase across the world in the persecution of people for their religious beliefs, Britain must champion religious freedom. I hope the Government will consider adopting the Labour manifesto commitment to creating a specific role, and have a person, in the FCO to take forward the religious freedom agenda across the world.

As I said, other speakers want to get in, so I will leave my comments on Europe until next week.

8.57 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): It is an honour to follow the reasoned arguments of the hon. Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith). I too congratulate all those who have made their maiden speeches, but I must particularly highlight that by my hon. Friend the Member

for Fareham (Suella Fernandes), whom I have known since she was born. Her parents will be justly proud of the speech she made.

Despite a bitter campaign in the general election, fired by the GMB, which sought to get everyone in my constituency not to vote for me, and by a rather shadowy organisation that labelled me as a child killer as a result of my support for the state of Israel, I am delighted to report that the constituents of Harrow East returned me with more than 50% of the vote and an increased majority.

I am delighted to represent the most multi-religious, multi-ethnic constituency in the country. We comprise every language on the planet and every religion under the sun, and we have representatives from every country on earth in our midst. It is a privilege to live in Harrow East and to hear about all the problems of the world without ever leaving the constituency.

One issue we debate in the House is Britain’s place in the world. I am delighted that British people will at last have a say on our membership of the European Union. By 2017, no one under the age of 60 will have had the opportunity to vote on Britain’s membership of the European club, and no one has ever voted on our membership of the European Union. I am delighted to have supported the proposal to do so in the last Parliament, and I am glad the Government caught up with those of us who did. I am also glad that the laggards on the Opposition Benches have finally seen the sense in having a referendum on our future. We must look at internationalist aspirations beyond the Commonwealth to the world at large. It is a fact that at the end of the second world war 25% of the world’s population was concentrated in Europe. Now it is only 10%. As a trading nation, we must be looking beyond our shores and beyond Europe.

I am very proud that the Conservative party manifesto was the only manifesto to mention many countries of the world, in particular India. We have an historic and special relationship with the United States of America that is second to none. Over the next five years, I look forward to us forging a relationship with India that is on a par with the relationship we enjoy with the United States of America: forging a position of greater market opportunities and greater co-operation between our two countries, and ensuring that our trade improves and that we stand four-square behind India’s aspirations to become a superpower within the region. As such, we look forward to India becoming a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

We should remember the plight of people who are less fortunate than ourselves. We must ensure a proper resolution to the truth and reconciliation programme in Sri Lanka, so that all its people can see the opportunities. The oppressed people of Bangladesh need to be safeguarded and their ability to celebrate their religion retained. Finally, our historic relations with the state of Israel must be preserved. We are the fourth or fifth-biggest economy in the world, and it is the tenth-biggest economy. We must stand shoulder to shoulder with our neighbours.

9.1 pm

Mr Gavin Shuker (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): It is an honour to speak in a debate with so many epic maiden speeches. I have to admit, however, that I was slightly perturbed to see that all those making them pretty

[Mr Gavin Shuker]

much looked older than me, which means that I am constrained to another five years of wandering around this place being asked if I know where I am going.

There can be no future for our nation that is not pro-internationalist and pro-reform. That means demonstrating global leadership to further our interests in and for the world, and making a connected world work for us. It means tackling structural inequalities—of power, wealth and identity—in the interests of all people. Our capacity for influence and leadership is unrivalled for a country of our size. What other nation is a leading member of the European Union, the Council of Europe, the Commonwealth, NATO and the permanent five of the UN Security Council? We have fundamentals we must not waste, but they must be coupled with political will. The Gracious Speech and the Government, just like the previous Government, fall short on will. This dangerous right-wing Tory Government's agenda for office risks further undermining Britain's place in the world. The range of the foreign and domestic policy measures announced last Wednesday poses a threat to our standing and influence.

First, now that the Prime Minister's in/out referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union is going ahead, it is right that Opposition Members accept the legitimacy of the Bill. It is vital, however, that we make the case for our continued membership and drive for a perpetual process of positive reform, in stark opposition to the right-wing Tory Government's sham negotiation, against an artificial timetable, that will damage our influence from Cork to Krakow.

Secondly, the Government's proposed abolition of the Human Rights Act would endanger our membership of the Council of Europe and our position as a party to the European convention on human rights. In addition to risking making it harder for victims of injustice to seek redress in this country, repealing the Act and removing ourselves from the jurisdiction of the Strasbourg Court would put us in the company of Belarus, the only other nation state in Europe not party to the convention. That is not leadership. From the party of Churchill—when the ECHR was drafted in large part by British lawyers with the support and encouragement of the former Prime Minister—the proposed repeal draws stark contrasts with, and conclusions about, the Conservative party of yesterday.

Thirdly, we must equip our citizens with the ability to navigate the complexities, threats and opportunities of a globalised world. Free trade, however, will bring freedom only if it is also fair. The Government's proposed domestic trade union Bill will put draconian restrictions on the most basic labour and trade union rights. The proposed changes to striking regulations are likely to flout basic International Labour Organisation rules, aligning Britain with an alarming number of repressive regimes that impose similar, or more severe, restrictions. And it comes as no surprise that in a previous iteration this right-wing Tory Government defunded the International Labour Organisation and weakened protections for workers around the world.

Fourthly, in failing to tackle structural and historical injustices our leadership and consistency have been brutally undermined. From Palestine to Kashmir, our interest is demanded by those who find themselves

being consistently disempowered and oppressed. From the UN to the World Trade Organisation, reform is demanded by those who are not in the room but consistently locked outside in an increasingly cold climate. From the Mediterranean to the Yellow sea, freedoms that we take for granted are under threat: freedom of religion and belief, freedom to love, and freedom of speech. Those freedoms require not our tacit acceptance but shoring up. This Queen's Speech is neither pro-internationalist nor pro-reform, and we should reject it.

9.5 pm

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Luton South (Mr Shuker) and the many Members who have made maiden speeches today and in previous days. We have heard speeches of great eloquence and passion, and we already know that Parliament will be well served by its new Members.

The county of Warwickshire has retained all its six Conservative MPs, each with an increased majority, but I want to make special mention of my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey). In 2010, his predecessor had the smallest Conservative majority in the country, at just 57, and at times his own prospects looked bleak. However, very hard work in the constituency and a national party message that resonated with the electorate have led to his being elected with a majority of 3,000. If on election night the Nuneaton result told us that the Conservative party would be in government, the North Warwickshire result told us that we would have a working majority.

In considering Britain's role in the world, I believe that Britain's role should be in Europe but with the right kind of relationship with Europe. On 15 June 1975, when the last referendum on Europe took place, I was 18 years and five months old. I followed the debate in the media; I had taken part in discussions at school; and I voted yes in that referendum, for Britain to remain in the European Economic Community. However, that was 40 years ago. Today's enlarged European Union is a very different body from the EEC then, and it is entirely right that we should renegotiate a new relationship. I am delighted that the Prime Minister has got stuck straight into doing that with visits and meetings last week, and I welcome the early positive responses from European leaders.

It is entirely right that the British people should have their say on Europe, and it is interesting that the Opposition have now changed their view and support a referendum. If they had been able to do that just a matter of weeks or months ago, the matter could have been settled in the last Parliament. However, our negotiations should not be rushed. They will set the template for the next 40 years and they will not be easy to conduct, so it is right that we should take time for the referendum to be held.

Our security in the world depends on our having armed forces that are equipped to carry out whatever it takes to keep us safe, and the Queen's Speech confirmed that work is now under way on the 2015 strategic defence and security review. It is entirely right that we should build on the SDSR of five years ago and consider the risks that our country faces in a rapidly changing world. We have heard much about those threats in our debate today.

In my constituency, we are building the propulsion system for the new Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers at GE's factory in the town. The first of those carriers will be handed over to the Royal Navy next year, and it was a great pleasure for me to see the first of those two vessels at Rosyth just before it was floated out, when I visited with the all-party group on the armed forces. We have heard much today from my hon. Friends the Members for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) and for Wells (James Heapey) about the very challenging issues faced by our armed forces. To new Members of Parliament who wish to learn more about our servicemen, I recommend the all-party group and the Armed Forces Parliamentary Trust.

I was pleased to see the Psychoactive Substances Bill in the Queen's Speech. It will be of great interest to my constituent Richard Smith, who has been a very vocal campaigner on this issue, having seen his son affected by these products.

Mr Speaker, you would not expect me to participate in a debate about Britain's role in the world without referring to what my constituency in particular has given to the world, and what we and the world will be celebrating both in Rugby and across the country in just 100 days, when we celebrate the rugby world cup. The town of Rugby will be hard at work preparing to welcome the world to see our wonderful game.

