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## Foreign Affairs Committee

### Oral evidence: Work of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, HC 253

Tuesday 6 October 2020

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Members present: Tom Tugendhat (Chair); Chris Bryant; Neil Coyle; Alicia Kearns; Stewart Malcolm McDonald; Andrew Rosindell; Bob Seely; Henry Smith; Royston Smith; Graham Stringer; Claudia Webbe.

Questions 121 - 250

Witness

I: Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs.



## Examination of witness

Witness: Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP.

**Chair:** Welcome to this afternoon's session of the Foreign Affairs Committee. We have with us the Foreign Secretary. I won't ask him to introduce himself; I think we all know Dominic Raab, as he has been our Foreign Secretary for a while. Instead, we will go straight into a quickfire round.

Q121 **Royston Smith:** Welcome, Foreign Secretary; it is good to see you again. In March, we talked about Covid, and this is going to be no exception. What steps are the Government taking to support the WHO with its investigations into the cause of the outbreak?

**Dominic Raab:** Thanks, Royston; good to see you again. Obviously, the WHO has a pretty unique mandate with country Governments to co-ordinate global health initiatives. The UK Government's view is that there are all sorts of lessons to be learnt from Covid. WHO is not a perfect institution; few international organisations are. If you did not have it, you would invent something like it. We want to work with it.

As you know, Royston, the UK is historically the third biggest donor to the WHO behind the US and the Gates Foundation. We welcome the independent panel for preparedness and response review of how the global pandemic response has worked and the WHO's role, and we will obviously look at it very carefully. We were supportive of setting it up as a good objective vehicle for a positive lessons-learning exercise that does not get too enmeshed in some of the politics around it.

Q122 **Royston Smith:** From the lessons-learnt point of view, which the WHO will be instrumental in afterwards—I assume with a subsequent inquiry and several subsequent inquiries all over the world—early on in the pandemic we did not have the testing capability, but now we have. Germany's testing capability was there at the beginning, although now it is smaller than ours, yet its infection rate is lower, its death rate is lower and its seriously ill rate is lower. What lessons are we learning now from other countries and putting in place to try to handle the pandemic? How much of that will be hard-wired in afterwards for any future pandemic or emergency?

**Dominic Raab:** I can speak to some of that. One of the things we have done is to look at Germany. It has a bigger manufacturing base for some of the things that it has been able to do. We have looked at Asia, which was more battle ready, partly as a result of going through SARS, swine flu and some of the other pandemics it has experienced, as a result of which it had a bit more operational experience. We have obviously learnt a lot through our own domestic experience.

There is also a bunch of things that we have got right. Obviously, the PM and the Health Secretary have talked about NHS capacity and making sure we have the V beds in place. If you look at what comes across my



in-tray, it is the combination of working towards a vaccine with our researchers, but also linking it to our international leadership. We smashed the Gavi vaccine summit target by raising \$8.8 billion. That is something the Prime Minister led. I think there is a real UK national interest in the search for equitable global distribution of the vaccine because, while our priority No. 1 will always be to protect the British population and the British people, we are all at risk of the threat of a second global wave.

The collaboration and the multilateral learning have been positive. There is a whole suite of things. Obviously, the Health Secretary will be better placed than me to focus on some of the domestic stuff, but in terms of the international space, notwithstanding all the challenges, I think the UK has demonstrated a very positive leadership role on repatriations, on shoring up the most vulnerable countries and on the search for a global vaccine.

**Q123 Chair:** How have you instructed embassies and high commissions around the world to do lessons-learnt exercises from the countries they are in to see which ones have done well?

**Dominic Raab:** We have not instituted a formal process, but one of the standing instructions has been to feed back best practice. Obviously, I speak personally to Ministers all over the world. I have just got back from Vietnam and South Korea.

On top of that, there are some specific lessons learnt from the bigger embassies like Beijing, which had a role in everything from the politics of the outbreak to the repatriation effort from a standing start and PPE. There is a big piece of work on lessons learnt on the diversification of our supply chains for reliance on PPE and a whole range of other things. I have been working with DIT, Antonia Romeo and the team from that Department on doing a whole scanning exercise across everything from components in nuclear power to widgets in the manufacturing process to see how robust and resilient our supply chains are. That is ongoing.

**Q124 Chair:** There are some countries that have done surprisingly well. You have listed some who, in a way, we expected to do well, such as Singapore and South Korea. They were SARS trained, if you like, and had very effective administrations. One of the countries that has done surprisingly well—many would not have expected it to—is Pakistan. Have you asked the high commission in Islamabad, for example, to report on that?

**Dominic Raab:** We get reporting on it all the time. They are proactive in doing so. I am slightly reticent about some of the comparisons—I am not singling out Pakistan—based on quality of data. The second thing is that you have to be quite careful about demographics. The demographics of the UK population are different and as a result the impact is different.



What the Government do is crucially important, but it is not the only thing. It is clear that we have an ageing population and a lot of people living with comorbidity conditions. That is part of it. The short answer is that we get constant feedback from all the embassies. If you think there is something particular that we should look at in Pakistan, we will be very happy to do it, but it is an iterative process.

**Q125 Alicia Kearns:** Following up Royston's questions on lessons learnt, the Committee is doing an inquiry into the resilience of multilaterals, of which the WHO is one. What are your greatest concerns regarding our ability to counter hostile efforts by states to undermine multilaterals such as the World Health Organisation?

**Dominic Raab:** I didn't quite catch all of that. I am sorry, but the Division bell was ringing, or whatever it was.

**Alicia Kearns:** It is normally my internet, so that is a bit of a relief.

This Committee is doing an inquiry into the resilience of multilaterals and how we defend them from those who seek to undermine them. Do you have any particular concerns about specific multilaterals in terms of the efforts to undermine them, such as the World Health Organisation? Do you think we are doing enough to reinforce and build their resilience?

**Dominic Raab:** We can always do more. If you had asked me at the beginning of the crisis when we had discussions internally whether there were actors, state and otherwise, who would try to take advantage of the crisis in cyber or in other areas, I think there would have been the usual suspects—Iran and to some degree Russia. I think you could make an argument that the timing of what China has been doing on Hong Kong would have been influenced by that. In a way, it is natural that amidst the uncertainty that Covid has wrought and the grabbing of everyone's attention and focus it is very easy for the world to take its eye off the ball.

Your question is probably more focused on the risk that international organisations become a target. We have a series of work where we cooperate not just with our international bilateral partners but with international organisations. We are obviously quite careful how we discuss that, but of course it is really important.

A general strategic point is that we need our multilateral organisations to be in good health and in good spirits, and we need to support them. None of them are perfect. I have argued in different contexts, as Chris knows, against supranationalism, but that is not the same as multilateralism. I think all the state and non-state actors that we worry about filling the vacuum will do so if we do not conduct ourselves and lead internationally, whether it is through the WHO, the WTO or the wider suite of international organisations. The UK is firmly committed to that.

**Q126 Alicia Kearns:** In 2020 and 2021, there are going to be 17 elections in UN specialised agencies or UN funds. Are we doing enough as the UK to



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make sure that our person wins those elections, and that those backed by Cuba, Iran, China and Russia—the evidence that we have been given—are not winning the heads of those important institutions?

**Dominic Raab:** We have two obvious big candidacies in play: the ICC and the WTO. Those are the top priority ones, but there is also a priority to make sure that even when we are not running a candidate we get the best person for the job, based on their expertise and experience, but also with the desire to move things forward politically in a positive way.

I will give you an example. In the election for the head of the World Intellectual Property Organisation, there is serious concern, if we are honest, and we should be in our domestic debate about this, around the Chinese candidate winning. We supported the Singaporean candidate. I think there was an international division of labour to make the case. It is quite an important message for all our allies that we need to avoid a vacuum in international organisations, otherwise some of those you describe, Alicia, will fill it. That is bad news for our national interest and bad news for the norms of international law and multilateralism that we all want to reinforce in a positive way.

Q127 **Chris Bryant:** Going back one step, Foreign Secretary, you were suggesting that China used coronavirus as an opportunity to take the fight to Hong Kong.

**Dominic Raab:** My point was generally that there was some discussion about whether countries that were considering taking action that we would regard as contrary to either our interests or international norms might use Covid. Obviously, the Hong Kong situation was going on well before Covid, but it has also been continuing. I think that those considerations, whether it is China, Tehran or Moscow, will feature. We are pretty confident about that. It is quite important for the international community, and obviously the UK, to keep its eye on the ball.

Q128 **Chris Bryant:** The UK has adopted a different position on the WHO from the United States of America. Do you buy Mike Pompeo's argument that the head of the WHO was bought by China?

**Dominic Raab:** Mike is a great colleague, and we liaise very closely. I was in Washington recently seeing him. There are some very real concerns around the outbreak in Wuhan and what happened, but I have not seen anything that would back up the particular assertion that you cited.

Q129 **Chris Bryant:** Did you have that conversation with Mike Pompeo?

**Dominic Raab:** We engage on the whole suite of issues all the time.

Q130 **Chris Bryant:** Did you have that conversation with Mike Pompeo?

**Dominic Raab:** As I said, we engage on the whole suite of issues all the time, not just at Secretary of State level but at an official level.



Q131 **Chris Bryant:** So you did have that conversation.

**Dominic Raab:** How many times do you want me to say it? I am happy to keep doing it; we have two and a half hours.

Q132 **Chris Bryant:** On Lukashenko, obviously I am delighted with what the UK has done. The British set list is slightly different from the EU list. It is good that the EU have got there now, but is it your understanding that Lukashenko has any UK holdings?

**Dominic Raab:** I would not talk about that in any event because it would be operationally relevant to the sanctions, so we do not do that. What I can tell you is that in the past there have been members of the Belarussian regime who have come to the UK or there have been financial transfers that involved the UK.

Q133 **Chris Bryant:** Why is our list different from the EU one? Were we trying to get the EU to do the same, or not?

**Dominic Raab:** There has been a huge amount of co-ordination and co-operation with the EU. We were obviously liaising with them on their sanctions list. We encouraged them to be as ambitious as possible. I am sure you will have seen, Chris, that we included Lukashenko himself, his son, his national security adviser and his chief of staff. We will support the other listings. We think it is important to make sure that they were as ambitious in terms of seniority as possible.

To take a half step back, if I may, to the sanctions as part of the broader strategy, first of all we triggered—it was the UK driving the triggering—the Moscow mechanism through the OSCE on 17 September. That enables us to have an independent investigation into the human rights abuses and the vote rigging. We also thought that this was the right moment to proceed on sanctions. We have doubled our financial support to human rights groups, media, and so on.

As you will have seen, we have suspended defence co-operation with Belarus. At the same time, there are lots of discussions about whether dialogue or even mediation can be precipitated, encouraged or promoted. We are all in favour of that. I do not think we are going to focus Lukashenko's mind or President Putin's mind unless there is serious and focused pressure. Just stepping back, that is why, in answer to your question, we wanted to be as ambitious on the sanctions as possible, not because we see it as a substitute for dialogue but because we think it is the only thing that gives a viable and realistic prospect for yielding any benefits.

