

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Work of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, HC 171

Tuesday 28 June 2022

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Members present: Tom Tugendhat (Chair); Chris Bryant; Liam Byrne; Neil Coyle; Alicia Kearns; Bob Seely; Henry Smith; Royston Smith; Graham Stringer.

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Witnesses

I: Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs; Sir Philip Barton KCMG OBE, Permanent Under-Secretary, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office; and Kumar Iyer, Director General, Economics, Science and Technology, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP, Sir Philip Barton and Kumar Iyer.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to this morning's session of the Foreign Affairs Committee. We are lucky to have with us this morning the Foreign Secretary, Liz Truss. Would you mind introducing your team?

Elizabeth Truss: With me are Sir Philip Barton, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, and Kumar Iyer, the director general for economics.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you very much indeed for coming this morning. There are many issues that we are looking to cover. We will be as brief as we can in questions, and I would be grateful if you would be succinct in your answers as well so we can get through as much as possible.

You have spoken about a network of liberty in the past. How do you see that network building up with the way in which the challenges we are seeing in Ukraine look like they may divide NATO, with China and the Northern Ireland protocol thrown into that, and division among our European partners? Do you see these things as incompatible?

Elizabeth Truss: We see a world, first of all, where security has been shattered, particularly European security. It also has grave consequences for global security with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. What we are seeing is the development of stronger alliances to challenge that. I think the G7 has been very significant in leading on sanctions on Russia and delivering wave after wave of sanctions that have debilitated the Russian economy. Most recently, this weekend we agreed to new sanctions on gold. We have had seven co-ordinated waves of sanctions from the G7.

I want to see the G7 acting as an economic NATO, not just looking at the challenge of Russia but also the challenge of China. In our recent G7 Foreign Ministers meeting we put out a statement about Chinese economic coercion. That is a key part, as far as I am concerned, of the network of liberty. Of course, the GDP of the G7 is 50% of the global economy. When we act collectively, we can ensure different outcomes. We can incentivise other nations differently.

NATO is also extremely important. We want to see an expanded NATO. We want to see a stronger NATO. We want to see more activity on the eastern flank. After this FAC hearing, I am going to Madrid for a NATO summit, which will be very important because it sets the new strategic context.

Q3 **Chair:** President Macron said that you had agreed to join the political economic community. What does that mean?

Elizabeth Truss: It is not true that we have agreed.

Q4 **Chair:** So President Macron is not right.



Elizabeth Truss: I don't know the exact words that President Macron has used, but we have not agreed to that. We see the key guarantor of security in Europe as being NATO. Our aims and ambitions are to strengthen NATO. We see the G7 as the absolutely key economic alliance for us. We have been working very closely with G7 partners throughout the Russian/Ukraine crisis. In fact, just two days ago I had a video conference with my G7 counterparts to co-ordinate next steps. Those are what we see as the key alliances as far as the United Kingdom is concerned.

Q5 **Chair:** You do not buy into his political economic community.

Elizabeth Truss: No.

Q6 **Chair:** That is not what he said. It would be useful to know—

Elizabeth Truss: I have not discussed it with him directly. Chair, I am visiting France on Friday, where I will meet Catherine Colonna, my French counterpart. No doubt, if there are proposals afoot, we will discuss them. We have been developing our bilateral relationships with many EU countries. We have now signed 13 bilateral agreements since EU exit. We have seven more due to be signed in the coming months—most recently, a bilateral agreement with Portugal. We are developing bilateral relationships. I speak regularly to the EU. We also have the joint expeditionary force collaborating on the security side as well. We have plentiful and positive relationships with our European friends.

Q7 **Chair:** Let's talk briefly about NATO. We will come back to some aspects of this, but one of the aspects of NATO that has been really important recently is the application for membership by Sweden and Finland. That is something that I think is supported by the whole House. I would be interested to know how you are working with Turkey in resolving some of the obstacles that seem to be blocking Sweden's and Finland's membership, Sweden's in particular.