9.9 pm

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): I wanted to take part in this debate because, like my Labour colleagues, I believe in the abiding principle that by the strength of our common endeavour we achieve more than we do alone, and the meaning of this principle does not stop at the Scottish border or the English channel. I believe in a United Kingdom that plays a major role in the planet's global institutions, and I believe that Britain is a force for good, which is why I said on the night I was re-elected that I would campaign to ensure that the UK remained at the top table of European nations by maintaining our membership of the EU. When I joined the Labour party in Sedgefield more than 30 years ago, I joined a constituent part of a British Labour party, not an English Labour party, and I will fight to ensure that the values we adhere to will find renewed strength and favour in all four parts of the UK, because they are not restrained by a cynical nationalism that says, "We want our independence, as long as it is not fiscal independence and we can keep the BBC."

If we can achieve more together than we can alone, surely our country should stay united. In a world where decisions taken on the other side of the world affect our communities here at home, we should realise that we cannot, and should not, pull up the drawbridge to the rest of the world. Instead, we should embrace it, with all its faults, be they climate change, national financial markets, ISIS or rampant technological change; all these things affect villages in Sedgefield, from Thornley in the north to Hurworth in the south. We should remember that the forces that swirl through the towns, cities and villages of the UK are now global. I say that not just because companies such as Nissan and Hitachi have invested in the north-east, but because being an active member in support of our global institutions means being confident not only in those institutions but in ourselves. Yes, we will need to

reform and renew them, but surely we are part of such institutions because we achieve more together than we ever do alone.

As part of our outward and optimistic approach to world affairs and the UK's role in that approach, we should play a key role in the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. The negotiations are a long way from completion, but it is not right to say no to the partnership without first knowing what is in it. To those opposed to TTIP now I say: if the agreement goes ahead, it will help us go some way towards reforming and negotiating 50% of the global economy, which can only be a good thing.

Our role in the world as a permanent member the UN Security Council means being a military contributor to the maintenance of global security, which is why we should be very careful before we allow our military budget to fall below 2% of GDP. But all that is at stake if this country is dismantled and its component parts diminished, and if the UK also leaves the EU questions should rightly be asked about whether we should have a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Surely if we believe that Britain is a force for good, we should not be undermining our role in the world by bringing uncertainty, but that is exactly what we are doing. We should not allow the UK's future to be put at risk for party political reasons or out of narrow nationalism. I do not believe in a little Britain. We achieve more together than we do alone, and that principle should guide us in our negotiations in Europe, in any referendum and in any goals we set for Britain in the world.

9.13 pm

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): I applaud the magnificent maiden speeches we have heard today. I always thought the class of 2014 was particularly distinguished, but on the basis of what we have heard today I think the class of 2015 will be even more so.

I thank the people of Newark for returning me to the House and the people of the county of Nottinghamshire, a majority of whom voted Conservative for the first time since 1983. I look particularly to my neighbour my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mark Spencer).

Given the shortness of time, I will concentrate on one area little touched upon today. The substantial internal constitutional reforms that are understandably diminishing the space and energy for foreign affairs and the many other immediate challenges in the Foreign Secretary's in-tray we have heard about today must not distract us from the bigger task of repositioning Britain in a new world order. We must all recognise that the future of our living standards and security will depend as much on the great new powers and the exploding consumer markets of Asia, Africa and Latin America as on Europe. That is where most, if not the vast majority, of the growth over the next 30 years will be.

The patterns of international trade are changing fast. The internet is upending old industries. The EU, born in an age when solidarity and centralisation were understandably relevant, now risks being hopelessly outmoded in a world that demands flexibility, decentralisation and, above all, openness to the markets beyond.

The British business I used to manage with the new hon. Member for South Antrim (Danny Kinahan)—Christie's—is now generating 45% of its annual turnover

[Robert Jenrick]

from Asia. Ten years ago, it was 1.5%. It is a similar story with other high-growth businesses, whether they be multinationals such as Burberry, JCB and Jaguar Land Rover, or Newark firms such as Benoy, an architects firm that has transformed itself within five to 10 years from designing barn conversions in Nottinghamshire to designing shopping malls and airports in Singapore and China. British businesses need our support and guidance in these endeavours.

The last Government opened new embassies in Asia and focused some of the Foreign Office's resources on trade. I sincerely hope that that refocusing will continue and accelerate in the five years to come. I was pleased that the Government chose to be a founding supporter of China's new Asian Infrastructure investment bank. Talks are under way for an EU-China bilateral trade agreement. Whether it be within or without Europe, the UK must take a lead in that enterprise, as it should on finalising the transatlantic free trade agreement that was crudely mischaracterised and caricatured before and during the election.

Above all, we should be confident enough to develop our own agenda to work with the emerging powers of Asia and Africa. That is where our future beckons. That is where the high-skilled, well-paid jobs will come from. Tackling those questions will be part of the answer to our productivity challenge at home.

Too many British companies rely on the captive markets of UK household consumption to fuel growth, rather than seek a place in the fiercely competitive international markets. Those companies are the ones we should be on the side of. The next five years may be characterised by many challenges, some of which will define our role in the world, but the overarching question is the wider one of how we can re-imagine Britain as a trading nation sending out ships to emerging markets.

9.17 pm

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I must say that we have heard some truly impressive maiden speeches today, and it has been a pleasure to sit here for seven hours listening to them.

My main point today is that the prosperity of my own constituency can be secured only by Britain being an outward-facing, open, skilled and confident country—one that is best placed to take advantage of the tremendous opportunities available in the world today. Listening to the Queen's Speech, however, I do not feel at all encouraged that that is the direction in which the new Government will take us.

I clearly recognise the decisive Conservative victory at the election, but I can honestly say that the issues of having too many low-paid, low-skilled jobs, of insecurity at work, of the bedroom tax and of unfair benefit sanctions, are real and genuine problems in my constituency. I say to whatever Government are in power that the people affected by those problems deserve to have their voices heard.

What I need this Government to understand is that many people in my area who do work hard, who do put in to the system, genuinely do not get the rewards that their labour should deliver. I need this Government to understand that in my constituency poverty, including

extreme poverty where people are pushed to rely on food banks, now affects people who are in work. In my borough, 24% of all the jobs, nearly a quarter, and 47% or about half of all part-time jobs pay below the living wage. Most of all, I need the Government to understand that the answers to those problems require Britain to be engaged in the world around us, and particularly engaged in the world economy and in the European Union.

If one thing is absolutely paramount to the prosperity of my area, it is Britain's membership of the EU. We still have substantial manufacturing in my area, and I have no doubt we would lose a great deal of it if we chose to leave the EU. I believe that even the uncertainty caused by holding a referendum will be to our economic detriment, but I hope it will end an even greater period of uncertainty by decisively confirming our membership of the EU once and for all.

I am not sure that it will be as straightforward as that, however. Having sat in this Parliament for the last five years, it is clear to me that a sizeable number of Conservative Back Benchers would not be happy even if our European neighbours agreed to change the name of Europe to "Greater Britain". Realistically, while there are several annoying things about the EU that might need to be reformed or changed—from where the Parliament sits to eligibility and reciprocity in respect of tax credits—I see us facing three main choices.

First, we could withdraw from the EU altogether and suffer catastrophic economic damage. Secondly, we could withdraw from the EU, but still sign up to the single market via a Norway-style free trade agreement under which we would still pay a fee to gain access to the single market and be forced to implement all the EU's rules without having a say in any of them. That would surely be disadvantageous. Thirdly, we could remain part of the EU and part of the single market, and, in doing so, secure a say in the rules of that single market. It is pretty obvious to me where our national interest lies in those three options.

I hope that we shall start to see the real issues in the debate come to the forefront. I hope even more that it will mark the start of a period of real engagement in Europe, in which we shall have the confidence to form the alliances and relationships that will make the EU work even better for us. We had it under Tony Blair and under Gordon Brown, but we have not had it under the present Prime Minister, and we need to get it back.

9.20 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab): I am extremely grateful to be called. Let me begin by paying tribute to all the Members who have made their maiden speeches—very fine maiden speeches—during the debate. I am confident that Members on both sides of the House will benefit from their contributions over the next five years.

As the right hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr Burns) said last week, this was a true-blue Tory Queen's Speech whose centrepiece was the EU referendum. Our party has said that it will go along with the referendum, and I support that, but let us be clear that the Prime Minister was forced into it from a position of weakness, not strength. He was forced into it because, in the last Parliament, 50 Tory Members rebelled in the EU budget vote. He was forced into it because, in the last Parliament,

the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) tabled an amendment to the Gracious Address, and he was forced to support that.