Q134 **Chris Bryant:** Why do you think Cyprus was so difficult?

**Dominic Raab:** There are all sorts of wider European considerations. They can speak for themselves. We know some of the issues that they have been having.

Q135 **Chris Bryant:** Dodgy Russian money in Cyprus banks?



**Dominic Raab:** You would not expect me to start commenting on assertions like that. The point is that we have a good bilateral relationship with Cyprus. We have made the point that on Europe's doorstep we cannot put up with this. We would urge our friends in Cyprus to come round and to do the right thing, which they did.

Q136 **Chris Bryant:** Will you get the US to join? Are you trying to get the US to join in that set of sanctions?

**Dominic Raab:** Yes. We have done it in tandem with the Canadians. I expect the US to follow suit. I think there was a feeling, when I was in Washington recently, on both sides of the political arc—as much in Congress as anywhere else—that the Europeans will put out the communiqué, possibly even do some censure, but will pick fights on their doorstep that the US has to ride in to resolve. I think they want to see some leadership from Europe. We tried to provide that with our Canadian friends and with the EU, but I think they are concerned about it as well.

Q137 **Chris Bryant:** The Russian ambassador said to the all-party Russia group on Monday afternoon that Lukashenko enjoys 60% support in Belarus, which would suggest that not even he believes that there are fair and free elections in Belarus. He made the point though that it can only be judged whether they are fair and free if there are OSCE and Council of Europe monitors. At the moment, the British Parliament will not allow any British monitors to go out. Do you think that is a shame?

**Dominic Raab:** Parliament will make its own decisions. I have learnt long and hard not to second-guess what the House's business is. All I would say is that we triggered the OSCE Moscow mechanism so that there can be an OSCE review. I think we are trying to do the right thing in terms of the pressure that sanctions bring, the transparency that the investigation will bring and leaving the door ajar for political dialogue and encouraging it, but being clear-sighted about what it would do to get Lukashenko to the table. We are very clear on our position both in Belarus and in Moscow about what needs to happen. I noticed the comments from Svetlana Tikhanovskaya yesterday about the UK, saying that we were showing ourselves as an example to the whole world and standing up for democracy in Belarus. I think we should continue to do so.

Q138 **Chris Bryant:** Wouldn't it be a good idea for a few parliamentarians to be able to help in that cause?

**Dominic Raab:** Subject to all of the usual considerations, including Covid.

Q139 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Foreign Secretary, it is good to see you. To pick up on that before I go to my main question, who do the UK Government recognise as the President of Belarus?

**Dominic Raab:** The long-standing practice has not been to recognise Governments. We recognise states. That is long-standing FCDO practice.



What we have made clear is that we do not think Lukashenko is legitimate and we think it was a fraudulent and illegitimate election that needs to be rectified, whether through fresh elections, transition or arrangements that are made with the opposition and other democrats in Belarus.

Q140 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** But who is the President of Belarus?

**Dominic Raab:** As I said, we have a long-standing track record, position and practice of not recognising Governments. We do not recognise Lukashenko as the legitimate Head of Government. Equally, we do not recognise Governments per se. We tend to limit our practice to recognising states.

Q141 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Thank you. I will move us on slightly to the ISC report on Russia, which came out just before the summer recess. Could you talk us through the main lessons for your Department that have come from the report and what you are doing to implement them?

**Dominic Raab:** It is good that the report was issued. From recollection, the key steer from the ISC—correct me if I am wrong—was that it thought there should be clear accountability on how we deal with Russia; that we should not underestimate the threat posed by Russia; and that there is a serious issue with illicit Russian finance, including through the UK.

In terms of the lessons learnt, we are actioning that. We have clear lines of accountability through the Russia and Ukraine national strategy implementation group. The Salisbury response showed how robust and active we can be, not just at home but internationally in standing up firmly to Russia. We have the unexplained wealth orders dealing with Russian finance. We have the counter hostile state activity Bill that will address some of the gaps in the Official Secrets Act which, from memory, was also raised in the report.

As I have already told the Committee, we have done the Magnitsky sanctions in relation to the case of Magnitsky, which itself was a tax fraud. One of the things, as I have told the House, is that we are looking at corruption more generally across the piece, but it would have an application in relation to this. We are developing proposals for consideration on extending the Magnitsky sanctions to cover corruption and similar financial impropriety.

Q142 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** One of the other things that the report mentioned was that the Government had not sought to assess whether or not there was any Russian interference in the 2016 EU referendum. The report went on to say that an assessment should take place by the intelligence community in the UK. Will the Government instruct the intelligence community to do that?

**Dominic Raab:** I am not saying too much more than we said in our response to the Select Committee recommendation on that. Of course,



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we are constantly looking to learn from all the various different areas of practice, whether it is Russia, Iran or any other state actor. I do not think it is a question of instructing the intelligence services; they are constantly reflecting on our vulnerabilities and the risk assessments and threats that we have.

**Q143 Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Moving on slightly, but staying with the report, it said that it was widely recognised that Russian intelligence and business in the UK are completely intertwined. What threat do you think that poses to political parties in the United Kingdom?

**Dominic Raab:** I would need to come back to give you a more detailed response, and I am happy to do that. We are alive to the mix you describe. There have long been concerns around organised crime and its link to the Kremlin. Of course, the Magnitsky case was a very good example of that. We are constantly alert to it. I think the financial tools for the Treasury in recent legislation we brought in have upped our game, but we can always look at further measures to sharpen our cutting edge.

**Q144 Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** With the recent poisoning of the opposition leader in Russia, Mr Navalny, can we expect British sanctions on the back of that?

**Dominic Raab:** The first thing is that we stand steadfast with Germany, which has given care to Alexei Navalny. We have been liaising very closely with them, and indeed with our partners in the OPCW. We have called for Russia to account for itself. It seems very clear—it is certainly the German conclusion and we agree with it—that Novichok was used against Navalny by Russian actors.

We have not yet attributed to the FSB or the Russian state, but there is an incredibly strong case for Moscow to answer. I have not yet heard a plausible alternative explanation. As we bottom this out in the OPCW, there will come a moment when we have to consider what further action we take because, of course, it is contrary to international law by any actor to use chemical weapons on your own soil or anyone else's.

**Q145 Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Can we assume that, if the OPCW concludes that the Russian state is responsible, the UK Government will follow with, hopefully co-ordinated, sanctions with other partners?

**Dominic Raab:** We will certainly want to look very carefully at the OPCW conclusions.

**Q146 Chair:** Are you aware of the accusation of a double poisoning, as in a first poisoning of Novichok and a second attempt at poisoning in Moscow?

**Dominic Raab:** I am not going to comment on some of those reports, but obviously we seek to verify the facts as clearly and as positively as we can. I do not know the answer. I do not have a verified, confirmed view on it.

**Q147 Alicia Kearns:** Overseas territories have been very grateful for the



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support the FCDO has provided during the Covid crisis. Many of them, such as Turks and Caicos, have raised that with me, so thank you on their behalf.

Ahead of hurricane season, are we confident that we are in a good place to be able to support our overseas territories and make sure that they are as resilient as possible to major natural disasters?

**Dominic Raab:** We have seen 25 named storms this year, of which nine were hurricanes, two of them major hurricanes. I think the prediction is that we will see a record number of storms this season. We are a couple shy of the annual record for the region.

We have already invested £2.5 million since the Caribbean hurricanes in 2017 to get the OTs better prepared. That ranges from things like communication systems, surveillance drones, back-up generators and all the panoply of resilience that you would expect. This year, we deployed HMS Medway and RFA Argus with four helicopters to the Caribbean. There is a further team based in the Turks and Caicos Islands.

We face a record number of storms. It is difficult to make a confident prediction because you do not know quite what the damage will be, but we have been thinking about it. We have prepared for it in all the ways I have described, and I think we are braced for what will be a difficult season.

Q148 **Chris Bryant:** Is Ascension Island really being considered as a possible place for asylum seekers?

**Dominic Raab:** The Home Secretary obviously leads on that. Her commitment, which I support unflinchingly, is to make sure that we have a system that achieves dual objectives. One is to continue our tradition of being a haven for those fleeing persecution. The second is that it is fair and not ripe for abuse. She is leading the reform agenda on that. As you would expect us to, we have looked at all the different possibilities for strengthening the system, whether it is to rule things in or out. The Home Secretary will set out our proposals in due course.

Q149 **Chris Bryant:** But you have responsibility for overseas territories. Have you considered Ascension Island?

**Dominic Raab:** We have looked at a whole range of opportunities. We have looked at whether the overseas territories might be involved. We have looked at international partners that might be involved. It is the job of the Foreign Office and the Home Office, and their Secretaries of State, to look at and scope all options, even if it is just to rule them out.

Q150 **Chris Bryant:** So have you scoped Ascension Island to rule it out?

**Dominic Raab:** We have scoped all options including OTs, including Ascension. We are not going to announce our policy here. I will let the Home Secretary do it, but I think it is right that we do that.



Q151 **Chris Bryant:** Have you consulted Ascension Island?

**Dominic Raab:** We talk to all of our OTs throughout.

Q152 **Chris Bryant:** About this specific policy?

**Dominic Raab:** It depends whether we are in scoping or policy development mode. Of course, you would not be able to do something like that in Ascension or some of the other OTs unless you had their buy-in. Of course, you need to consult. What you are talking about—the leaked document—was at the very initial preliminary scoping exercise. I appreciate where you are going with it, Chris, but it is not like it is the Government's policy. It is something that we have looked at, again at an earlier scoping period phase.

Q153 **Henry Smith:** Thank you for joining us, Foreign Secretary. Again on the overseas territories and migrants, but slightly different from the main subject, the Turks and Caicos Islands have a particular issue with Haitian migrants. What sort of assistance is the FCDO able to offer that overseas territory?

**Dominic Raab:** I would need to check the specific support that we are providing to TCI. I am not sure, off the top of my head. Of course, they have primary responsibility but, where we need to, we will always look at reasonable requests for support. I am very happy to write to the Committee with any further detail, if that is helpful.

Q154 **Graham Stringer:** The last time you were here, Foreign Secretary, we discussed the prospect of COP26 and the anomalous position of China being treated as a developing country. Given the hardening of our position on China, do you still think it is reasonable to bend over backwards and allow China to join COP26 as a developing country, with very little commitment to reducing carbon?

**Dominic Raab:** If you look at what they said most recently on their NDC, there is starting to be some forward progress. I think it is important that, when we are discussing China, we look at it in a balanced and clear-sighted way. There are opportunities and risks.

One of the opportunities is to work with China on climate change. We will not shift the dial unless China shifts the dial. It is the biggest net emitter, but it is also the biggest investor in renewable technologies. I can assure you that, along with human rights, Hong Kong and all the other things, it is always at the forefront of things I discuss with my opposite number, Wang Yi.