Elizabeth Truss: I visited Ankara last week. I had talks with my Foreign Minister counterpart. There are a few remaining issues to be agreed. We are strongly supportive of Sweden and Finland joining NATO. We believe it would strengthen the northern flank in particular, but also add huge value to the alliance.

I am hopeful that an agreement can be reached. There have been discussions taking place between NATO, Turkey, Finland and Sweden. The United Kingdom has been supporting those discussions.

Q8 **Chair:** Do you see them joining in Madrid?

Elizabeth Truss: I very much hope that we will see significant progress at Madrid. I cannot commit to that. The UK is not a party to the direct discussions between Turkey, Finland and Sweden, but we all want to resolve the issues so that those two countries are able to join.

Q9 **Chair:** We will move on to your own Department. It has now been a year



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since the two Departments, DFID and the Foreign Office, were merged. How is the efficiency working? How are you counting whether or not it has been a productive merger? What have you done differently, and what have you done better?

Elizabeth Truss: I am going to ask Philip to talk about some of the more organisational aspects of the merger. What I have done since becoming Foreign Secretary, and since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, is to restructure the Department, first of all to have clearer geographical accountability and, secondly, to make sure we are focused more on geopolitics. We now have a geopolitics director general responsible for geopolitics and security. We have also beefed up Kumar's area, particularly with work on economic security, and we have created a dedicated development director general.

I think that was very important. When I arrived at the Department, development was interspersed through the Department. Of course, there is a development angle to virtually every part of the world we deal with, but there wasn't leadership at board level for development. We have now fixed that.

Q10 **Chair:** You are recreating the ODA, effectively, within the FCO.

Elizabeth Truss: We are creating a dedicated leader for development. That is Nick Dyer. He is responsible for delivering the international development strategy that we launched about a month ago. We have created that structure within the Department. We have created more geographical accountability—for example, around the Indo-Pacific, around Europe, around Africa and Latin America, and around America and the middle east.

What I found before was that there was more of a matrix structure and the accountability was not clear enough. Those are the changes I have made as Foreign Secretary, but I will hand over to Philip to say a bit more about that.

Sir Philip Barton: Thank you, Foreign Secretary. When the Prime Minister announced the merger, he wanted us to be more coherent and have more impact in our international work. The things that I would point to over the first year and a half of the new Department are, first, delivery of a year of UK international leadership last year; a very successful G7; COP26; and the Global Partnership for Education summit in the middle of the year. Again, in all of those, the FCDO were at the heart of the UK's work on that and we achieved more by doing diplomacy and development together.

If you look, for example, at our response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, we have been more agile by having the development side absolutely in from the first steps, as it were, as we looked at how we have done humanitarian support in the region and how we have thought about the



secondary consequences of the invasion around food and security around the world.

A third example is that when we have tried to relieve humanitarian suffering I think we have done a better job at putting our political and diplomatic influence alongside that. For example, as we worked with traditional development partners like the World Food Programme to get supplies into Tigray, in light of the conflict there, we have also been able to use our diplomatic influence alongside that to secure access. I think we are achieving what the Prime Minister wanted, which was more coherence and more impact.

Q11 **Chair:** Do you see development spending principally as a tool of diplomacy?

Elizabeth Truss: It has various purposes, but it has to be a coherent part of our foreign policy. One of the concerns I have had about development spending in the past is whether it was contributing to our overall objectives of promoting freedom and democracy around the world and were we looking at it in a way that challenges some of the geopolitical efforts by malign actors. This is why we launched British International Investment as an alternative to strings-attached investment from countries like China. In fact, we are now working much more collaboratively with our G7 partners. This weekend, we launch the global partnership for infrastructure and investment, which is \$600 billion of spending. It is a G7 collective effort to challenge the Chinese belt and road initiative.