The EU referendum is a result of the Prime Minister's weakness, and, as the Government Whips are well aware, it would take just nine Tory Members voting in our Lobby to sink any piece of Government legislation. During this Parliament, because of his slender majority, the Prime Minister may well experience the chaos of which he warned during the general election campaign.

I will campaign for us to remain in the European Union. What worries me about the referendum is that all the energy and animating spirit of the Prime Minister and the Government will now be directed towards the renegotiation. Rather than spending his valuable time with other European leaders discussing energy security and the energy threats from eastern Europe, or matters relating to the Greek financial crisis, the Prime Minister will spend all of it discussing the intricacies of the treaty of Rome, just to satisfy his own Back Benchers.

The problem relates to a range of foreign policy issues. As we heard from the right hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan), there are mutterings that we are withdrawing from the world—that the United Kingdom is not playing its role on issues such as climate change, poverty, security and terrorism, and that we are retreating from the world stage. We are reducing our military capability, and there are strains on our domestic capability. It seems that not only do we no longer carry a big stick, but we do not even speak softly any more.

There are two areas in which I think the Government have been complacent. We have a Prime Minister and a Chancellor who, as far as I am aware, have not said a single word, let alone taken a single step, in relation to the emerging economic crisis in China, which is in the grip of one of the worst stock market frenzies in history. Millions of ordinary Chinese people are borrowing money that they cannot repay to invest in what they think will be one-way bets on rising stocks. Just three weeks ago, a real estate company on the Chinese stock market saw its shares rise by 10%, simply because it had changed its name to something that sounded more like the name of a technology firm. That is madness. History teaches us that it will end in tears, and those tears will be shed not just in China, but in Britain. It used to be said that, when America sneezed, Britain caught a cold. When China eventually sneezes, Britain will be in bed for a year, and, as far as I can see, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have done nothing.

We are equally complacent about India. We talk about increasing our trade, but the number of students coming from India has fallen by 36%. In the last Parliament, the Home Secretary talked of increasing a £3,000 visa bond for visitors from India. I hope that that is not on the agenda now. On the questions of China and India, and on a range of other foreign policy matters, we are becoming increasingly complacent, and withdrawing from the world.

I hope that the Foreign Secretary will think again about many of those matters.

9.24 pm

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): May I begin by paying tribute to our armed forces and the work they are doing across the world to protect our country and

Britain's national interests? We remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice during the last Parliament and we must never forget them. I also pay tribute to Foreign Office and DFID staff working often in challenging environments to improve people's lives. I warmly congratulate the Secretary of State for International Development on her reappointment and on the commitment she personally has shown to the advancement of women and girls across the world. We also congratulate her colleagues the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Mr Swayne), on his reappointment, and the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps), formerly known as Michael Green. He has shown that being deputy chairman of the Conservative party is no barrier to promotion to higher things, and we wish him well as he starts his big, proper Government job.

All three DFID Ministers have the great privilege and duty of delivering change to the poorest people in the world at a time of significant challenges. If we in this House wish to end the abuse of power, to end inequality in education and health, and to end the waste of worklessness and transform our world, we must rise to meet the challenges of globalisation, technology and migration. We believe we achieve more by our common endeavour than we achieve alone.

But this Queen's Speech was notable for the things it did not mention as much as for those it did. The right hon. Lady's party promised to scrap the Human Rights Act yet there was nothing on that in the Gracious Speech. We on the Labour Benches believe human rights are universal and inalienable. Mature democracies like ours should support the development of free societies everywhere while upholding our own legal and moral obligations.

Britain helped draft the European convention on human rights after the genocide of world war two. What message does it send to the bigots and tyrants of the world if we leave that convention? If we turn our back on human rights, what hope is there for those awaiting the death penalty in prisons around the world? What message does that send to Burma, Syria, North Korea, Sri Lanka and Iran?

Workers' rights are also human rights, so will the right hon. Lady use some of the £1.8 billion she has earmarked for economic development to work with trade unions to tackle the abuses of migrant workers building Qatar's 2022 World cup stadiums? The International Trade Union Confederation estimates that 1,200 workers have died so far. That is the human toll of FIFA's corruption. The deaths of those people are a stain on the beautiful game. The right hon. Lady's Government should organise a summit to press for change at FIFA, and that change must also include a review of the decision to award the World cup to Qatar.

Today we face the greatest refugee crisis since the second world war, with 55 million people in need of our help. Over the past two years we have seen a huge tragedy unfolding in the Mediterranean. People fleeing conflict in Syria, Libya and Eritrea are putting their lives into the hands of the traffickers because the world is turning away in their hour of need. The right hon. Lady's Government were wrong to withdraw from the Mare Nostrum Mediterranean rescue force saying it acted as a pull factor, but they were right to realise their mistake, to correct it and to participate in the new

[*Mary Creagh*]

Mediterranean rescue force, and we pay tribute to our armed forces who are engaged in that task.

This country has a proud history of helping those fleeing persecution, yet we have offered safe haven via the United Nations to fewer people than Germany, Austria, Canada, Sweden, France and even Australia. The right hon. Lady's Government have resettled just 187 Syrian refugees under the UK's vulnerable persons relocation scheme. Labour Members now urge her to work with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to offer safe haven to the children of Syria.

Sir Alan Duncan: Given that we have given 25 times more than the French to assist those fleeing from Syria, does the hon. Lady think it also right that we should be put on the same basis for taking as many people into this country, when most of them would rather go back to their own land?

Mary Creagh: The right hon. Gentleman talks about our previous work. Under the UN scheme, we took 2,500 people from Bosnia and 4,000 Kosovar Albanians when our troops were engaged in the no-fly zone and the airstrikes in the former Yugoslavia. It is not a question of either/or; it is a question of and/and. Our country's proud tradition of offering safe haven to those fleeing persecution should not be forgotten.

We heard some excellent speeches, including from the right hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan), but I will concentrate on Members who made their maiden speech. There was an excellent contribution from the hon. Member for Fareham (Suella Fernandes), who shared her family's personal story in a powerful and eloquent maiden speech. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) reminded us of the question of what happens when the renewables run out. She fought off UKIP in her seat, and she set out the future for her town, with 4,000 new green jobs in the energy sector in partnership with the European Union. The hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) made her maiden speech, and we are glad to hear that her constituency is recovering from the floods. There was also an excellent speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper), who shared with us the fact that 90% of sound systems in Hollywood are made in Burnley, which we will all think about when we watch the next blockbuster.

We heard an excellent speech from the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh), who talked about the importance of women's participation in politics. She represents a constituency that combines both The Famous Grouse and Gleneagles—she has the best of both worlds.

We heard a moving tribute to the members of our armed forces and about the needs of veterans from the new hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer). He paid a moving tribute to Lance Sergeant Dan Collins, who took his own life, and Lance Bombardier Mark Chandler, who was killed in action in Afghanistan. Those were deeply moving moments that this Chamber will not forget in a hurry.

We also heard a great speech from the new hon. Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield). She and I share an Irish heritage, although I cannot say that I have

burned any effigies of the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), although there is always time—so good, they burned him twice!

The hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) made an excellent speech, and he talked about the importance of Bombardier to his constituency.

My hon. Friend the Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn) spoke movingly about how he was a child of the peace process. He talked about the contribution of the Irish community and the difference it has made to Britain. We also had two speeches from Members who can perhaps be described, in the words of Thomas Hardy's "Tess of the d'Urbervilles," as maidens no more: the Mayor of London, who is also known as the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), and the right hon. Member for Gordon, who waxed lyrical on the Prime Minister's secret renegotiations with the EU. He compared the renegotiations to the South Sea Company, whereby a company was set up but people were not allowed to know its purpose until it was all finished.

We heard excellent speeches from the new hon. Member for South Antrim (Danny Kinahan) on the need for the military covenant to be recognised in Northern Ireland and from the new hon. Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann), who described delivering his own and others' election literature.

The hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond) rightly reminded us of the debt we owe the intelligence services.

The new hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) began by wishing peace on this House and ended by wishing peace on the world.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) reminded us of Sir William Beveridge, one of her predecessors, and the importance of realising the potential of every child.

The hon. and gallant Member for Wells (James Heapey) spoke eloquently of his service to his country in Basra, Kabul and Sangin.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) spoke of the proud history of non-conformism in her constituency and our duty to accept more refugees.

The hon. Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) also spoke about the importance of businesses in his constituency and the need to keep working in Europe.