On the question of how it should be classified, I appreciate that there are political considerations and they mesh with the technical considerations that define this, but the bottom line is that I want China in the room on the UN climate change talks that we host. First of all, they make a big difference in their own right. Secondly, if we can get their buy-in, it helps



to shift the dial with all the other emitters, and indeed all the other developed countries that we also need to take action.

What we are trying to do is create a virtuous circle and create some momentum around COP26 next year. It is a big year for the UK internationally. We are not just hosting that; we have our G7 presidency. Most Foreign Secretaries would say that you want to be able to talk and engage with China because you want to be able to get them to make progress. On their NDC, we are starting to see it; we need them to go further.

**Q155 Graham Stringer:** They announced recently that they would be zero carbon in 40 years' time, in 2060. You just referred to that. Do you think that is a credible objective when they have 121 gigawatts of coal plant in development at the moment, which is more than half the world's capacity? I understand what you say; it is better to have people inside the tent than outside the tent, to use a crude analogy, but if they have no credibility in their commitment, yet the objective for reducing carbon depends on them, what is the point?

**Dominic Raab:** First of all, what you want to do is to get as many countries as possible, particularly the biggest players, committed to ambitious targets. Then you want to work with them, cajole them, coax them and support them to hit them. Of course, they can be held to account on their targets.

**Q156 Graham Stringer:** But they cannot be held to account, can they, Foreign Secretary? The only legal abiding commitment from the Paris conference was to report what you were doing, not to abide by the targets.

**Dominic Raab:** I am not quite as negative as you are about it, Graham. China is a massive investor in renewables. They are the biggest. They have a sense of what sustainable economic growth looks like, just from raw self-interest and their vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. You make a perfectly reasonable critique of China's approach, but I would argue that the best thing to do is try to work with them on their NDC, which we are starting to do, and then on the means to achieve it, and to hold them to account over it. China wants to be taken seriously as a leading member of the international community. Getting them on the hook for things is one way of trying to encourage that in a positive way. If you have a better alternative—if we should just ignore China—you need to explain how that is going to take us any further forward. It is not clear to me that there is a better strategy than the one I am putting forward to you.

**Q157 Graham Stringer:** That is a reasonable point. More than 30 years ago, I led a delegation to Wuhan at the instigation of the Conservative Government at the time. The basis of that was to try to increase trade and academic contacts and draw China into the community, because trade would lead to more respect for human rights and more freedom as a trade-off. That has failed, hasn't it? What you are saying is that we



need them in the room to discuss it, but that has failed on trade as it is failing on carbon. With respect, the amount of renewables they have is irrelevant. The actual quantum of coal being used is what is going to contribute to the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

**Dominic Raab:** I do not think the amount of renewables, or their investment or commitment to it, is irrelevant, precisely because it makes the case stronger for weaning them off coal. I have been out there. The issue with coal is not just in China. There are issues with coal in South Korea, in Japan and in Australia.

Q158 **Graham Stringer:** And India.

**Dominic Raab:** And India. There are many countries with many different issues. What we have to try to do is make them see the win-win; that there are green jobs, there is sustainable economic growth and we can build back, particularly out of the Covid crisis, stronger and greener.

It is perfectly fair; I am the Minister, and you are here as a scrutineering parliamentarian, but what is the positive alternative that you would replace the strategy with? Is it that we do not talk to them? What is the alternative? I think you are underestimating the sensitivity of China to their own interest to proceed down the track, albeit more cautiously, carefully and self-interestedly than we would want, and their sensitivity to their reputation for being a responsible member of the international community.

I do not want to overstate it. We have seen in Hong Kong, with Jiang Duan, on human rights that it is not going to be a silver bullet on a whole range of issues, but I do not think it is entirely irrelevant, which leads me to suggest that we should keep pushing. One of the things we are trying to do with COP26 is to encourage the EU with their NDC; if we get movement across all the big players, we will be in a much better position to go back to China. Likewise, if China moves, we will be in a better position to build the virtuous circle by going back to those other countries. I think that is the smart way to approach it. We have a good year until COP26. I have not heard a better alternative.

**Chair:** Thank you very much. There are two last bits of quickfire. Henry wants to ask about freedom of religion and belief.

Q159 **Henry Smith:** Foreign Secretary, we have the presidency of the UN Security Council next February. What opportunity is the FCDO planning to promote religious freedom? Globally, some 83% of people live in areas of the world where religious freedom is curtailed. As you will be aware, one of the recommendations in the report by the Bishop of Truro is that British diplomats around the world should be better trained in dealing with the matter. I would be interested to know what plans the Department has in that respect.

**Dominic Raab:** There is a three-pillared approach to the freedom agenda. There is our media freedom campaign, on which we partnered



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with Canada, but it has a much bigger membership now. It is basically supporting journalists who come under fire around the world. There is our freedom of religious belief agenda, and I will say a little bit more about that. Then there are the Magnitsky sanctions on those who persecute people who are enjoying those freedoms.

We plan to co-host, subject to Covid of course, an international conference on FoRB next year. Alongside our G7 presidency priorities, which will include promoting open societies, of which freedom of speech and freedom of religion and belief is a part, that is going to be an important aspect. It is very squarely on the agenda. I pay tribute to Rehman Chishti's work on all of this as well.

Q160 **Chair:** You will be aware of what is going on in Azerbaijan and Armenia at the moment. Have you made an assessment of the implications for NATO and overflights towards the east of the so far rather silent response from many NATO countries?

**Dominic Raab:** On the silence of it all, I have released another statement today, alongside the one on 28 September with my Canadian opposite number. We are urging de-escalation and a return to the OSCE Minsk co-chair process.

In terms of the impact on NATO, there are two things. First, it shows that we cannot take our eye off the ball of our immediate European neighbourhood. That is incredibly important. No one more than me is talking about the Indo-Pacific tilt and all the other things going on. The European neighbourhood and the Caucasus matter, and we need to keep our eye on that ball.

It also reminds us, given the tension between Russia and Turkey, of the wider external players and the tussle going on for geopolitical positioning. As frustrating as some of the conduct by our Turkish ally is, we need to be eyes wide open to the risk of Turkey falling into the embrace of Russia, so there are multiple strategic implications. At the same time, ultimately the United Kingdom stands up for democracy, human rights and the rule of law. We need to call out serious breaches of international norms and try to resolve conflicts like this very openly. There is a mixture of values and strategic considerations in play.

**Chair:** We will move on to the sections, the first of which is on the integrated review.

Q161 **Chris Bryant:** Over the last year, there has been a reorganisation in government and the Department has grown another arm, body, limb, head—

**Chair:** A new heart, I think.

**Chris Bryant:** Whatever. It has changed. Since those plans were first put together, considering that there have been major international developments round the world, have any of your priorities changed?



**Dominic Raab:** To be clear, are you talking about the IR or the merger?

**Chris Bryant:** The merger.

**Dominic Raab:** I thought we were on to the—

**Chris Bryant:** We've moved. We were just trying to throw you, and it worked.

**Dominic Raab:** The whole point of the new FCDO is to be agile to the changing agenda.

The thing we learnt during Covid is that we need to become more integrated. In the House, I have given illustrations of why that was so. It also showed how we could go further by merging. I think we did it effectively on 2 September. We have a new team in place. The way I think it will add value—the IR will feed that and the merger will feed the IR—is that it will bring together all aspects of foreign policy. Let me give you a couple of recent examples.

Covid has increased the risk of famine in many conflict zones, from Yemen to Sudan. One of the things we did in the first week of the merger was to announce £190 million more to tackle that combined threat, but you have to galvanise the money you put in with diplomatic leadership, and I appointed Nick Dyer as our special envoy for famine prevention. I could give other examples: Yemen, and the approach we take to the Occupied Palestinian Territories, which I visited recently. An interesting statistic I looked at before coming here is that 45% of our aid budget—nearly £7 billion—is spent in fragile or conflict states. My point is that we will have more impact and bang for taxpayers' buck if we join together our ODA and our strategic foreign policy priorities.

Q162 **Chris Bryant:** In your speeches when all of this was happening, you spoke a lot about values and about how everything we did in that whole sphere, across the whole piece, needed to be based on values, but there does not seem to be so much of that values talk around now; it seems to be rather more mercantilist.

**Dominic Raab:** Do you have any evidence for that assertion, because I do not accept it? I am happy to answer the question.

Q163 **Chris Bryant:** Historically, one of the values of the Foreign Office and the UK Government has always been the rule of law. The Government for the first time ever have published their own legal advice on their own law, saying they believe that the law they are publishing does not abide by international law. That seems a bit of a surrender of a key British value.

**Dominic Raab:** I do not agree with that. I think it is a precautionary defensive reaction to what the EU has been doing. While of course there is the Brexit drama going on, and we are at the 11th hour in the FTA negotiations, when I lead the UK, and am not talking about Brexit with my European interlocutors, no one thinks the UK is anything other than a stalwart, reliable defender of the international rule of law.



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I read out to you the comment from the Belarusian opposition leader, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya. When I was in Vietnam it was interesting, given the socialist complexion of that country, that we talked a lot together about upholding UNCLOS in the South China sea, not just the strategic interests you can imagine Vietnam has there but the value we attach as a maritime power to the rules-based international system. In relation to Hong Kong, no one has put back to me, "You can't talk about that because of the IM Bill." Don't get me wrong; I understand why you raise the issue, Chris, but I would say that from Korea, to Vietnam—

Q164 **Chris Bryant:** That is not the evidence the Committee has had. We have had people say that it undermines our international reputation.

**Dominic Raab:** That is not my experience from talking to Governments, businesses or civil societies in countries around the world. That is not the reaction. If the argument is that that will be a riposte to the UK whenever it raises human rights or international law, I do not have one example of it to show you.

Q165 **Chris Bryant:** We have several that we can show you.

**Dominic Raab:** But not that have been raised with me.

Q166 **Chris Bryant:** Can I ask about a slightly different element? Now you have the two parts of the equation together, do you think international trade should be in there as well?

**Dominic Raab:** You are always tempting me to go there. We have been clear that we want trade commissioners to be accountable to a head of post, which I think is important. DIT is doing incredible work; Liz Truss has done a great job on the FTA with Japan. We already have one with Korea. One of the things I was talking about with Prime Minister Kyun was how to take forward an even more ambitious one in future. We are close to one with Vietnam. We are ambitious to join CPTPP.

I think that right now we are in a good place; we are more integrated. I am working with Antonia Romeo on Project Defend, which is looking at all our supply chain vulnerabilities. It is important that we become more integrated, but that is not just about DIT; it is about what the MOD is doing and the structures for the NSC. That is something the integrated review is looking at very carefully.

Q167 **Chris Bryant:** I may be out of date. Is Liam Fox going to win his battle for the WTO?