Of course, we need to be focused on alleviating humanitarian suffering, but we also need to look at the future geopolitics and whether our development spending is pushing in the right direction or whether we are inadvertently contributing to countries being pulled towards authoritarian regimes. We look at it through that lens as well as looking at it through the humanitarian lens.

Q12 **Chair:** Quite understandably, you are talking about trade as an instrument of foreign policy. Do you think you should be merged with the Department for International Trade as well?

Elizabeth Truss: No, I do not. We work very closely in collaboration with the Department for Trade and, indeed, with the Ministry of Defence. I think it is right that we have separate Cabinet Ministers for those roles because there is a significant amount of work and different focuses required. What we now have across development, trade, security, defence and diplomacy is a coherent foreign policy all pointing in the same direction.

Q13 **Chair:** Your annual report and accounts state that the merger has put a lot of pressure on staff. I am sure we are very understanding of that. What has the impact been and how have you sought to resolve that situation?



Elizabeth Truss: Staff have of course been affected by the merger but also by Covid. It has had a very difficult effect on the Foreign Office in particular. People were not able to come home from some countries. It is very hard to do the job of a diplomat when you cannot meet people. We are now emerging from that.

Philip can give more details. I do not think that we have seen an increase in turnover of staff from either organisation. We are doing more work to bring talent into the organisation, particularly to make sure that we have the right expertise in areas like technology and economics under Kumar. There is more work needed to reflect what we have to do in modern diplomacy and the fact that economic coercion is becoming a much bigger issue.

Sir Philip Barton: As the Foreign Secretary said, Covid clearly had a very significant impact. It has on everybody, but for us our ability to do our work, and our ability for our diplomats overseas to remain connected with their lives in the UK, was harder. We are emerging from that. What we are seeing now is people in the Department taking pride in what we are achieving and taking pride in the things I described earlier, where we are achieving more by being more coherent and doing things together. What we have seen in the cross-fertilisation of former DFID, with really deep expertise in how you do significant programmes and effect change that way, and former FCO agility is coming together and bringing the best of us into one sense of purpose. There is a clear sense of mission now, delivering for the UK across diplomacy, development and consular work. As I say, I think people are responding positively to that.

Q14 **Chair:** You talked about unity of mission. Do you have unity of terms and conditions yet?

Sir Philip Barton: We are working through aligning our terms and conditions. We have made progress on pay, for example. Our country-based colleagues overseas were on different scales in the places where there were both DFID offices and high commissions and embassies. We are unifying those. We have unified pay scales at senior levels. We will move to unify the delegated grades over the period ahead. There is a complex set of other terms and conditions—something like 200 in total—and we are working to unify those over the next period.

Q15 **Chair:** The Committee was slightly surprised to hear that you are advertising a post in New York that has just been filled on DFID terms and conditions—an organisation that has not existed for a year.

Sir Philip Barton: While we produce unified terms and conditions, people need to be on a set of terms and conditions. At the moment, we are going through the process of creating a single set of terms and conditions.

Q16 **Chair:** When do you expect that to be complete?



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Sir Philip Barton: To be absolutely complete will take a couple of years because it is complex bringing together 200 different terms and conditions.

Q17 **Chair:** When will the last person to be hired on old terms and conditions be hired?

Sir Philip Barton: I cannot give you an absolute answer to that.

Q18 **Chris Bryant:** I have a quick question about humanitarian aid. The UK Government have promised £220 million to Ukraine and surrounding countries. Why has only £60 million been spent so far?

Elizabeth Truss: We have allocated the full £220 million to organisations, but it gets spent over time. I believe the latest figure is around £100 million. Organisations, once they have been allocated the funding, need to deploy that funding over time. All of the £220 million has been allocated.

Q19 **Chris Bryant:** You were talking about authoritarian regimes earlier. You have said that the UK should be a “robust counterweight to authoritarian regimes” and that “we are ending our dependency on authoritarian regimes for energy.” How would you describe the Gulf states?