Let me turn to the three immediate tasks ahead of the International Development Secretary in the next six months: the financing for development summit in July; the sustainable development summit in September; and the climate summit in December. Those international summits will shape the life chances of millions of people, yet only one, the climate summit, received a mention in the Gracious Speech. Will she encourage her right hon. Friend the Chancellor to attend the financing for development summit, to demonstrate UK leadership? It will be crucial to convince other wealthy countries to make their fair contribution to put poorer nations on the path to a low-carbon, secure and sustainable future.

At September's summit, the world must focus the new sustainable development goals on the growing gap between rich and poor. Inequality reduces growth, hindering development. Ensuring women's political, social, economic

and human rights will help eradicate poverty and achieve inclusive economic growth. Across the world, millions of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people face criminalisation, hatred and persecution. Inequalities in gender, caste, race, sexuality, community, disability, religion, and ethnicity far too often determine people's life chances. Ensuring that everyone has access to healthcare is essential to ending poverty. The best way to protect against disease is to build a resilient, publicly controlled, publicly funded health service. With Ebola still lingering in Sierra Leone and Guinea, will the International Development Secretary now prioritise the provision of universal health coverage in the sustainable development goals?

The third summit is the climate summit in December. As many right hon. and hon. Members have said, the effect of climate change will hit the poorest people hardest. Eradicating poverty goes hand in hand with tackling climate change. If we do not cap temperature rises below 2°, millions of people will fall back into poverty. DFID must be fully involved in the preparations and negotiations for the climate conference. The climate change crisis is not an abstract geography and weather question, but a threat to the lives and livelihoods of millions of people.

The Gracious Speech was marked by the commitment to the EU referendum. Our country needs strong alliances around the world. Those alliances start in Europe, and a strong Britain benefits from a strong European Union. The Prime Minister has been uncharacteristically coy about what he is trying to renegotiate with other EU leaders. Labour Members look forward to making the case for remaining in the biggest market in the world, the protector of our rights and freedoms as workers and consumers, and the most successful peace process the world has ever seen.

In conclusion, there is an ambition across this House to see a better world, as Members from both sides have passionately made clear in a range of speeches today. The last Labour Government cancelled debt, trebled the aid budget, and brokered ambitious deals on trade and climate change. We will not allow that history to be rewritten by Conservative Members. In Opposition, we will support the Government unflinchingly and in good faith where it is appropriate to do so. Where it is not, we will force them to act, as we did when the Government failed to act on their 2010 manifesto promise to commit 0.7% of gross national income to international development aid. This Government must not squander the leadership role that the 0.7% commitment gives them. As many hon. Members have said in this debate, we have to choose and shape Britain's future place in Europe and in the world. As the global village becomes smaller and more connected, we believe we must build a world where power, wealth and opportunity is in the hands of the many, not the few, and where we achieve more by our common endeavour than we achieve alone.

9.39 pm

The Secretary of State for International Development (Justine Greening): I am delighted to have the impossible task of trying to wind up a wide-ranging debate on an incredibly important topic. It has been characterised by some outstanding maiden speeches by Members from across the House and I will do my best to do them justice in wrapping up.

I should start by saying how proud I am to have been re-elected to represent my own community of Putney, Roehampton and Southfields. I am very proud to have achieved a bigger majority, with a bigger share of the vote, in 2015 than I did in 2010. It is a real privilege for me to be able to continue to represent my local community, as it is for many other Members across the House.

On this important debate today, there can be no argument that the actions this country takes on the world stage matter to all of our lives here in Britain, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) pointed out, history shows that we often shape the lives of so many others beyond these shores as well. By standing tall in the world, Britain not only protects our interests but promotes them. It stands up for the values we believe in, and does the right thing by the poorest people on the planet.

We should be clear that these issues are not either/or options; in fact they go hand in hand. We know that in today's world, global problems such as migration, disease and terrorism all find their way on to our doorsteps. Instability in a country such as Somalia can end up affecting us through piracy. We either tackle and shape those problems, or they will tackle and shape us instead. It has never been clearer that our national security and long-term economic prosperity depend on greater prosperity and security in the wider world.

By contrast, countries that progress successfully on the path of development—countries such as China or India—present our country with huge economic opportunities. We can either make the most of those emerging economic opportunities, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) said, or risk being left behind by those countries that will take advantage of the opportunities.

As I have said, this House has heard many excellent contributions today, and I want to pick up on a number of them, especially the incredibly impressive maiden speeches. I am proud that our Conservative intake includes people from all walks of life, including from military service, and the NHS. We also now have a former postman. All those Members have a real ethos of public service, which led them to stand and be elected to represent their own communities. I am immensely proud to welcome all of them to the House today.

Let me pick up on a few contributions. First, I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) is back in the House. We have missed his colour over the years, and we look forward to more new words, such as schmoozathon, over the coming months. It is also great to see the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) back a second time around. He must have made a number of maiden speeches over the course of his career.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) gave us a fantastic opening speech. She has a tough act to follow. I often wondered whether her predecessor had found his own renewable energy source that he drew on over the years. I have no doubt that she will do a great job representing her local community without necessarily having to change her name to that of a local fish, as her predecessor did.

Let me turn now to the speeches made by my new hon. Friends. As first generation migrants, my hon. Friends the Members for Fareham (Suella Fernandes)

[*Justine Greening*]

and for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) set out their take on being able to contribute to our country and talked about the aspirations that their parents had when they arrived here. Whatever debate we have around having good controls over our immigration policy, the success or otherwise of those people who make their lives here is intrinsically linked to the success of our country, and we should never ever forget that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) talked about Somerset being the gateway to the south-west I am pleased that with the investment going into the A303 it will be a gateway that remains open rather than closed for the future.

I will continue to speak until 10 o'clock, Mr Speaker, if that is acceptable to you. I just want to ensure that we both understand how I am approaching my closing speech.

The hon. Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper) talked about the northern powerhouse. I am pleased she recognised the Chancellor's aim of setting our northern cities and regions on their feet again, contributing to our economy. I know, having grown up just outside Sheffield, the contribution those cities can make. She recognised the strategy that is now in place and talked about how the old mills are being reinvented for the 21st century. That is exactly the kind of change we want to see in those communities and I can assure her that we will work through many of the Bills in the Queen's Speech to continue to stimulate economic growth right across our country.

I pay tribute to the maiden speech from the hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh), from the SNP, who talked about job creation and how important it is in her local community. That point was also made by the new hon. Members for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson), for South Antrim (Danny Kinahan) and for St Helens North (Conor McGinn). They were all powerful introductions to the House and I pay tribute to those Members.

As the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) mentioned, perhaps one of the most moving speeches we heard today was from my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer). He clearly comes to this House having set himself a real mission and it is one with which we can all agree and, I hope, support, particularly his aims of helping to improve support for people with mental health issues in our country and understanding how that affects veterans and people who have served in our armed forces. I certainly remember a case in my constituency of a man who had served in Northern Ireland and had come back and spent years suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, which took a great toll not only on him personally but on his wider family. My hon. Friend has set himself a noble mission and I wish him all the best in tackling it.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann), who is now no longer a postman, is incredibly welcome in the House. He talked about how he wants the message of aspiration and blue collar Conservatism to run through everything we do as a party and as a Government. I could not agree with him more. I also went to my local comprehensive school and came from a very ordinary background and his

achievements in reaching this House are significant. I wish him well in his future career. I should also take this opportunity to say a big thank you to my postman, Ryan, who pointed out to me during the election just how heavy his postbag was, delivering not only my literature, as he pointed out, but everyone else's.

My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond), aside from pointing out her cycling prowess, again talked about the importance of her local economy and how it is steadily changing to be as successful in the 21st century as it was in the 20th century. I was in university in Southampton and knew Portsmouth very well from that time. It is a fantastic city and I know that she will do a great job in representing the communities that elected her.

As I wrap up my tributes to those who made such great maiden speeches, let me mention my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan). I remember going up to visit her when she was campaigning assiduously in the run-up to the election and I can tell her that being a chartered accountant is a good thing and will give her all the skills she needs to be successful in this House. She made a good bid in the competition for the most beautiful constituency.

The hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) also described how passionate she is and what drove her to become an MP. The values and the faith that she brings to her role will no doubt stand her in good stead. I liked her account of the radical traditions of her community and how she aims to continue those. My hon. Friend the Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood), who has a tough act to follow in many respects, spoke eloquently about the job that he plans to do for his local community. I have no doubt that he will be extremely successful.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary set out how, by maintaining a strong economy, this Government can pursue a foreign policy that will deliver a stronger, more secure and more prosperous Britain.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) highlighted in his speech the importance of international institutions to which the UK belongs. We face many complex challenges from EU reform, which we will no doubt debate at length in the House over the coming months and years. Many Members spoke about that today, including my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey).