**Dominic Raab:** He is doing a brilliant job and he is a fantastic candidate. He would not just do the job well technically, given his trade experience, but as a political heavyweight, who has been in Cabinet in different roles, he would be good at resolving some of the political tensions that we know have afflicted the WTO.

Q168 **Chris Bryant:** I cannot remember. Did he vote for the Bill that breaks international law? I do not think he did because it was thought that might



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undermine his campaign.

**Dominic Raab:** He has been travelling a lot on the campaign, but you need to ask Liam about his voting record.

**Chair:** Having spoken to many people about Liam's candidature, I can honestly say that he is receiving quite a lot more support than many people expected.

Q169 **Alicia Kearns:** I have a question about the merger and the creation of the FCDO. There were a lot of calls from the aid community for a specific Minister for aid. I am asking for specific reassurances that that will not happen, because it is really important that, as we merge, every Minister, whether for Africa, the Commonwealth or anywhere else, focuses equally on aid and on all our diplomatic work. What are your plans in that respect?

**Dominic Raab:** By the way, over the summer as we bedded down the merger in the lead-up to 2 September, we did a whole lot of work with NGOs. We had roundtables, including with Bond, the international development network, which represents 400-plus bodies, such as CARE, Christian Aid, the ONE campaign, Amnesty and others. I have spoken to Bill Gates about it as well. The NGO community really matters to us.

We were very clear about this at the outset. We looked at the option of a single aid Minister, whether a Minister of State or otherwise, but the argument you make was the most persuasive. If we are serious about integration, whatever the geographic area, whether it is the Asia Minister, the Africa Minister or the Minister for Latin America, we want the development policy and aid budget to be aligned and integrated with all the other diplomatic bilateral and multilateral issues that we are considering. Therefore, we did not go down that route. I think you could have argued it both ways, but, taking it in the round, the argument you made was the most persuasive to me.

**Chair:** Claudia wants to ask something about DIT, which is not in the Foreign Secretary's remit.

Q170 **Claudia Webbe:** It is only because the Foreign Secretary just mentioned Yemen and trade. I want to bring the two together.

The Foreign Secretary will be aware that his Department provides advice to the Department for International Trade on whether to approve applications for arms export licences on the basis of what we call criteria 2 of the consolidated criteria, which ensures that British weapons are not at risk of being used against civilians. On Yemen, he will know that last year the Court of Appeal found that ministerial approvals of arms exports had been made illegally because the rules on civilian protections were simply disregarded throughout 2016-19, during which time tens of thousands of bombs were dropped on schools, hospitals and water infrastructure in Yemen. Could the Foreign Secretary explain to the Committee why the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which I guess for



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most of that period was run by the Prime Minister, did not factor in the threat to civilians in Yemen of British exports to Saudi Arabia?

**Dominic Raab:** That was not what the Court decided. It took issue with the way we had assessed the threat and asked both DIT and the FCDO to look at it again. DIT conducted that process with FCDO buy-in, and we have taken on board the Court's ruling.

The point I was making was not about trade in Yemen, but that Yemen is a good example of where there is a conflict we are trying to resolve. We are working with Martin Griffiths, UN special envoy, and Saudi. We are trying to put pressure on the Houthis. It is a good example where a very diplomatic conflict resolution initiative dovetails with the aid we provide, which is why at the 2020 pledging conference we pledged £160 million this year for Yemen. That was the point I was making.

We have addressed meticulously the concerns that the court found in relation to export licensing. I stand firmly by the fact that we have one of the most robust and rigorous export licence regimes in the world, and if and when any question is raised around it, we look at it incredibly carefully.

Q171 **Claudia Webbe:** What the UN is saying is clearly a real contradiction to the Government; it says there is an ongoing pattern of civilians being attacked by an air force armed with British bombs and planes. Could you respond to those UN charges?

**Dominic Raab:** I have to be honest with you. I think what you are saying is a caricature of what the UN is saying and what the Court judgment said, but I can assure you that we take all the questions raised by the Court about the methodology of our approach very seriously, and indeed have corrected the process as it applies to Saudi Arabia. We looked at that. I think I am right in saying that the Trade Secretary has publicly explained how we have gone about that.

Q172 **Neil Coyle:** Understandably, the transfer of personnel from the different Departments has been delayed due to Covid, and there are hundreds of staff in limbo. Can the Foreign Secretary tell us when the process of transfer will end and people will be on permanent contracts and not fixed-term contracts?

**Dominic Raab:** Are you saying that in relation to DFID staff coming over to the new FCDO?

Q173 **Neil Coyle:** DFID and FCO. I understand there are hundreds in that position.

**Dominic Raab:** In the context of the overall headcount of the FCDO, it is a reasonably small proportion, but we are working through all the HR issues to make sure not just that we give as much stability and certainty as possible to all of our brilliant employees here and abroad, including locally engaged staff, but that we incentivise them in the right way. If



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you write to me with the details you have, I will be very happy to respond and give you some reassurance on that.

Q174 **Neil Coyle:** A quick idea of timelines would be really useful. Could you not at least give us that today?

**Dominic Raab:** I want to check very carefully and then be able to give you confidently and accurately a precise timeframe. We are working through all the HR issues as swiftly as possible.

Q175 **Neil Coyle:** I understand that. In your previous response to the Committee's report on the merger, you said that 26 NGOs were consulted. Can you tell us which NGOs were consulted and what they said?

**Dominic Raab:** Including over the summer, we have put in a whole range of engagements with parliamentarians, including chairs of the main Select Committees. We have had calls with NGOs. We had a roundtable involving 16 civil society organisations, including Bond, the international development network that represents 400 organisations. Other organisations at that roundtable alone included CARE International, the International Rescue Committee, Christian Aid, the ONE Campaign, Amnesty and others. On top of the NGOs—

Q176 **Chair:** Is that not the list of those who were consulted for the integrated review, rather than for the merger?

**Dominic Raab:** No, but often the debate will incorporate both. Those were the ones specifically consulted, including on the merger. There is an overlap. We take the opportunity to pick their brains. The merger and the IR are quite integrated, as you would expect.

It was not only NGOs. I have spoken to Dr Tedros, the WHO, David Malpass, president of the World Bank, and we have had engagement with the ICRC and UNHCR. We have also talked to quite a lot of other countries to glean their experience and lessons learnt, including Canada, France, Japan, the US and Italy.

Q177 **Chair:** As a sideline, you mentioned that you consulted Parliament before the merger. When?

**Dominic Raab:** Not necessarily before the merger, but I think we have had engagement with your Committee in the context of the IR.

Q178 **Chair:** Since?

**Dominic Raab:** It was on 2 September. We have been proceeding at pace. The first step was 2 September. There is probably a huge, probably year-long, bedding-in practice for the way the Department is run and the lessons internationally and what that means for staff. There is still a lot of work to be done; it is work in progress.

Q179 **Royston Smith:** What is your one foreign policy priority?



**Dominic Raab:** I am not sure I have just one, but one thing that is really important coming out of the integrated review is the Indo-Pacific tilt. I have been to the region three times. I have just got back from Vietnam and Korea. I can see all sorts of reasons for it—growth opportunities in trade, investment and business over the next 10, 20 or 30 years. For SMEs and UK exports, there are huge growth opportunities. By the way, some of that trade liberalisation will be good for consumers here at home.

I have lamented a little bit the intellectual laziness or lack of bandwidth in the debate on foreign policy, which is always around the very big players. Of course, they all matter, whether it is the EU, China or the US, but there is also a whole range of mid-sized players who have wide economic and political considerations and values that overlap with us. For example, Korea has one of the closest voting records to that of the UK in any international organisation. It was very good to talk to Prime Minister Sye-kyun about all of those areas.

Vietnam is not necessarily a country you would think we had lots of shared values with, because of the different political make-up of our governance and systems. But for the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, if you think of the presence of China and what it means for global trends, being more active and energetic in that region is critically important. I think you will see a lot more Foreign Secretaries and Ministers generally treading that path. That is where I think a lot of the opportunities and the risk management in the next 20 to 30 years will be.

Q180 **Chair:** You have spoken time and again about values, and emphasised your human rights credentials, from your time as a lawyer with the Foreign Office, as well as your time now. Do you recognise the report that the Foreign Office put out on Vietnam criticising the harassment of protesters and the oppression of many civil rights activists?

**Dominic Raab:** Yes, and I raised that issue. As with China, and as with any partner we engage, we need to be clear-eyed. If you are building a mature and lasting partnership and engagement strategy, you need to be able to talk about the difficult things as well as the opportunities. We need to be both flexible and robust in doing so. I raised human rights when I was in Hanoi. I do so wherever I go. I raised it in Saudi; I raised it in China, and I will continue to do so. I also think it is important to seize the opportunities and not live in an ivory tower around these things. I am not suggesting that is your point, but the reassurance I can give you is that it does not get airbrushed out of the conversation.

Q181 **Royston Smith:** You have laid out some of your priorities. For those of us who were excited about Brexit, leaving the EU and being able to strike out as Global Britain, there are lots of things we could talk about, particularly what Global Britain means. What are your main priorities, and how can the FCO do them all? In the end, if everything is a priority, nothing is a priority. What are the main priorities?



**Dominic Raab:** I am not sure we are quite there yet, but the way I look at it is having a 40:60 split, where I recognise that 60% of foreign policy is reactive to events, whether it is in Belarus or on the border of Armenia and Azerbaijan, and try to protect 40% of our time, effort and energy to focus on the strategic stuff in a forward-thinking way. The way we would demonstrate that at the moment is the fact that we are doing the merger, the CSR and the IR at the same time. That has obviously taken up a lot of energy, bandwidth and raw time.

It is absolutely crucial that you do not think you can do it all. To talk about relationships, you can make a strong and compelling case for us to be more active in every corner of the world, but as well as our traditional relationships, which we are not neglecting, if you were to ask me to carve out an area for extra attention, investment and time spent, it is the Indo-Pacific region. That obviously breaks down. There are a lot of different countries out there; it is a wide area in and of itself, and lots of themes, from trade to security, go with it, but proactively and strategically that would be my priority for Global Britain.

Q182 **Royston Smith:** The Prime Minister has talked about using the G7 presidency to create a new global approach to health security. What are the Government's other objectives for the UK presidency of the G7 in 2021?

**Dominic Raab:** That is a great question. We are formulating them as we speak. I would see it in two or three brackets. We should be much more robust in our foreign policy, or even more robust in defending open societies. That includes everything from liberal free trade, notwithstanding the protectionist wave and the challenges of Covid, to incorporating democracy and human rights. We have talked a bit about that. I think the UK has shown great leadership on Belarus and Hong Kong, and we need to keep doing that. We need to rope in a wider coalition of like-minded countries. I think the G7 presidency is a good opportunity to do that.

As well as promoting open societies, we need to promote global goods. One of them is vaccines for Covid; climate change is another; and 12 years' quality education for every girl, no matter her background, is an important one. We will want the G7 to reflect the growing importance of the Indo-Pacific region. Those are three ways in which I think you will see our presidency priorities formulated and shaped.