Elizabeth Truss: I would describe the Gulf states as partners of the United Kingdom. We are currently negotiating a trade deal with the GCC. Is every country that we work with exactly in line with United Kingdom policy on everything? No, they are not, but they are important allies of the United Kingdom.

Q20 **Chris Bryant:** Hang on. Mohammed bin Salman was responsible for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. No? Yes?

Elizabeth Truss: What I would say is that Saudi Arabia—

Q21 **Chris Bryant:** Is he responsible?

Elizabeth Truss: —is an important partner of the United Kingdom.

Q22 **Chris Bryant:** There were 81 executions all on one day in Saudi Arabia, and you do not think that that is an authoritarian regime.

Elizabeth Truss: What I am focused on is making sure that we are dealing with the major threats to the world. The No. 1 threat we are dealing with at the moment is the threat from Russia. In order to do that we need to make sure that we have alternative energy sources. One of the key sources of energy is the Gulf region. We are not dealing in a perfect world. We are dealing in a world where we need to make difficult decisions. I think it is right that we build that closer trading relationship with the Gulf states.

Q23 **Chris Bryant:** If a country is an authoritarian regime, it is fine to do business with it as long as the authoritarianism is only within its own borders. Is that right?



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Elizabeth Truss: What we are facing with Russia is a regime that is actively seeking to invade sovereign nations and create a greater Russia to recreate the former Soviet Union. What we are seeing with China—

Q24 **Chris Bryant:** But we went cap in hand to them for 12 years, and now we are doing the same with Saudi Arabia.

Elizabeth Truss: Well, that was wrong.

Q25 **Chris Bryant:** You supported it.

Elizabeth Truss: I think the approach that was taken to Russia by the west was wrong.

Q26 **Chris Bryant:** In the Gulf trade document that you have just published you say, “The government will continue...to hold those who violate human rights to account.” How are you doing that in the Gulf states at the moment?

Elizabeth Truss: These issues are raised regularly with the relevant Ministers and leaders who we meet in the Gulf states.

Q27 **Chris Bryant:** You have, personally?

Elizabeth Truss: I have personally, yes.

Q28 **Chris Bryant:** Your spokesman said that you had not. What is the last human rights issue that you raised with a Gulf state leader?

Elizabeth Truss: I would have to come back to the Committee on the precise timing of that, but I certainly have raised—

Q29 **Chris Bryant:** Anything. Just tell us anything that you have said on human rights—

Elizabeth Truss: I certainly have raised it when I was in—

Q30 **Chris Bryant:** Go on, tell us one now.

Elizabeth Truss: I am just trying to remember my most recent visit, but I can assure you that I have raised it. I will write to you with the details.

Q31 **Chris Bryant:** You cannot remember a single human rights issue that you have raised with a Gulf state leader.

Elizabeth Truss: I have raised particular issues when I have been in the Gulf about human rights issues.

Q32 **Chris Bryant:** Name one.

Elizabeth Truss: I am not going to go into all the details of private conversations, which I will come back to you on in due course.

Chris Bryant: You cannot name one. Thank you, Chair.

Q33 **Liam Byrne:** Your Government have come under some criticism for the cut in support for overseas development. We have had new resources. Do



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you know how much the UK has had in special drawing rights from the International Monetary Fund?

Elizabeth Truss: I do not have a figure—*[Inaudible.]*

Q34 **Liam Byrne:** It is £19 billion. It is one of the most significant increases in resource that we could deploy. What conversations have you had with the Treasury about rechannelling those special drawing rights?

Elizabeth Truss: Frequent discussions with the Treasury on that issue.

Q35 **Liam Byrne:** When was the last discussion?

Sir Philip Barton: I think it was in the early spring, in the wake of the spending review.

Elizabeth Truss: Yes.

Q36 **Liam Byrne:** What is your personal target for the fraction of special drawing rights that we should be recycling?