Migration is another complex challenge. Back in the 1980s people in Britain first became aware of the challenges to international development posed by poverty. They saw people in Ethiopia suffering and starving because of the famine there. Those people had no idea of the world that the rest of us were living in. They had no conception of their state, compared with everyone else's. That has changed. People are no longer willing to accept a life sentence of poverty. They are aware of the prospects in the rest of the world and we can expect them to try to get a better life for themselves. We must be prepared to continue the work that we are doing, levelling up their part of the world and helping to create jobs, opportunity and prosperity where they are. That is why the work that DFID is doing not just in responding to humanitarian crises, but in upping our game on economic development, doing more work on jobs and

livelihoods, is so important in tackling the root causes of the problem that we are now seeing daily on our doorstep.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir Gerald Howarth) described many of the challenges that we face, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), with reference to the threat posed by ISIL and al-Qaeda-affiliated groups. Our diplomacy will continue to be as important as ever, alongside our military prowess, in tackling those challenges.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman) was right to point out that we should not forget the importance of the middle east peace process and issues such as Kashmir as we debate the broader foreign policy challenges that we face. In a thoughtful but extremely short speech, the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) covered important points for the House to reflect on, which featured also in the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood.

This Government are committed to doing whatever is necessary to keep Britain safe at all times. We have the biggest defence budget in the EU and the second biggest in NATO, and we will maintain strong, modern armed forces.

Sir Gerald Howarth: My right hon. Friend mentions that we have the largest defence budget in the EU, but serious concerns have been expressed by our principal ally. Will she address those?

Justine Greening: My hon. Friend is right to point out the challenges associated with continuing to invest to maintain our defence in future. The Prime Minister has been incredibly clear that we will meet our 2% commitment this coming year—[*Interruption.*] As my hon. Friend knows, we hosted the NATO summit in Wales. We hear chuntering from the Opposition Benches, but we need take no lectures from those whose Government left us with a hole of £38 billion in our defence budget. For that they should be truly ashamed of themselves. We have cleared up that mess. We are living within our means and at the same time we are investing in our military equipment—investing more than inflation and making sure we maintain our troops. We will continue to do that. My right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) and my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) spoke passionately about how important that commitment is.

That requires us all to work effectively across government. Indeed, the days when one could look at the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Department for International Development as separate Departments that tackle separate issues are over. A long-term, joined-up approach is absolutely essential, as my hon. Friends the Members for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) and for Gloucester (Richard Graham) said. The good news is that the UK Government have never worked together as seamlessly as we do today. On threats to our security, for example, DFID has worked hand in hand with the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Health to combat Ebola in Sierra Leone. Those efforts have not only saved countless lives in west Africa, but helped to prevent a global health crisis that could have been far deadlier than it was and even threatened the UK.

Two weeks ago I had the privilege of seeing at first hand some of our humanitarian work in Nepal. Britain's outstanding team of diplomats, armed forces servicemen and women and DFID staff are working hand in hand to ensure that aid is reaching the most vulnerable people. I pay tribute to all of them and to the work they are doing. I also pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan), who did life-saving work when a DFID Minister to ensure that Nepal was better prepared to withstand the impact of the earthquake. That work saved lives across that country, and we should be incredibly proud of that.

On economic opportunities, we have never had a more joined-up approach, with DFID and the Foreign Office launching key prosperity partnerships to strengthen our commercial links with emerging markets in Africa. I very much welcome UK Trade & Investment's renewed willingness to do more to work alongside the Foreign Office to ensure that UK companies are well placed to do well in these new but fast-growing markets.

Albert Owen: Will DFID also work with the devolved Administrations? There have been some good bilateral agreements with African states, for example between the Scottish Parliament and Malawi and Lesotho, and with all-party groups in this House. It is important that those groups are given a bigger audience in international development.

Justine Greening: I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that I work very closely with all-party groups, which I think play a key role in this House by enabling so many parliamentarians with an interest in this area not only to express that interest, but to work with Ministers and help inform policy. That goes for the devolved Administrations as well. As we heard in some of the speeches from the SNP Benches, we should be proud of Scotland's close links with Malawi. I look forward to working with hon. Members from that party, hopefully to pursue a united development strategy for the UK.

Protecting and promoting Britain's place in the world means more than just working across government; it requires a two-pronged approach that takes action today and future-proofs our prospects for tomorrow. That means action on today's problems and upstream work to tackle the root causes that drive issues such as migration. It means minimising the risks of instability as far as we reasonably can. The hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) made some important points about that. It means continuing our work to help the millions of refugees affected by the Syria crisis so that they can cope with the lives they are now leading in neighbouring countries such as Lebanon and Jordan. We are also helping countries such as Somalia and Nigeria to deal with terrorism and instability in their midst.

Future-proofing Britain's prospects for tomorrow also means market-making. In the end, the best guarantor of stability and prosperity is development. We are working with the Foreign Office and UKTI to ensure that we play that constructive role in the next wave of emerging markets. That frontier economy strategy, led by DFID, is critical not only in helping to tackle poverty, but in securing the UK's economic prospects for tomorrow.

Finally, all that work is underpinned by values; values that mean we will continue to be a world leader in campaigning for better rights for women and girls, for

[Justine Greening]

example. I am proud of the work that this Government have done. We will continue to do that, whether on dealing with female genital mutilation or child marriage. Britain should stand tall in the world not only because of our economic strength and military capacity, but because we have an approach that reflects more about us than just that. Britain has never been a country that buries its head in the sand; we have taken on global problems and made them our own. Others will try to talk us down, but we should never fall into the same trap. I think that today's debate shows our democracy at its best. We should be proud of the work that this country is doing.

10 pm

The debate stood adjourned (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Ordered, That the debate be resumed tomorrow.

Upland Farming

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Sarah Newton.*)

10 pm

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): I greatly appreciate the chance to talk briefly tonight about upland farming, not least because my hon. Friend the new Minister—my hearty congratulations to him—represents Penrith and The Border, a part of the world that we both know well. I know that he has the same problems I do with farmers who are struggling on upland pasture. He is very shrewd, and although he is new to the job he certainly knows his subject. I think we can both agree about one thing—it takes a very special sort of farmer to be able to ply this trade on the moorland and uplands of the United Kingdom.

Cattle and sheep on the lonely but lovely purple-capped landscapes of Exmoor are bred to be tough, and so are the people who tend that land and always have done, but mostly it is not much of a living. In the LFAs—the less-favoured areas, as Whitehall insists on calling them—some farmers, as we well know in this House, barely cover their costs. They have to rely on unpaid family labour to help run their businesses, or diversify. Their savings have dwindled hugely. Holidays, new cars, nights out and even clothes are sometimes luxuries that they can no longer afford.

Andrew Bingham (High Peak) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Liddell-Grainger: Of course I give way to my hon. Friend, with pleasure.

Andrew Bingham: In my constituency there are lots of hill farmers. Does my hon. Friend share my concern that the difficulties facing these farmers in the current climate and operational system are discouraging the next generation of younger farmers? Ultimately, when we look across our beautiful fields, what we see is the result of the work these farmers do, and I have great concern for the future.

Mr Liddell-Grainger: As always, my hon. Friend hits the nail on the head; he is absolutely right. He knows as well as I do—we are roughly the same age—about the closure of agricultural colleges across the United Kingdom and the failure to invest in farming and young farmers. Our inability to help finance young farmers to get into farming has proved to be almost insurmountable. A lot of us, including me, should really be farming. That is what we set out to do, and we have ended up in such an esteemed places as this.

I am afraid that this entire situation—my hon. Friend put it very eloquently—is not a sob story but a reality. He and I know it to be the truth, because these people are our constituents. They are proud and extremely hard-working people. It is not that they do not want to be farmers—of course they do; it is what their parents and grandparents did, and they want to continue a tradition as much as anything else—but the balance sheets do not add up. They cannot grow cereals or exotic vegetables on unsheltered land at high altitude. They have to graze livestock instead—the most uncertain

and least profitable part of cattle and sheep farming. Hill farmers are rightly at the end of the production chain. They are more vulnerable than most to price fluctuations, as we are seeing at the moment. If their costs go up, that comes out of their pockets. In some ways, it is a miracle, given the economics, that they have survived, but miracles do happen.