Q183 **Chair:** How do you define Indo-Pacific?

**Dominic Raab:** I would probably draw a line on a map and show you. We are quite specific in calling it Indo-Pacific rather than just Asia-Pacific. Effectively, I am going east from India.

Q184 **Chair:** Not Pakistan?

**Dominic Raab:** You cannot look at India without looking at Pakistan. Pakistan is important for a load of other reasons. I am not confusing the



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subcontinent with the wider Indo-Pacific, so probably not. That does not mean that Pakistan is not important for a whole range of reasons.

Q185 **Chair:** I understand, and I am not making that point. The reason I ask the question is that I think I am right in saying that falls under three different ministerial responsibilities under you. Is there any reason why you have not brought them together?

**Dominic Raab:** What would fall under three different responsibilities?

Q186 **Chair:** Asia falls under one Minister, India falls under a different one and the Pacific islands and various other elements fall under a third Minister. Would it not be sensible to have a single Minister of State responsible for the Indo-Pacific?

**Dominic Raab:** We have a single Secretary of State with a fantastic team and a good division of labour, which makes sure we are properly joined up.

**Chair:** I am delighted to hear it.

**Chris Bryant:** You are smiling through that.

**Dominic Raab:** I always smile when you're in the room, Chris.

Q187 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Can I turn to the integrated review? You have said that the Department will engage with "non-traditional partners" over the integrated review. How do you define non-traditional, and who are they?

**Dominic Raab:** Who is that a quote from?

Q188 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** I believe it was in a previous submission you made to the Committee.

**Dominic Raab:** I will have to fish it out and see what the context was.

We want it to allow us to have a proper strategic forward look to 2030 and beyond. My role has been to chair a cross-Whitehall ministerial group. We have had eight meetings with officials and senior Ministers—I have just come from one—with one more to come. It is broken down into a range of key themes: the UK's place in the world; the role of tech, its potential, but also the risk from cyber; defence and security; how we integrate our aid and development policy; and resilience. Those are the broad themes we have looked at, and we are working up what will amount to a prospectus that we will publish in due course.

Senior officials and Ministers have variously engaged with Parliament and Select Committees; the devolved Administrations; 25 think-tanks, including RUSI, Chatham House and the Overseas Development Institute; 38 academics, from Cambridge to the Sorbonne; and 17 NGOs, including the Gates Foundation and Oxfam. We are discussing it. When I was in the States, I was interested by how much appetite there was for the IR from Jerusalem to Washington DC to Hanoi, and interest in what it will mean



for our foreign policy, including on the merger. Lots of different countries are asking about our experience of the merger in how they are looking at things. We have tried to tap as much of our network, governmental and non-governmental, as possible.

**Q189 Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** It is particularly interesting that you have spoken to the devolved Administrations. I am sure you will recall my SNP predecessor on this Committee, Stephen Gethins, who was always keen on the idea of decentralising foreign policy to other parts of the UK, so I am pleased to hear that is happening. Back in April, the then permanent under-secretary, Sir Simon McDonald, said that the Committee could have a list of all the countries consulted as part of the review, but we have now been told we cannot have it due to “diplomatic sensitivities”. Why?

**Dominic Raab:** I am happy to take a look at that. The truth is that we engage one way or another with almost every international partner on those issues, whether it is through telegrams, letters or advice. We integrate that. I am happy to look again if there is a question about a list of the countries with which we have had contact. I can check that for you.

**Q190 Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** I take it that we can look forward to getting that list.

**Dominic Raab:** I will do a follow-up. You can look forward to my response to your query. I look at these things very seriously in good faith. This Committee is one of the pre-eminent ones in Parliament. I take its work very seriously. As well as my assiduous private office here, I have a list of action points, as I always have when I come here, to make sure I get back to you on any points you raise and I was not in a position to respond to.

**Q191 Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** I am grateful. You mentioned the key areas you are going to look at in the integrated review. You once wrote to the Committee saying that policy should be “based on values as much as it is on our core interests.” The emphasis these days—perhaps Chris Bryant touched on this earlier—switches to striking the right balance between economic opportunity and security. The documents about the integrated review do not mention either democracy or human rights. Could you explain the discrepancy that seems to have worked itself in over time between something that was going to be based on values and core interests and then did not mention things like democracy or human rights?

**Dominic Raab:** I can reassure you that the group I chair, and the officials who inform it and feed into it, are looking constantly at human rights issues. As I think I explained in my opening remarks, our whole piece on encouraging and promoting open societies brings together the idea that trade, democracy, transparency and human rights are not somehow in conflict, but are two sides of the same coin, and we should



be unabashed in promoting those values. All aspects of what we are doing in the IR address that. If you look at what we have said and done on Belarus, likewise the lead we have taken with our European partners and others on Alexei Navalny, Magnitsky sanctions and across the board, we are practising what we preach, and that will continue.

Q192 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Can I take you to international law? Under what circumstances do you think it is acceptable for international law to be broken by a nation?

**Dominic Raab:** As a former Foreign Office lawyer, my answer is that I do not think you can answer that in abstract. You have to be quite careful about the extent to which you are responding to a prior breach or threat to either a treaty obligation or customary rule of international law. Fundamentally, I do not think I will get into the business of answering hypotheticals.

Of course, we have not broken international law. What we have made clear is that the integrity of the United Kingdom is crucial. We have responded to, frankly, some aggressive behaviour in the joint committee that I think would put at risk the Good Friday agreement that represents obligations we are all signed up to. I am confident that with good will on all sides we can resolve those issues, as I am confident we can get a Canada-style free trade agreement with the EU in tandem with that.

Q193 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** I was actually thinking more of the Sino-British agreement on Hong Kong, Foreign Secretary. Do you think there are any circumstances in which it is acceptable to breach that?

**Dominic Raab:** The UK has not breached it; we have lived up to it, and we call on China to do so.

Q194 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** That is my point. What I am getting at is that there is no excuse for China breaching it.

**Dominic Raab:** I think what you are trying neatly to do is draw some moral equivalence, or substantial equivalence, between the two. I think it is crazy; it is absolute nonsense.

Q195 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** No. The question I want to come to is in relation to news today that Lord Hodge, deputy president of the UK Supreme Court, is going to take a seat on the Court of Final Appeal in Hong Kong. I want to get your assessment of what that says about the upholding of things like democracy, human rights and the rule of law. How comfortable are you as Foreign Secretary with Lord Hodge taking up that place on the Hong Kong court?

**Dominic Raab:** Those appointments are made independently. It is a finely balanced judgment call. The national security legislation has been introduced, but the way it is applied, including by the courts, brings into question not just the freedoms that the people of Hong Kong are entitled to under the joint declaration, but separately the autonomy of Hong



Kong's political institutions and judiciary. There could come a point where it becomes deeply uncomfortable.

Equally, I noted that the Hong Kong Bar has put in a plea that international judges do not just flee the Hong Kong courts at this point in time because that would make matters worse, whereas they may have a positive effect. I do not judge that one way or the other; I am just presenting the two arguments. What I am doing, with the Lord Chancellor, is consulting the President of the Supreme Court on what the correct approach will be. What needs to be clear is that, if the autonomy of the judiciary is at threat, British judges do not give it a veneer of legitimacy.

Q196 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** You mention a veneer of legitimacy. That is essentially what will happen, is it not?

**Dominic Raab:** Again, you are speculating. The point is that we have not had cases under the national security legislation going to the higher judicial authorities in Hong Kong. The question would be to what extent they provide a check or a balance.

It is worth trying to maintain the guarantor function of the international judges as long as it does not become a veneer of legitimacy on a breach of not just the freedoms of the people of Hong Kong but judicial autonomy. I think our discussion and the comments of those actually in Hong Kong, including the Hong Kong Bar, have made clear that it is a very finely balanced judgment call. The Lord Chancellor and I will be consulting the Supreme Court on that, although the process is handled independently.

Q197 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Post publication of the integrated review, can we expect to see the Government give greater significance through the Foreign Office, the Cabinet Office and perhaps the MOD to addressing the hybrid threats that the UK faces? Whenever I have tried to raise it before, it tends to go to the Cabinet Office, but it strikes me as something on which perhaps the Foreign Office should take a greater lead. Should we be looking to do something similar to countries like Poland or the Baltic states and start appointing ambassadors for hybrid affairs who can better co-ordinate and learn internationally how best to counter hybrid threats?

**Dominic Raab:** The hybrid threat piece is complex and challenging. All I would say at this point is that I can assure you—I think my themes brought it out in different ways—that we are looking at the whole range of those threats and challenges in the context of the IR.

Q198 **Chair:** Can I go back over a couple of issues, Foreign Secretary? You said that the Internal Market Bill did not break international law. Are you, therefore, correcting the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland?

**Dominic Raab:** No, I am not correcting him. The provisions have not been applied in a way that would create the tension described.



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Q199 **Chair:** So the statement made by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is not one you would have repeated.

**Dominic Raab:** All Ministers, politicians and individuals choose their words carefully in their own way. I am just making a point of fact.

Q200 **Chair:** Do you agree that the new Hong Kong security Bill breaches the Basic Law?

**Dominic Raab:** I have said all along that I think it violates the autonomy and freedoms. We set that out quite clearly. Sorry, do you mean the Basic Law rather than the joint declaration?

**Chair:** Yes.

**Dominic Raab:** As Foreign Secretary, I am quite careful not to opine on the law of other countries, but if you look at the way the Basic Law is set out and the provisions on when it can introduce national security legislation, it is very difficult, in terms not just of the joint declaration but of China's own law as applied to Hong Kong, to see how it is consistent. I have made that point to the Chinese authorities, including my opposite number.

I would be a bit careful about seeking to opine, but I have asked that very question. It is very difficult. From memory—don't hold me to precise terms—the Basic Law says that it would apply national security legislation only in the event of a public emergency or external threat, neither of which China says applies. I think that is a reasonable conversation we can have with our Chinese interlocutors, and indeed I have had it.

Q201 **Chair:** You can see why it causes a problem. If the national security law violates the Basic Law, it is very difficult to see how the judges can be upholding the constitution of Hong Kong, and indeed their sworn oath, when they go.

**Dominic Raab:** It is very difficult, which is why we want to see whether the checks that the judiciary provide in Hong Kong have any impact. That will only ever be tested by cases.

Q202 **Chair:** Would you be a judge in the Court of Final Appeal?

**Dominic Raab:** Would I?

**Chair:** Do you think it would be reputationally enhancing?

**Dominic Raab:** I would respect the separation of powers that we have between the Executive and judiciary and allow them to take the calls of propriety. I think in the remarks I made earlier—

Q203 **Chair:** I am not asking you to comment on their judgments; I am asking you to comment on the jurisdiction under which they operate.

**Dominic Raab:** Actually, you are asking me to comment on the integrity of the decisions they are taking, and I'm not—



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Q204 **Chair:** No, I am asking you to comment on the integrity of the jurisdiction.