Elizabeth Truss: I do not have a personal target for the fraction of drawing rights that we should be targeting, but I am clear that it is an opportunity for us to find funding to help support projects.

Q37 **Liam Byrne:** Should we be rechannelling more than we are today?

Elizabeth Truss: As I say, we are in discussions with the Treasury about just that.

Q38 **Liam Byrne:** Do you know how much we have recycled so far?

Elizabeth Truss: No, I don't.

Q39 **Liam Byrne:** It is about 20% to 25% of £19 billion. It is the biggest single increase that we could make in development aid this year, but you do not know what the figure is and you do not know what your target is.

Elizabeth Truss: As I said, we have regular discussions. In fact, we continue to be in discussions with the Treasury about the overall overseas development budget. We are trying to secure funding for various projects, in particular to make sure that we have funding for Ukraine. I think as we go forward, one of my big focuses is Ukrainian reconstruction and seeing what we can do in terms of SDRs for those projects.

Q40 **Liam Byrne:** We have just been handed £19 billion of special drawing rights. What is your target, your personal objective, for what fraction of that we should be rechannelling?

Elizabeth Truss: My objective is to secure funding for the Ukrainian reconstruction. Those are regular discussions I have with the Treasury. We negotiate on a case-by-case basis with the Treasury, who own the policy for special drawing rights.

Q41 **Liam Byrne:** But you do not have a personal view on what fraction of the £19 billion—



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Elizabeth Truss: I am not going to go into the details of my negotiations with the Treasury which are ongoing. I don't know if Philip wants to say anything.

Q42 **Liam Byrne:** Is it too low?

Sir Philip Barton: As the Foreign Secretary says, it is an ongoing discussion with the Treasury about how the SDRs are used and how they are scored.

Liam Byrne: It sounds like you have cut development spending, you have been given £19 billion and you do not have a strategy for maximising how much of this new £19 billion we are recycling.

Chair: Neil, you wanted to come in.

Q43 **Neil Coyle:** We have moved on slightly, but I will come back to that. It was around the departmental merger and the extension you just touched on around Ukraine work, but also Afghanistan. In March, you wrote to the Prime Minister to ask for 1,000 additional staff for the Department to help manage that. What was the answer?

Sir Philip Barton: As you know, there is a process across the whole of the Government around the size of the civil service. The Foreign Secretary and I are engaged, as we have been asked to be, by the Cabinet Office and the Treasury in that process. We have begun those discussions. They have not concluded. That is the process by which decisions will be taken around the overall size of the civil service and individual Departments.

Q44 **Neil Coyle:** You do not want to cut the number and you have asked for some more. What is the situation right now?

Sir Philip Barton: I am explaining where we are in terms of numbers of people in the Department.

Q45 **Neil Coyle:** Do you have any more yet?

Sir Philip Barton: There is a civil service-wide process which has not concluded. That will answer the question about the long-term size of the Department.

Q46 **Neil Coyle:** When do you expect that?

Sir Philip Barton: On that process there will be a conclusion in the autumn. It is a centrally run process—

Q47 **Neil Coyle:** Sorry, Sir Philip, if it is in autumn, we can come back to it then. In the meantime, what is happening to civil servants out there who are being tasked with the work that you would like the 1,000 extra to be doing? You have asked for that 1,000 quotient, so what has been deprioritised in order to deliver the work of the 1,000 people you have not yet got?



Sir Philip Barton: To finish the answer, the process will conclude in the autumn. In the meantime, we are recruiting additional staff because we knew, particularly at the less senior levels, that we did not have enough staff. That recruitment process is happening now and additional staff will be coming into the Department over the next few months as we conclude those processes.

The Foreign Secretary has set out how we have restructured to make sure that we are prioritising what we need to do in light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and that we are, in the way the Foreign Secretary has described, absolutely focused on that and in a more coherent way around how we lead our development work. The international economics work that Kumar leads is clear about our leadership of geographic work.