Let us look at some local things. The best sheep tags in Britain are designed by an Exmoor company—an excellent local company called Shearwell. Despite all the challenges on Exmoor, it still supports two markets at Cutcombe and at Blackmoor Gate—fantastic! However, because cheap imports such as New Zealand lamb and Polish beef are flooding in, prices get squeezed, and I am afraid that our hill farmers and other farmers take the hit. Farm incomes on uplands like Exmoor are way down. Not long ago, the average income was roughly £31,000. That may sound like a reasonable amount of money, but remember it is just turnover—most of it comes from subsidies, not profit. A similar lowland farm would reckon to be getting about double that—possibly £60,000 or more—yet it is our hard-pressed hill farmers who have helped to create some of the finest landscapes in Europe, and not just in our country.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Liddell-Grainger: I give way with pleasure to the Irish.

Jim Shannon: I am always very interested in how we can help upland farmers. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one thing we could do for them is encourage more sporting shooting projects in the uplands, thereby giving them more income and finance to help them in their farming projects?

Mr Liddell-Grainger: My constituency is the home of the stag hounds and some of the finest shoots in Britain. I have, I think, 11 packs in my constituency and I assure the hon. Gentleman that shooting, hunting and fishing put an enormous amount back into my constituency, as is also the case in my hon. Friend the Minister's constituency of Penrith and The Border. If there was ever a reason for repealing a ridiculous Act, this may be the time to do so. I thank the hon. Gentleman and hope he will join us in the beautiful Exmoor to ride to hounds.

Hundreds of thousands of visitors come to Exmoor every year. Hill farming is the driver for wealth creation across whole swathes of our rural economy. Diversification has become a necessity on moorland, encouraged by Governments and imaginative implementation by farmers who will turn their hands to anything legal to keep going. It is, of course, a case of having to do so. Many hill farmers will never break even on farming activity alone. They know it, we know it and I know the Minister knows it, but the burning issue for us all is how to achieve a financial solution that persuades farmers to continue doing what they have always done

Personally, I am not convinced—I am interested to hear the Minister's views on this—that we have got this right. I hope that we will hear a much more joined-up approach now that this country is being run by our one-party Government. We should strive to achieve an

outcome that compensates farmers fairly for the efforts they make preserving, protecting and looking after our landscape.

Some of the hill farmers I meet have become embittered about the system—with some cause. It is, after all, a minefield of baffling bureaucracy with ever-changing subsidies all packaged in deliberately confusing names which keep altering without much warning. Even the most basic subsidy—I am going to go into acronyms, I am sorry—the SPS, or single payment scheme, has now been renamed the BPS to remind the world that it is just a basic payment subsidy. The poor old farmers, however, have to put up with much worse.

Does anybody remember the HLCAs—hill livestock compensatory allowances—which were paid to farmers to look after the land? They were simplified and replaced by the HFAs—hill farm allowances—but just as we were getting used to HFAs, they were killed off and turned into UELS, which, as everyone knows, stands for the upland entry level stewardship scheme. Don't bother to write this down: it's too late and I really can't go on too much longer with this.

The same thing happened to ESAs—environmentally sensitive areas—but probably not for long, as some of these things tend to come back rebranded with different initials. We are going to be talking about something called CS, which is countryside stewardship. That is fine, but we have been getting used to the CSS, which is the same thing but with an extra S stuck on the end. I do hope everyone is taking this in; I will, of course, be asking questions at the end.

A hill farmer in an SDA or LFA who used to be paid an HLCA which turned into an HFA which then became an UELS or perhaps an ESA and is about to transform itself into the CS has probably been tearing out their hair, or what is left of it, for years. Every one of those schemes comes with complex forms which are to be filled in before—dare I say it?—a single euro changes hands and ends up in the farmer's pocket.

I did a quick trawl on the internet to try to list the number of different schemes and rules that come under the CAP—common agricultural policy—and can see how it would drive anyone batty. I do not have to get up at 5 o'clock in the morning and run a farm in a bleak climate, or rely on subsidies to put food on my family's breakfast table, to find that out.

Most hill farmers will tell us that this is a nightmare system. It is like trying to play soccer with both legs tied together and then finding that Sepp Blatter has shifted the goalposts again. The Minister should not be alarmed. I do not hold him personally responsible—he has only been here two minutes. The muddle is caused by a basic conflict between trying to help farmers and looking after the natural world at the same time. This is where common sense starts to break down.

As I have mentioned, the major funding that farmers get is the SPS, which is known now as the BPS. It amounts to roughly £200 per hectare, but to claim the cash the farmer has to have the land in good agricultural and environmental condition—or, believe it or not, GAEC—among the compulsory standards for which is:

“Avoiding the encroachment of unwanted vegetation on agricultural land”.

That means that if a farmer wants more money, they have to keep wild weeds in check, presumably by towing

[Mr Liddell-Grainger]

cutting gear over the land, which is an awful lot easier said than done if they live and farm on Exmoor—it is a hill.

For decades, farmers have managed the moor by burning off gorse and heather in the spring. It is one of the oldest methods known to man. It fertilises the soil with ash, provides new growth for livestock grazing and prevents raging summer fires that could destroy the soil and lead to erosion. But guess what? Natural England came along and told farmers they were getting it wrong and burning too much. A restriction order was placed at the whim of one official, whose views were based on a practice in—dare I say it, seeing that my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill) is on the Front Bench?—North Yorkshire. The problem is that vegetation grows far more rapidly on Exmoor, which is why it has to be burned regularly. I mean no disrespect: we are a few months ahead. The result of such interference is that parts of the moor now sprout 10-foot gorse. It is far too tall to be burned safely, so it has to be chopped mechanically, with no soil benefits whatsoever. It makes the area look—I would happily entertain my hon. Friend the Minister on Exmoor—as though a small thermonuclear bomb has just gone off, and it costs us a fortune.

All that is very hard for any farmer whose family has been managing the same piece of countryside for five or six generations. Just as one example, farmers have been told that they are not doing enough to protect butterflies and beetles, so they have been lumbered with more controls. I do not think that farmers go around wilfully vandalising fauna or flora—I have never met one who does, and nobody else in the House has; farmers love to see it as much as any of us, which is why they farm—but we cannot expect them to be full-time guardians of the countryside for next to nothing.

The problem is that subsidies have not kept pace with the growing list of environmental responsibilities. That is one of the main conclusions of an important academic study produced by the Exmoor Hill Farming Network. I commend that excellent organisation to the House. It wants the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to invest in a thorough analysis of beef and sheep chains to try to secure better prices for producers. How often have we been here before? It is also after a complete review of the current level of support to these farmers to analyse the implications of “social exclusion and mental ill-health”.

The Minister will already know from his own experience of hill farming how desolate and lonely it can be.

I accept that there are no quick fixes, but I have to wonder about the sense of moving too fast to achieve some of DEFRA’s more bizarre ambitions of reducing farmers’ reliance on subsidies. It may be a good aim, but it surely cannot be done until alternative solutions and sources of income can be guaranteed. I extend a warm invitation to the Minister to visit our beautiful part of the world. As I have said, I would love to host him.

I offer one caution. Almost 400 years ago, Exmoor was just a filthy piece of barren ground. That is what the writer Daniel Defoe called it. Robinson Crusoe would not give it a second look; he had gone to his desert island. But then came the farmers and—guess what?—they tamed the land. They continue to do so. If

upland farmers ever called it a day, who would look after Exmoor? Why would the tourists bother to come? What would happen to the hundreds of rural businesses that we depend on to keep it the way it is? One farmer put it to me rather simply. “All I want,” he said, “is a level playing field”—then he winked—“but please don’t tell FIFA to design it.”

10.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset (Mr Liddell-Grainger) for raising a subject of such importance, and indeed for his kind words. It is a very great privilege to have my first opportunity to stand at the Dispatch Box dealing with a subject of such importance. I apologise in advance for the fact that I am not accustomed to doing so. I am normally barracking Front Benchers from the Back Benches, and it is rather difficult to adjust to facing forward.

As my hon. Friend pointed out, upland farmers are the most powerful symbol of our most fundamental values. Their presence is a living reminder of the formation of the British landscape, with the relationship between humans and soils reflected in the very shape of our fell sides. The uplands are the creation of those farmers. As he said, it is their work that we are celebrating and from which we are benefiting, whether through tourism, ecology, poetry or painting. We see their legacy in the shape of every field and the angle of every dry stone wall. It is their children who support our schools, and it is they who support our rural roads and shops. The lifeblood of our rural communities depends on the upland farmer, and that is as true of Exmoor and my hon. Friend’s constituency as it is of Cumbria, the North Yorkshire moors, Northumbria, Dartmoor, the Yorkshire dales and the whole Pennine ridge.