**Dominic Raab:** I think you are getting close to it, and I will decide how and what I answer. I want to respect the separation of powers. What I think I have given you in answer to earlier questions from the Committee are the concerns and the very finely balanced judgment call. That is why the Lord Chancellor will consult the Supreme Court, mindful of respecting its independence on this, about the considerations in play.

Q205 **Chair:** You are asking them to think again.

**Dominic Raab:** I would not frame it like that; I would frame it the way I described it.

Q206 **Alicia Kearns:** The FCDO has said it wants to be a force for good in the world, and obviously human rights is an issue close to your own heart. What does that mean in practical terms, and how do you think we will see it manifested over the next few years?

**Dominic Raab:** I talked about the three pillars: media freedom and protecting journalists, FoRB and Magnitsky. They are not static. On media freedom, we have work, and different KPIs, on swelling the ranks of the coalition, raising money to support journalists and trying to work with countries that are willing, but not necessarily yet technically able, to protect media freedoms. We have a high-level panel doing that kind of work. Pushing and progressing all of that work forward is really important.

On FoRB, we want to broaden the coalition. We want to host a conference in the UK. I think we are co-hosting a conference, but we certainly want to take a lead in pressing that forward next year. On Magnitsky, we constantly look at new designations and at extending the sanctions regime on human rights to cover corruption as well.

Q207 **Alicia Kearns:** On corruption and sanctions, are you looking at those who profit from it, not just those who carry out the corruption, but throughout the entire chain? Can you specifically update us on any plans there are to support the Uyghur community through sanctions?

**Dominic Raab:** In the original Magnitsky sanctions, we included those who profit from human rights abuses. That may well be a model, depending on how we define corruption and the associated offences that we would look at in relation to corruption. It makes sense.

You mentioned the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. We have been very clear about that. We have led the charge in the Human Rights Council. We have also recently led a statement in the UN Third Committee. We want to look very carefully based on the evidence, if we are talking about Magnitsky sanctions, about whether and when is the right time to do that. In the UK, our concern can only be growing about the reports of what is happening in Xinjiang. We would want to work very closely with our



international partners to give the most powerful message, whether it is in UN forums or in applying sanctions.

**Q208 Alicia Kearns:** There is no question but that the UK has been an advocate for the Uyghur people. However, what we have not done as yet is classify what is happening to that ethnic minority as genocide. When there is clear evidence of forced sterilisation of women, torture, mass slave labour and things far worse than that, how far can we go in terms of the legal team ascertaining it to be genocide? Surely, even if we consider it to be just a mass human rights atrocity, it means we should be reconsidering whether or not we attend the 2022 Beijing Olympics, for example. Would you have us not attend the Beijing Olympics?

**Dominic Raab:** On your question about genocide, I am afraid the lawyer in me comes out a little bit. I have made it clear that there is evidence of serious and egregious human rights violations—gross human rights violations. On genocide—I say this as a former war crimes lawyer—the challenge is to prove and demonstrate that not only was it destruction of a minority, however that is classified, but the deliberate intention to destroy it as such. That has always been the challenge with the definition of genocide.

The more of that evidence we see, and the more the international community addresses its mind to it, the more we need to look very carefully at what action we take. The concern about what is happening to the Uyghurs—their detention and mistreatment, the forced sterilisation—is something we cannot just turn away from. We obviously want to gather the evidence carefully and work very closely with our international partners, and that is what we are doing. As I said, we have led the way not just in the Human Rights Council but in the Third Committee of the UN, and will continue to do so.

**Q209 Alicia Kearns:** Do you agree that not going to the 2022 Beijing Olympics would send a strong signal that we will not take part in activities that essentially are a platform for a country that is committing appalling human rights atrocities, even if we do not accept it as genocide as yet?

**Dominic Raab:** Generally speaking, my instinct is to separate sport from diplomacy and politics, but there comes a point when that may not be possible. Let's gather the evidence and work with our international partners and consider in the round what further action we need to take.

**Q210 Chair:** His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge very often attends international sporting events on behalf of Her Majesty's Government. Will you be encouraging him to attend?

**Dominic Raab:** That will be a corollary of the wider process of evaluating the evidence, working with our international partners on whatever further decisions we come to.

**Q211 Chair:** To be clear, it is not his choice; he would attend only on behalf of the Government, so it would be your choice and that of the Prime



Minister.

**Dominic Raab:** We would obviously want to look at that very closely and carefully.

Q212 **Chair:** On the question of genocide, you are the lawyer, not me, and I take your point. Other lawyers, Ben Emmerson included, have cited cultural destruction, forced sterilisation and many other areas as giving cause for the evidence of intent you speak of. Clearly, there is a line, possibly a narrow one, between the two of you. How much more evidence do you think you need to see?

**Dominic Raab:** Particularly these days, you can always find a lawyer or a scientist who will disagree with something the Government are doing. The reality is that it is not just a question of showing that minorities have been targeted, of whichever description; it is establishing that they have been targeted as a minority, not just because they are a nuisance and they are raising concerns.

Putting this case aside, that has always been the challenge, certainly in a war crimes tribunal, in establishing a case. We will obviously look at this very carefully, but the trigger of genocide not only requires a very particular set of evidential burdens; it also triggers a whole range of consequences. I think it is right to look at that very carefully.

Back when I was a lawyer at Liberty, I took a case to the ECHR with Ben Emmerson. I hold him in very high regard. We looked very carefully at what he said. Lawyers will differ on those things when the definitions are reached.

Q213 **Chair:** I appreciate that. It is just that, clearly, the detention camps that we see forcing the Chinese language, silencing the Uighur tongue and the various disruptions of cultural monuments, including, as you know, the mosque in Kashgar and many other parts of western China, seem to indicate that a particular group is being targeted for its cultural, religious, and social observations, and not just a minority that may or may not be problematic.

**Dominic Raab:** "Seem to." We need to establish it, and I think it is harder to get over that line. To be honest with you, my view is that there are egregious human rights abuses. We need to call them out. We need to hold China to account. Frankly, the precise legal label has implications, but that should not distract us from saying that this is appalling and we condemn it. We need to be making the point to China, a country that rightly has expectations to be treated as a leading member of the international community, that this is at odds with the responsibilities that come with being a leading member of the international community.

Q214 **Graham Stringer:** I think the Foreign Secretary should have a look at Margaret Thatcher's problems in trying to get a boycott of the 1980 Olympic games in Moscow. She failed. I just point that out. It is not a question; it is a piece of advice.



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Whether it is technically a genocide or not, I agree that there are appalling things happening in western China. I represent a significant Jewish community who write to me regularly. Basically, the burden of their argument is, "We were promised that the Holocaust would never happen again. It is happening in western China. What are we going to do about it?"

I realise that militarily there is nothing we can do about it. One of the surprises that they point out is that there are many Muslim countries around the world that are amazingly silent on the issue. Have you contacted those Muslim countries to see if they would put pressure on? Within this country and in Europe, the Holy See and the Archbishop of Canterbury have also been quiet on the issue. Are you trying to use your contacts to get those very influential countries and religious groups to put pressure on the Chinese?

**Dominic Raab:** First of all, I agree with your basic point that they are egregious human rights abuses. I am not quite sure, as I said to the son of a Holocaust refugee, that there is equivalence between what has happened in Xinjiang, appalling as it is, and the gas chambers of Auschwitz. I am not quite sure we are at that level yet. Immediately we are into that, Graham, we are into a rather unsavoury gradation of human rights abuses. Let's all agree that what is happening is appalling.

You make a good point about why there are so few Muslim countries speaking up, and I raise it with all my counterparts. Obviously, China has huge economic and political heft, and the question is to what extent that is eclipsing others from speaking out when you would have thought that they might, should, and would. You make a good point.

Q215 **Graham Stringer:** I do not think my constituents are saying this is Germany 1944. They are saying it is the thin end of the wedge from Germany in 1935 or thereabouts. That is their point.

It takes us back to the discussion we were having before about the relationship with China and whether involving them in international bodies such as the World Health Organisation, the International Olympics Committee, or other organisations is working. Is this not an indication that we should be more hawkish with China than we have been? It does not seem, either on carbon or on human rights, that involving China is working at the moment.

**Dominic Raab:** I would say that the UK has been leading in human rights and has been willing to go out on a limb more than pretty much any other country, not just in itself, but in leading the way and marshalling other countries. I appreciate that you are urging us to be more hawkish. I think we need to recognise the reality of China and try to influence its conduct in a positive way as best we can.

I was not clear whether your hawkishness extended to trying to eject them from international organisations. The bigger challenge is allowing them a free run of international organisations and allowing them to fill



the vacuum of western influence and norm-making. I personally would make the argument as passionately as I could—I gave the example of WIPO earlier, and there are others—that we ought to be standing up and fighting for our values, and doing so not just with the usual big players but with agile coalitions of like-minded countries, not just in Europe and North America—I do a lot of work with my Canadian opposite number, Foreign Minister Champagne—but in south-east Asia, where there are countries that believe in the international rule of law and do not want it crushed or remade under a different paradigm that would threaten their equities, whether it is the law of the sea or generally the stability of the international system.

I think we need to work within the multilateral system that we have. I am not quite sure, reflexively compelling as it may be, where your hawkishness leads you. What is the action you would like us to take that we have not taken? The bottom line is that we try to get the balance right. I would say that we lead on human rights internationally. We are also trying to do the smart thing of protecting the multilateral system, but that has become more challenging, not less, because of some of the tensions, not just with China but with the US. We are working with all of our international partners to do that. If someone has a better strategy, I would like to hear it. No one is saying it is easy, but I think those are the fundamental pillars of the right way to approach China.

**Q216 Chris Bryant:** I always thought that the best way to approach human rights was that it is a seamless garment, and you cannot pick and choose all the way around. That sometimes leads you to difficult diplomatic decisions about what to raise, when to raise it, and all the rest. It takes me to one area where we have historically aligned ourselves with the rest of the EU, and that is in relation to Cuba. Now that we are no longer a member of the EU, have we changed our position in relation to Cuba and ministerial visits to Cuba?

**Dominic Raab:** I would not say we have changed our position. I am constantly open-minded about our relations with countries, particularly those where we have had a previously poor record or relationship. While I am not at the moment of some Damascene conversion, I point out that during the course of the Covid crisis, when the Braemar cruise ship with, I think, 600 people on board needed to dock and get home because of Covid, it was the Cuban authorities who provided for that. I had a couple of conversations with my Cuban opposite number.

I remember moments during the crisis when other countries—whatever their motivations may have been; let's not be naive about it—actually engaged with us. It is important that, when you have openings—maybe crises do this—to a more constructive relationship with a country, you take them.

**Q217 Chris Bryant:** I get that, but, historically, our position has been that we do not have ministerial visits to Cuba because the Cuban Government will only let us meet the people they want us to meet, not opposition leaders,



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and they do not respect freedom of speech. Is that still our position?