Q48 **Neil Coyle:** What was deprioritised?

Sir Philip Barton: We are focused on the top priorities, as the Foreign Secretary has set out, which is primarily Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Q49 **Neil Coyle:** So what was deprioritised? You are not answering. You are saying that you have taken on these additional priorities and you have asked for extra staff to do it, but you are not saying what has been deprioritised. It is a really simple question.

Sir Philip Barton: Clearly, as we look forward, as it were, there is the work you do on Russia's invasion of Ukraine. There are other areas of work that we get to when we can.

Q50 **Neil Coyle:** I have tried to help.

Chair: Perhaps the Foreign Secretary would like to help you.

Elizabeth Truss: As Philip says, we have moved staff into Russia/Ukraine. We have moved staff into geopolitics, supporting the G7 work around that. We have gained some efficiencies in doing that. I think it is important to point that out.

I was talking about development. There are quite a lot of disparate teams across the organisation. We have now put them into a single area and a single directorate. That has created more coherence in the organisation.

Q51 **Chair:** You have drawn down on—

Elizabeth Truss: In terms of geographical areas, I have highlighted Russia/Ukraine. We have a strong tilt towards the Indo-Pacific. We are also making sure that our development aid in Africa is going up over time. Those are the areas that we are prioritising. In terms of staff numbers, I am sure we could write to you on that.

Q52 **Chair:** Perhaps, Foreign Secretary, you could tell me where you might have drawn down from. Have you drawn down from South America? Have you drawn down from Asia? Have you drawn down from America, Australia or Europe? I can keep going, if you like.



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Elizabeth Truss: We also have extra staff who have come over from the Cabinet Office to support the NIP work.

Q53 **Chair:** Have you drawn down no staff from any other areas at all?

Sir Philip Barton: Overall, Chair, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, we prepared an immediate 24/7 crisis response. We drew across the organisation. As the situation became clear, we then wanted to make sure that we had an enhanced effort and again we drew across the organisation and looked at where we could find additional people. We have done that across the whole Department.

Chair: I am just delighted that the Foreign Office is clearly the Department on the mount, and every time you look for loaves and fishes, you reach into the basket and there is enough to feed the 5,000. It is fantastic. It is a remarkable achievement.

Q54 **Bob Seely:** I have a quick question on the changing of contracts. Why is it taking so long to change over people's contracts? I rightly see FCO folks who are not on as generous terms as people who have come over from DFID. Why is it taking so long just to get a single contract for anybody working in the FCDO? You are saying that this might go on for another two years.

Sir Philip Barton: There are two reasons. One is that it is not just the salary and the pay scales which we are moving to unify as quickly as we can. There are obviously affordability questions in how you do that.

There is then a wider package of quite complicated allowances which were different between the two Departments. We need to work out how best to do that. In some cases, for example, if you look at pay, a former DFID colleague might be paid in basic salary terms more than a former FCO colleague, but the wider allowance package will have been different. It is the wider package of allowances that takes longer to work through.

Q55 **Bob Seely:** Do you think that process would be quicker in the private sector, or do you think that a private sector company would take the same amount of time to work through these issues?

Sir Philip Barton: I have discussed this a lot with our non-executive directors, who all have deep private sector experience. What they say is that this is a complex process and it always takes time.

Q56 **Bob Seely:** I have a tiny follow-up on what we were talking about. I am not trying to be critical, but because you have such a draw on resources on Russia and Ukraine, I know that you would want to say that we are still firing on all cylinders on South Africa, the Middle East and all this stuff. But because you are so focused, for very good reason, on Russia and Ukraine, without wishing to be critical, do you think the day-to-day work in other areas is suffering or do you think you are doing more with less? How long can you continue to do more with less before your other ambitions as the FCDO become constricted because you have to focus



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resources?