Upland farmers face three unique challenges. As my hon. Friend said, those are, first, economics and incomes; secondly, bureaucracy; and, thirdly, environmental management. I would like to respond briefly to each of those in turn. First, I can absolutely reassure him that the Government understand the serious issues around farm incomes. The average income for upland farmers is about £23,900, but many farmers in our constituencies operate on incomes that are considerably lower. In my constituency, there are upland farmers on incomes below £16,000 a year.

We looked specifically at the data for my hon. Friend’s constituency and for Exmoor, and we found that the number of commercial farm holdings fell from 603 in 2009 to 510 in 2013. Now, there will be many reasons for that, some of which are to do with economies of scale, and some of which are to do with changes in agriculture, but I feel, and I think he will feel, that that is 100 families whose history, heritage, knowledge of the landscape and investment in the soil have been lost forever.

That is why I am proud that the Government have introduced some serious reforms to the way the basic payment scheme operates. For example, from 2015, we are equalising the payments for lowland areas and severely disadvantaged areas. The direct payment rate on moorland has almost doubled. That sounds like normal Government jargon, but it is not—it makes an

enormous difference. Effectively, it means that lowland farms will lose a certain amount, but it will be a relatively small amount compared with the benefit for upland farmers. DEFRA estimates that the SDA rate will increase from about €200 to €245 per hectare, and the moorland rate will nearly double, from €35 to nearly €70.

That should make a significant difference to upland incomes, but the Department needs to be careful to study this. We must be sure that we look at incomes in the round. We are looking not just at the basic payment scheme, but at all the other forms of support and environmental incentive provided to these farmers. More needs to be done, and we must monitor the impact of the changes to be sure that they remain flexible and that we are attentive to any problems.

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Can the Minister answer a question asked of me time and again by my farming constituents in north Northumberland, many of whom are upland farmers? How would the Government support our farmers if the nation votes to leave the European Union in 2017? That is a real concern, and there is a fear that there is no understanding in DEFRA of how the issue might be dealt with.

Rory Stewart: It is a great privilege to take a question from my hon. Friend, and I congratulate her on her maiden speech. As the representative of Berwick, she represents the epitome of the middleland—that wonderful junction between England and Scotland—and the upland farmers right the way along to the Kielder forest. It is vital that, whatever happens in the vote on the European Union, the Conservative party—indeed, all parties in this House, I hope—and this country continue to provide deep support for farmers. We will be able to do that only if we take some of the arguments my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset made and bring the public along with us. It would be dangerous, whether we remain in the European Union or leave it, if we ended up vesting our responsibility in the EU. We must take responsibility ourselves; we must say we believe in the support farmers currently get from Europe, and, whatever happens in the vote, we must continue to provide it, for all the reasons that my hon. Friend mentioned and that my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) raised in her question.

The second issue my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset raised concerned complex structures and bureaucracy, and I congratulate him on a most astonishing range of acronyms. It was a fantastic list of what we are all struggling with day by day. I am glad, however, that DEFRA has taken a number of steps to try to recognise how frustrating that bureaucracy can be. We hope that the new countryside stewardship scheme, which he mocked in his inimitable style, will provide a simpler, more robust method of delivering what we all want. We can see this, for example, in one issue that he raised: under-grazing and over-grazing. The countryside stewardship scheme is much more flexible at addressing that exact issue.

The third issue my hon. Friend raised—I am going to face the House rather than Mr Speaker; I apologise, I am learning my role here at the Dispatch Box—relates

to the unintended environmental consequences of what we are doing. He used a very good example: the contrast between what is happening in Exmoor and what is happening in the North Yorkshire moors. He pointed out that differential growing rates mean the stopping of burning on Exmoor leads to much more growth of foliage and, in fact, damage to the environment. He is following a very distinguished tradition. That was pointed out by Charles Darwin in his seminal work, “The Origin of Species”. He stated that removing grazing and allowing grass to grow actually reduces the number of species on a given area of land. In other words, allowing that kind of understocking and not having burning in place may result not just in damage to farm incomes, but environmental damage.

That is why Natural England has, I am very glad to say, introduced flexibility around burning regimes. It has proposed allowing larger burn areas and more frequent burn rotations than would be found on sporting estates in the northern uplands. That will of course be key to farmers who do not want to be looking at a fell side that they will see as returning to wilderness and scrub, but it will also be vital for species such as the heath fritillary. I challenge my hon. Friend, if that is not happening on the ground, to please come back to us so we can look at it again, but Natural England has introduced those changes.

I would like to conclude by summarising some of the essential steps that I believe we now require to ensure that we have sustainable upland farming and sustainable upland communities.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset (Mr Liddell-Grainger) referred to rural isolation. I hoped the Minister would try to address that issue and where we are on income brackets, so that those who feel isolated can be reassured that there is a future for them in the uplands.

Rory Stewart: Rural isolation is a serious issue. Upland areas are, almost by definition, the most sparsely populated areas in Britain. People are trapped by barriers of distance. Traditionally, those are barriers of communication and barriers of roads, but increasingly they are barriers of technology, such as lack of access to superfast broadband. In addition, if one looks at an individual upland farm, one will find that the number of people working on that farm has decreased dramatically in the past 60 years. Farms that might once have employed two or three people no longer do. Increasingly, that means that life in the uplands, if connected to the fact that the number of farms is falling because farms are getting larger, is increasingly lonely. As we know, an auction mart can provide an important way for farmers to meet each other.

That is not to say that we should be portraying upland farmers as victims. They are, as we all know, incredibly resilient and confident individuals who have chosen the life they love deeply and of which we are deeply proud. However, we need to be serious about the fact that isolated lives can be challenging: challenging for education and healthcare for farmers and their children, and challenging in terms of being able to diversify. We talk a great deal about getting people online, but if there is no broadband connection on one’s farm it is pretty difficult to diversify.

[Rory Stewart]

All these issues about isolation are important reasons why keeping incomes up through agri-environmental schemes is necessary. However, finding other kinds of infrastructure investment that we can put in place, whether it is for better roads or better broadband, will also be vital to the long-term health of those communities and the long-term life of the whole area, including those very species we want to protect. The whole idea of the countryside stewardship scheme is predicated, of course, on the existence of those countryside stewards, and as my hon. Friend pointed out, in this case the countryside stewards are the upland farmers themselves.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): I congratulate the Minister on his contribution today; he has always made good contributions from the Back Benches and is now doing a fantastic job at the Dispatch Box. He mentioned the importance of broadband. I was on Hall's Fell Ridge on Blencathra this weekend, looking down over his constituency, and I thought about the similarities between the upland farmers there and some of the upland farmers in my Macclesfield constituency, which is on the other side of the Peak district. Does he agree that it is vital to get these roll-out plans clearer, so that farmers can plan ahead to see whether they will be in the roll-out plan for the 99 percentile, or if they are not in that plan to have options to roll out into community-based solutions, which he knows quite a lot about from his own experience?

Rory Stewart: It is great to take a question from my hon. Friend. He is, of course, not just a fantastic local constituency MP but somebody who knows a great deal about this specific subject and has championed the outdoor industries, the uplands and the connection between the two, so he knows a great deal about diversification.

The point my hon. Friend made, which in grisly jargon terms we could call a point about transparency, is absolutely central. It is very important that rural communities know when they will get broadband and what kind of broadband they can get, so that they can make the relevant plans. There may be areas where broadband delivery may be more difficult, in which case

people need to look at private sector providers or focus on the possibility of satellite or point-to-point wireless connections.

I will conclude my response to my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset. I say a very strong thanks to him for raising an issue that matters so much; in fact, this rather crowded House in the middle of an Adjournment debate is a testament to how much this issue matters to so many of us here.

We need to have a much more open conversation, and we need to recognise that one size does not fit all. That means that we need to learn from all parts of this House and from all hon. Members about what is working and what is not working in their constituencies. We need to be better at being challenged on issues such as burning on Dartmoor.

Natural England should be empowered to be much more flexible. We do not need a 300-mile screwdriver operating from here in Westminster to tell people what to do; such a situation should be resolved between a Natural England official and the farmer on the ground in Dartmoor. We ourselves must assess and reassess relentlessly the regulatory methods that we are putting in place; we have to free farmers to farm.

The contribution of my hon. Friend is vital in the process of championing the uplands. I am really pleased that this debate is one of the earliest Adjournment debates of this Parliament. His contribution is also vital in holding people such as me to task, to ensure that we listen, learn and act.

I will finish by speaking personally and saying that I find almost nothing in our landscape as precious or as moving as the contribution of upland farmers over countless generations. We owe it to our ancestors and our descendents, to our landscape and to our rural communities, to give upland farmers the support they require to do their essential work. I pay tribute to the work done by many, many people in this Chamber over the years in supporting upland farmers, but this evening I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend for securing this very important debate.