**Dominic Raab:** That still stands.

Q218 **Chris Bryant:** That is all I was asking.

**Dominic Raab:** It was rather elliptically phrased but I see what you are getting at now.

Q219 **Chair:** Can I just go back to Asia for a second? We now have a mission to ASEAN. Is that paying off?

**Dominic Raab:** Our brilliant ambassador, John Lamb, is working very assiduously. When I was in Hanoi, as well as working on the bilateral efforts, it was the first time there has been a UK-ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting, which we, in effect, jointly hosted. Looking at the Indo-Pacific tilt and two tangible things we could achieve within a two or three-year period, one would be to join CPTPP, and the other would be to attain dialogue partner status with ASEAN. Dialogue partner status was very much part of the bid that I have already put in.

We talked about a whole range of issues, from trade, climate change, the prosperity fund, the Covid support fund that we are putting in, to the values piece; the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea is one of them. I think there is a real opportunity. As you probably know, Mr Chairman, there has been a moratorium on new dialogue partners, so there is a technical blockage that we need to address, but we have had a lot of positive support for our active engagement. As I said, that is the first time there has been a UK-ASEAN foreign ministerial meeting, certainly as far as I can recollect.

That gives you a signal not just of our commitment to the region and indeed to that organisation, but of the warmth and the positivity we have had back.

Q220 **Chair:** ASEAN is about 660 million people roughly, if you include all the countries together. Organisations like Facebook count billions, depending on how you count them of course. Are we going to have missions to tech firms now that they operate so much like states?

**Dominic Raab:** I do not think I am planning to set up an embassy to Facebook or Google.

Q221 **Chair:** The Danes have. The Danish Government have.

**Dominic Raab:** They are always doing innovative things. It is important that we engage with business, particularly tech. One of the things the IR is looking at is the tech piece. We have ambitions to be leading tech in various areas; artificial intelligence, quantum, and others. There is an interesting piece where you align not just the tech start-ups and the growth that we have in this country on the commercial and business side, but the expertise that we have, obviously with GCHQ, and look at how we turn that into a particular comparative advantage over the next 10, 20,



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30 years and how we strengthen that comparative advantage. I see the tech companies having a role to play in that.

Q222 **Chair:** Given the importance that tech companies now have in shaping policy, and literally writing the code on which we build our lives, why would we not seek a representative office in some capacity—not a traditional embassy—in some of the larger companies that underpin our economy and, in many ways, our freedoms?

**Dominic Raab:** I do not think that is the same thing as setting up an embassy, but you are right to say that we should engage with them and we already do. I think we should do more of that and IR will flesh some of it out.

Q223 **Chair:** If we may, we will move on to Iran. As you know, we are completing a report on Iran, so this is, as it were, our ministerial session. We were hoping to have a ministerial session with the middle east Minister, but I am afraid he was not able to do it, so you are stepping in for James Cleverly. I hope that is all right. What would you say is the end goal of engagement with Iran?

**Dominic Raab:** At the moment, Iran is engaged in a series of choices that have led it down what I think is a cul-de-sac. It has done that on the nuclear file, with systemic non-compliance with the JCPOA. It is doing it in relation to its support for proxies and terrorist groups; you can see some of that in the militia in Iraq, and in some of its influence in Syria. There are other areas of flouting of international norms like freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz. There are human rights abuses, such as the arbitrary detention of dual nationals, including UK dual nationals.

I think what we need to do is hold Iran to account for all the choices that it makes, and, at the same time, leave the door ajar for it to make the right choices in the future. That is, effectively, the strategy that we are adopting and the approach that we are taking, working with our international partners.

Q224 **Chair:** You spoke about the frequent and significant violation of the JCPOA. Why do we not declare it dead?

**Dominic Raab:** It has been systematically reduced. Let's face it: on all sides, people are waiting to see what happens in November in the US elections. From my point of view, and I think the UK point of view, the JCPOA at least provides a structure for addressing Iran's non-compliance. The E3, which we very much pushed, has triggered the dispute resolution mechanism. We are proceeding through that process. We envisage holding meetings at ministerial level as well. What we want to try to do is prevent any further deterioration. I am not sure that there is any sense in declaring the JCPOA dead and junking it in advance of something better to put in its place, but that is basically a strategic question.



After the election, not least because Tehran is waiting to see what happens, there will be further opportunities, and what we need to do now is prevent any further deterioration in the situation.

Q225 **Chair:** The FCDO, in its evidence in response to our Iran inquiry, stated that it disagrees with the US policy of maximum pressure, and instead is committed to appropriate pressure in diplomatic engagement. What do you mean by appropriate pressure? Does it mean accepting the snapback of sanctions?

**Dominic Raab:** To be very clear, the UK, and indeed our E3 partners, has not ruled out snapback. Equally, there is a challenge with the US, which is now no longer part of the JCPOA, and we lament that, as we have made clear. I do not think it can then, having come out of the JCPOA, legally and technically avail itself of a mechanism that is part of the JCPOA. We have not ruled it out.

Q226 **Chair:** You know the Americans dispute that on the grounds that they are cited in the initial UNSCR.

**Dominic Raab:** I am fully conversant with the US position. I have to say that none of the other UNSC members accepts that, with the exception of the Dominican Republic. It is challenging. We have never ruled it out. We just say that you cannot do it unilaterally if you are not part of the JCPOA.

It is important not to rule it out. There is always going to be a point at which we have to accept the JCPOA being not just left as a shell but unsalvageable. I do not think we are there yet, and we need to try to contain the situation and prevent any further deterioration between now and early in the new year, when we hope there will be more focus from Tehran as a result of the US elections having passed.

**Chair:** The US elections are going to carry a lot of water in this conversation.

Q227 **Claudia Webbe:** To follow on from that, I want to look at the longer-term view. Foreign Secretary, you have spoken in the longer term of a replacement to the joint comprehensive plan of action that addresses Iran's wider destabilising activities. I want to explore whether the groundwork for such an agreement exists. What do we mean by Iran's destabilising activities?

**Dominic Raab:** Supporting militia and terrorist groups around the world to either attack their host countries or western interests, including the United Kingdom's.

Q228 **Claudia Webbe:** In that sense, would it be argued that the UK equally has difficulties? I think there is a quaint English term, "calling the kettle black". Would it not be argued that we are a bit duplicitous in that?

**Dominic Raab:** I think you need to take a long, hard look in the mirror if you think that the United Kingdom is in any way replicating, mirroring or



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somehow engaged in the kind of behaviour that Iran is in terms of its support for terrorism, or indeed what it is trying to do with militias with the new Government in Iraq, or the effects it has in Yemen through the Houthis or what it is doing in Syria. Where is the equivalent UK behaviour? I do not even begin to understand your moral equivalence with that.

**Q229 Claudia Webbe:** Others would argue that we support the Yemeni paper Government and the Saudi-led coalition that is bombing Yemenis. Both Iran and Britain are actually providing aid to the region. The point is, why is Iran's activity destabilising and not ours?

**Dominic Raab:** We are trying to secure peace in Yemen. We have supported all of the UN's efforts. If Iran wanted to, it could pretty decisively rein in the Houthis or cut off all support, and I think you would see that conflict resolved pretty swiftly. Of course there are different protagonists. Our efforts have been entirely driven towards alleviating the humanitarian plight with the aid that we provide, and, diplomatically, resolving the conflict, including working through the UN. If Iran mirrored that approach, we would have peace in Yemen, and it could be done fairly swiftly.

**Q230 Claudia Webbe:** I hear you, but of course there are humanitarian catastrophes and global destabilisations that followed our interventions in Libya, in Iraq, and our support for non-state actors in Syria. We fought at considerable human cost. Can I go further and ask about the groundwork for the agreement in terms of the longer-term plan? In what way would you say that it exists?

**Dominic Raab:** I need to be a bit careful about some of the diplomatic discussions. I think you can see in the previous US initiative under the current President and in President Macron's initiatives that there are initiatives that can provide a model to lift the ambitions of the JCPOA and address some of the defects. It is not a perfect deal, and I do not think anyone described it as a perfect deal. As I have argued consistently, until we have something better, I do not think we should junk it. I think they would provide a model for that. There are other permutations.

A lot of the groundwork is there. What is required is the political will for Tehran to make the choice that it wants to improve its standing in the world and, frankly, the lives of its citizens. Let's not let Iran off the hook for the choices being made in Tehran. That is really important. Among democracies, whether it is the Europeans or the Americans, there will be different approaches. It is important that, by quite rightly debating the different possible approaches, we do not let Tehran off the hook for its conduct—its systematic flouting of international law.

**Q231 Claudia Webbe:** What is the end goal of engagement with Iran? How does engagement maximise the UK's interest?

**Dominic Raab:** Most Foreign Secretaries would say that it is always better to talk to your international interlocutors, whether you regard



them as posing opportunities or risks, or some combination of the two. I always think it is worth engaging. I have been speaking to Foreign Minister Zarif over the summer. I will continue to speak to him, not least in pursuit of the release of our dual nationals. I constantly want to keep the pressure on. It is always better to try to apply the smart pressure of talking, and engaging, as best you can, in positive proposals on how to take things forward and build confidence in the relationship, rather than just allowing a vacuum to build up. That is my instinct.

There are times when you cannot do that, or should not do that, but my instincts and my presumption are in favour of engagement. What the long-term strategy ends in is getting the right balance—not just the UK, but working with our international partners—of carrots and sticks, and the regime in Iran taking the right choices based on the interests of its own people to address its behaviour, which is contrary to international law. I think there is a better path for Iran if it chooses that. Those choices are for Iran and its Government to take. What I want to be clear about is, first, not letting them off the hook for their behaviour; and secondly, that the relationship with the United Kingdom, and I am sure the rest of the world, can change if they adopt a different and better path.

Q232 **Claudia Webbe:** What kind of support is provided to the families of detained British and dual nationals in Iran? Is it provided automatically or do families need to formally request assistance? The first part of that question is key.

**Dominic Raab:** It is a good question. We provide a whole range of assistance. We lobby for release where we believe that they have been arbitrarily detained. We provide support to their families; they can contact us 24 hours a day. We raise health and welfare concerns with the Iranian Government, as we would any other, and we raise issues of mistreatment. We would do that whenever asked to, and of course we engage with the families without them formally coming to ask us. Of course, some individuals in Iran and elsewhere do not want the UK Government taking up their case on their behalf. We obviously want to respect their wishes as well.

I can tell you that we take it incredibly seriously. The consular teams working on not just the Iran files, but the difficult cases of Brits or dual nationals detained around the world, work incredibly hard, with the sensitivity and the professionalism that you would expect and want to see. We always raise those cases. I have to be careful about what I am saying, but I am in regular contact with Foreign Minister Zarif and we are doing everything that we can to secure the release of dual nationals who want our support in doing so in Tehran.

There is one other thing that we have done recently. I am not sure whether it has been done before, and I think it provides some context in relation to Brexit, whatever the outcome; I hope we get a deal and I am confident we can. I have been liaising very closely with my European partners. The E3 format—France, Germany, the UK—is still going on. I



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hosted them at Chevening in September. We issued a statement not just on the nuclear file but on human rights in Iran, and indeed the position and plight of our dual nationals. I think that is a good example of leverage in UK diplomacy, not just bilaterally but with our partners and our European partners, notwithstanding the Brexit track that we are engaged on.

**Q233 Claudia Webbe:** In the case of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, it is abhorrent that a British citizen should be detained in Iran for so long on what would appear to be such flimsy charges. Do you want to say something about that?

**Dominic Raab:** The detention of Nazanin and all the other dual nationals is arbitrary and unacceptable, and they should be released and returned to their families in the United Kingdom as soon as possible. I raise this regularly with the Iranians, and so does our brilliant ambassador in Tehran, Rob Macaire. I speak to the families regularly. I have to be very careful and sensitive in what I say about that and how I handle it. I have spoken to Nazanin, because she is effectively under house arrest in Tehran. We will continue to provide support. We are dealing with a regime that is incredibly intransigent on these issues, but we are mobilising as much diplomatic muscle as we can to try to secure their release.

**Q234 Claudia Webbe:** We should also be concerned about the lack of due process in detaining Iranian businessmen and scientists in the US on charges related to sanctions violation. I want to understand why we are extraditing Iranians to that system. Does that assistance to the US not imperil our own citizens in Iran?

**Dominic Raab:** I am not quite sure which recent UK to US extradition case you are talking about. In any event, with extradition proceedings, we have meticulous checks that are decided by a court. All human rights arguments can be made, tested and decided by a court, not by politicians.

**Q235 Claudia Webbe:** There is the case of Seyed Sajjad Shahidian, for example. When we provide such assistance, does that not imperil our ability to assist our citizens in Iran?

**Dominic Raab:** Whenever we extradite, it is based on domestic legislation applied by the courts, on which hitherto there has been cross-party consensus, unless you want us to pull extradition arrangements, not just presumably with the US, but with any other country. I am not quite sure why we would do that. I do not think the interests of justice, diplomacy, or effective law enforcement would be served by that.

**Claudia Webbe:** I just leave you with the example of—

**Chair:** Order. We are going to move on.

**Claudia Webbe:** Okay. Thank, you Chair.



**Chair:** Thank you.

Q236 **Henry Smith:** Recently, the Minister for the middle east said in a communication to us that the FCDO “regularly raises human rights with the Iranians and acts with international partners to press Iran to improve its humans rights record.” How effective do you think we have been in achieving that?

**Dominic Raab:** As effective as any other country dealing with Iran. They are not going to do it just because we put out communiqués, although I think they are sensitive to the reputational risk; we know that some politicians in Iran are. I do not think it can be done on its own, but I think it is important. On 22 September, we raised all of those concerns about the human rights record of Iran against their own people, as well as nationals and dual nationals being detained. It is important to keep up that pressure, along with the other things we do.

Q237 **Chair:** I am slightly surprised to hear you say reputational risk. This is a regime that murders homosexuals, beats women for not wearing appropriate clothing and spends vast sums on murdering Sunni Arabs in neighbouring states. Is it really concerned about its reputation?

**Dominic Raab:** You are right. We have that debate about China as well. I would not overdo it. The more that countries engage with Iran and say, “But what about this, what about that?” the more they rob it of the victimhood that it is trying to propagatate domestically and abroad. In that sense, there is at least scope for influence, which is why I think it was important to be able to do it at E3 level. I am not sure we have done it in that way before; I would have to check with my predecessors.

We need to keep the momentum going and keep the heat on Iran. I think they are mindful when we raise those issues with them. You are absolutely right to be sanguine about the choices and the decision makers in Tehran.

Q238 **Chair:** It feels almost like we are trying to libel Sonia Sutcliffe. It is pretty difficult to libel a child murderer. It seems pretty difficult to damage the reputation of a murderous, genocidal regime.

**Dominic Raab:** That felt like a rhetorical question.

**Chair:** It did, because it was.

Q239 **Henry Smith:** BBC Persian and the British Council are not able to operate within Iran. What is the FCDO doing to directly try to engage with the Iranian people?

**Dominic Raab:** First of all, Iran’s criminalisation of engagement and co-operation with the British Council is totally unjustified. We have raised that. We provide support and advice to the council. We have raised it with the Iranian Government. We raise it at the Human Rights Council. It is very difficult, given the restrictions and the powers that will be



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deployed against anyone who tries to engage directly with the Iranian people. It is very difficult.

Back in 2002 or 2003, I was in Tehran negotiating an investment protection agreement. It is a well-educated society. It has a history of challenge and protest against its rulers. We saw that more recently in 2003. There are thoughtful people, not just in civil society such as it is allowed to operate in Iran, but in the Government, who recognise that the decisions that the current predominant leaders are making are wrong. It is quite difficult to reach out in the way you are describing because of the nature of the regime, as it is in many other countries, from North Korea across the spectrum.

Q240 **Chair:** Can we add to that thanks to the BBC Persian staff who do such a powerful job in making sure that Persian speakers, not just in Iran but around the region, are able to access a free news service?

**Dominic Raab:** I totally join with you in doing that.

Q241 **Chair:** I am sure you will do this, so I am going to do it in a very leading way. Would you repeat your commitment to the BBC World Service and the important role it plays? It was quite striking to hear various people speaking about it recently, including somebody referring to John Brennan, when head of the CIA, saying that he looked to the BBC World Service first thing in the morning to find out what was actually happening in the world.

**Dominic Raab:** I think the BBC World Service does a terrific job. On UK soft power, I think sometimes we do not look at ourselves in the way others see us. The British Council had an Ipsos MORI poll, which I have been talking about recently, that had us top among young people around the world—16 to 24-year-olds—in terms of the attractiveness of the United Kingdom and trust in our institutions. Getting the message of what we stand for across through independent news organisations is really important. I do not think anyone does it better than the BBC World Service.

Q242 **Chair:** Could I go on to the challenges that Iran poses through its cyber capabilities? It is one of the most cyber-capable states. How are you dealing with that?

**Dominic Raab:** Some of that is obviously not for discussion, even in this Committee, but we are very mindful of the threat and of the partnerships that the regime engages in. We are doing everything we can to provide advice to business, and to protect the resilience of UK infrastructure and Government and public services. We have seen cyber-attacks—not from Iran—on those engaged in research on a vaccine for Covid. It is worth being mindful and eyes wide open at the range of targets that state-sponsored cyber-criminals now look to focus on. That range, and having it within our focus, is really important.

**Chair:** There are a couple of questions that we skipped over by mistake.



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Would you mind very much staying for another two minutes?

**Dominic Raab:** Of course.

**Chair:** Thank you.

Q243 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Foreign Secretary, how do you view Confucius Institutes?

**Dominic Raab:** That is a rather open question. Do you want to try a more closed question?

Q244 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Should we close Confucius Institutes or be discouraging universities from hosting them?

**Dominic Raab:** We need to look very carefully at all of our academic institutions' relations with any organisation that could—I say could—be used as a proxy or a vehicle for propagating nefarious activities at the behest of another Government or state, whether that is China or otherwise. Of course, what China is doing rather effectively is trying to maximise its soft power around the world. We see other Governments doing it—western countries with whom we have similar values, like the French. We see the Russians doing it.

I think we are second to none in our soft power potential. The most important thing we do is to project a very positive, soft power prospectus for what the UK is all about; it is, if I can put it like this, a democratic, open society-promoting competitor to the propaganda efforts that other countries engage in.

Q245 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Can I put to you a very specific example of the threat that they pose? I met some students from Glasgow and Edinburgh Universities who were protesting for democracy in Hong Kong, only to have their photographs sent back to state authorities in China and their parents visited by the police in China to tell them to get their kids to calm down and stop taking part in protests such as those. The students I met believe that that happened because there are, essentially, Communist party functionaries placed at those universities via Confucius Institutes. When a case like that arises, and they relay it to a Member of Parliament, where would you suggest that I or any other MP—there will be others who have met students in this position—take those cases?

**Dominic Raab:** You should write to the Education Secretary and to me. It is more broadly a question of the integrity of our higher education institutions, which we constantly look at. If there are cases like that, you should let us know.

Q246 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Would you commit to a review of Confucius Institutes in the United Kingdom?

**Dominic Raab:** I would commit to look very carefully at any evidence in any reports based on your constituents that you send me.

Q247 **Chair:** Stewart has made an interesting point. Would you ask your China



team to have a look at Confucius Institutes in the UK and write to the Committee?

**Dominic Raab:** If you write to me with the particular information you want to glean, I am very happy to respond.

Q248 **Alicia Kearns:** Could you update us on the current strategy and approach of the Government on bringing back orphans of Daesh terrorists from Syria, and more broadly from that area, at the moment?

**Dominic Raab:** For operational reasons, we are limited in what we can say. You will know the Government's policy. It is the same. We are open, able, and willing where it is possible to return unaccompanied minors or orphans who have British nationality. There was one recent case, which you have probably seen reported, where we have done so. If it can be done safely, and subject to those criteria, I personally believe—I have always said this—that we should do what we can to bring them home, particularly the little ones, the young ones who are the innocents of war.

Q249 **Chris Bryant:** On behalf of the Committee, could you pass our gratitude to the whole of the diplomatic network? This year must have been phenomenally difficult for them. We are all aware of how miserable it is being stuck at home on your own, or working from home, but many of them will be working from home in a country other than their own, possibly with a partner on the other side of the world, and trying to deal with people in very, very difficult situations.

Lots of MPs have been directly involved in Peru, New Zealand, and all sorts of places around the world. I would be grateful if you could pass on our enormous thanks and perhaps just a slight warning that sometimes, when people are very isolated, it is all too easy for people to end up bullied by people down the line. I hope the FCO, or FCDO or whatever it is now called, will put things in place to make sure that people are supported themselves.

**Dominic Raab:** Thank you for saying that. We obviously take the health and welfare of our teams very seriously. I take the point you have made. Overall, my experience, over a year of dealing with quite a difficult set of international challenges, has been that they are first rate. Aside from the expertise and experience they show, what has struck me above all is the character that has been shown by so many people in very difficult circumstances. They are public servants. They know that their No. 1 job is to serve the British people, whether it is procuring PPE, the search for a vaccine or getting all our nationals back home. They are human beings as well, and I am sure they will appreciate the warm comments you have made, Chris.

Q250 **Chair:** Thank you very much. We all echo Chris's words and I am very happy to say that, while we hold you to account, we have nothing but praise for—

**Chris Bryant:** We have no praise for you. It is just for them.



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***Dominic Raab:*** I was under no illusion.

***Chair:*** We are very glad that you appreciate the difference. On that note, thank you very much indeed for giving us so much of your time and for being generous with the overspill. It is extremely good of you.

***Dominic Raab:*** My pleasure.