Question put and agreed to.

10.29 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 1 June 2015

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Foreign Affairs Council/Foreign Affairs Council (Defence)/General Affairs Council

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond) attended the Foreign Affairs Council, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon) attended the Foreign Affairs Council (Defence), and they both attended a joint session with Foreign and Defence Ministers. I attended the General Affairs Council (GAC). The Foreign Affairs Council and Foreign Affairs Council (Defence) were chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, and the General Affairs Council was chaired by the Latvian presidency.

Foreign Affairs Council and Foreign Affairs Council (Defence)

A provisional report of the meeting and conclusions adopted can be found at:

<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2015/05/18/>

Foreign Affairs Council (Defence) & European Defence Agency (EDA)

The EDA ministerial steering board discussion focused on preparations for the June European Council. The Defence Secretary welcomed the work that the EDA has done in delivering the major programmes agreed to at the December 2013 European Council and encouraged the agency to remain focused on delivering progress on these programmes at the June council. Ministers also endorsed the small medium enterprise (SME) action plan.

Defence Ministers discussed CSDP missions and operations in the Foreign Affairs Council (Defence), where greater political will by member states in force generation and increased EU-NATO co-operation were highlighted as being key to success. The Defence Secretary reaffirmed the UK's support for the counter piracy, operation EU Naval Force Atalanta and highlighted that a combination of naval forces and development of best management practice by industry and private contractors remained important in order to suppress the pirates' business model. The Defence Secretary also emphasised the UK's continued commitment to the maintenance of the Executive mandate for EUFOR Althea. This mandate was an essential international safeguard against a return to violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Joint Meeting of Foreign Affairs Council and Foreign Affairs Council (Defence)

Over lunch, EU Defence and Foreign Ministers exchanged views on the security in the EU's broader neighbourhood with NATO Security General Jens Stoltenberg. Ministers then discussed the preparations

for the European Council in June 2015, which cover the common security and defence policy, and debated ongoing work reviewing changes in the EU's strategic environment, including the preparation of a report by the High Representative to the European Council on 25-26 June. The Foreign Secretary noted that the June European Council should be a stocktake of the work begun in December 2013 and highlighted the importance of the EU's co-operation with NATO.

The Council then took stock of the follow-up to the European Council of 23 April, which focused on migration issues. It approved a crisis management concept for a possible EU military operation and established an EU naval operation to disrupt the business model of human smugglers in the southern central Mediterranean. The Foreign Secretary and Defence Secretary spoke in support of the establishment of the operation, but, noted that prior to its launch, clarity would be required on the handling of migrants rescued, smugglers apprehended, and the necessary legal base for the operation would need to be established. All four phases (surveillance/intelligence; seizure of vessels on the high seas; seizure and potentially destruction in Libyan waters/ashore; and withdrawal) needed to be enactable. A number of Ministers set out their position on resettlement and relocation, including the Foreign Secretary who made it clear that the UK would not accept compulsory resettlement.

Foreign Affairs Council

Middle East peace process (MEPP)

Ministers exchanged views on the situation in the middle east and on prospects for the peace process, following the formation of a new Israeli Government and ahead of a visit of the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to the region. Ms. Mogherini would be accompanied by Fernando Gentilini, the newly appointed EU Special Representative for the MEPP. The Foreign Secretary recognised the widespread frustration on the MEPP and argued that the EU should keep in step with the US and that there would likely be no progress until the Iran nuclear talks ended.

Other Items

Ministers agreed a number of other measures:

The Council adopted conclusions on Burundi;

The Council adopted conclusions on the Common Security and Defence Policy;

The Council adopted the EU position for the twelfth meeting of the EU-Uzbekistan co-operation in Brussels on 18 May; and

The Council adopted the draft agenda for the EU-Gulf co-operation Council Joint Council and ministerial meeting, to be held on 24 May 2015 in Doha.

General Affairs Council

A provisional report of the Council meeting can be found at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/gac/2015/05/19/>.

The General Affairs Council (GAC) on 19 May focused on: follow-up to the April emergency European Council; preparation of the June European Council; and the four presidents' report on economic governance in the euro area.

Follow-up to the April emergency European Council on migration

The Latvian presidency and European Commission updated the GAC on developments since the 23 April emergency European Council discussed migration pressures in the Mediterranean.

I reiterated the points made by the Foreign Secretary at the Foreign Affairs Council and informed members states about UK activities to help prevent further loss of life in the Mediterranean. I emphasised the importance of addressing the causes of illegal immigration and tackling the organised criminals behind it, and the need for the EU to focus on the longer term picture.

Preparation of the June European Council

The GAC began preparations for the 23 and 24 June European Council, which the Prime Minister will attend. The June European Council will focus on security and economic issues including: defence and the European security strategy; relations with Russia and Ukraine; follow-up of the February European Council on terrorism and April European Council on migration; the digital single market; the 2015 European semester; TTIP; and economic governance in the euro area.

Four presidents' report on economic governance in the euro area

The European Commission updated the GAC on preparations of the four presidents' report on the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) to be presented to the June European Council.

[HCWS6]

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): The House may welcome a report on the 2015 nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT) review conference, held at the United Nations in New York between 27 April and 22 May to review progress and agree future actions against the NPT's three pillars: disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The review conference was a substantive event, which advanced discussion on each of the treaty's three pillars but concluded without reaching a consensus outcome.

The UK played an active role both in the preparation for the review conference and at the conference itself. As part of its preparations for the review conference, the UK invited certain non-nuclear weapons states and civil society representatives, for the first time, to the UK-hosted P5 conference of nuclear weapon states in February this year. The UK also submitted a revised national report setting out the action the UK is taking to support the NPT. We encouraged and participated in five rounds of informal consultations between Israel and Arab states on a conference on a middle east zone free from nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

The Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the right hon. Baroness Anelay of St Johns DBE, set out the UK's approach and progress against NPT objectives on the opening day of the conference. The UK delegation participated actively, both in the main conference and at side events, including on our pioneering verification work and nuclear energy. We

engaged constructively in the negotiations throughout, seeking to reach agreement and to make progress on all three pillars of the treaty.

We were disappointed that, despite the progress made in many areas, the conference was not able to find common ground on how to make further progress on the proposed middle east zone free from nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. This issue was the reason that consensus was not reached on the draft outcome document. The UK sought a process which was meaningful and based on arrangements freely arrived at by all states of the region. The proposed text would not have enabled tangible progress to be made and so we were unable to support the draft conclusions. We remain committed to the 1995 resolution on the middle east, the creation of a middle east zone free from nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction, and the steps agreed in 2010 towards that end.

The UK's commitment to the treaty and to fulfilling our NPT obligations, including under article VI on disarmament, remains undiminished. As a responsible nuclear weapon state and an original party to the NPT, the UK remains committed to creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons. We have reduced our nuclear forces by well over half since the cold war peak and dismantled all of our air delivered nuclear weapons. In 2010 the UK committed to reducing the number of operationally available warheads to no more than 120; we have now achieved this which means that our Vanguard submarines now carry 40 warheads. We also remain on course to reduce our total stockpile of nuclear weapons to no more than 180 warheads by the mid 2020s.

The lack of a consensus outcome neither undermines the treaty nor changes states' obligations. Of the eight previous review conferences, three have ended without consensus. Throughout, the treaty has remained vitally important for the UK and for the international community as a whole, playing an unparalleled role in curtailing the nuclear arms race and keeping the world safe. The action plan agreed at the 2010 review conference remains valid as a comprehensive roadmap for all NPT states to follow to take forward action on disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful use of nuclear technology, as do the agreements from 2000 and 1995. The UK will continue to pursue this roadmap, working closely with our partners in the NPT.

[HCWS7]

PRIME MINISTER

Machinery of Government Changes

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): This written statement confirms the following Machinery of Government changes:

Responsibility for the Shareholder Executive will transfer from the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. A new Government-owned company, UK Government Investments (UKGI), wholly owned by HM Treasury, will be formed to oversee the activities of both the

Shareholder Executive and UK Financial Investments. This change will take place on the establishment of UKGI.

Responsibility for the Digital Economy Unit will transfer from being jointly held between the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to being the responsibility solely of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, with policy responsibility transferring accordingly. The Unit will retain strong

links with the Department for Business Innovation and Skills through the Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy, which is a joint ministerial post. This change will be effective immediately.

Responsibility for cities policy will transfer from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. This change will be effective from 1 July.

[HCWS8]

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

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