Elizabeth Truss: Ultimately, there is always a point at which you cannot do things in any organisation, because there is an infinite amount we can do as the Foreign Office. We have to focus. I think that by creating this geopolitical area we are now more efficient in some of the ways we deal with issues. For example, we have recently signed a security and CET agreement with Indonesia. We are now able to look at doing that with other partners around the world. We are able to read across.

My observation about the Foreign Office historically is that it has been quite siloed. We have sometimes reinvented the wheel or not read across. For example, in China we have a China department but a lot of the work we need to do on China is working with our G7 allies to challenge China collectively. That is done better through our geopolitics area.

I think we are doing things differently, but, of course, you are right, Bob, that there will be areas where we cannot do as much. There is a certain amount of reducing some of the activities that were not necessarily generating as much value.

Q57 Bob Seely: Can you enlighten us as to what some of those activities were? What would have been a medium-term priority that has now fallen down the scale, just because of the amount of significant additional work that is now being done, either on China or on Russia and Ukraine?

Sir Philip Barton: The way I would answer it is that, first, to go back to your sustainable question, there is an issue around the overall shape and resourcing of the Department in terms of people. That goes back to the question about the additional 1,000. In a sense, it is true of the two legacy Departments that for a lot of their time they were doing business as usual in a world where we are seeing more frequent and very significant crises. How we have contingency to respond to that is an important question for how we are organised in the future.

On the prioritisation point, what we have not done is said that we are stopping X or Y completely. We do not have a list of things. What we have done is look across the whole Department to resource the increased effort. There will be bilateral relationships where, in an ideal world, we will be doing more on opportunity/proactive work. We now have a reduced resource on that, and are just keeping relationships going because we need to put resource into the response to Russia/Ukraine.

Q58 Chair: Can I ask specifically about an area where you have committed to do extra work? We are all aware of the Rwanda policy and the oversight that has been promised of Rwanda to support them. What extra resources have you put into Rwanda?

Sir Philip Barton: I would have to come back to you on the precise details, Chair. I think what we have done used our excellent high



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commissioner and his team and their time as the resource in support of the Home Office-led third-country partnership.

Q59 **Chair:** As far as you are aware.

Sir Philip Barton: I would have to absolutely check. I do not think we have put in additional staff—obviously, at the UK end, as you would expect, as FCDO we have played our part in the cross-HMG work on this priority area.

Q60 **Chair:** I ask because the commitment was to have oversight in Kigali of refugees who had been sent to Rwanda. I am just wondering what commitment you made as part of that agreement. Presumably there was some consular responsibility as part of that. I am sure the Home Secretary would have asked for support because, of course, this is a high commission and not a Government Department. What commitment did you make?

Elizabeth Truss: Our high commission is very closely involved in what is happening there.

Q61 **Chair:** I am sure. I am just wondering what augmented—

Elizabeth Truss: It is worth saying that Rwanda is a country where we are building a series of partnerships on a number of issues.

Q62 **Chair:** Absolutely. I understand that. I do not wish to be in any way critical. That is a separate Home Office policy, and we are not going into it. You must have made a commitment to the Home Secretary. What did she ask for, and what have you committed to do in the high commission in Kigali in order to support the promise made by the British Government to have oversight of refugees, supposedly numbered in the hundreds, who will at some point in the imminent future be sent to Rwanda?

Elizabeth Truss: My understanding is that that will be led by Home Office officials rather than FCDO officials. This is for all of the migration work we do. Home Office officials lead in terms of assessing accommodation and all of those types of issues. It is very much Home Office-led. We provide diplomatic support, but we would not be providing that type of oversight.

Q63 **Chair:** What preparations have you made to provide diplomatic support to how many Home Office officials in Kigali?

Elizabeth Truss: I would have to come back.

Sir Philip Barton: Chair, we will have to come back to you on the numbers. I think the key thing is that the high commissioner and his team have put at the disposal of the Home Office their diplomatic influence, access and support as we have had our discussions with the Government of Rwanda.

Elizabeth Truss: It is worth saying that one of the points I have focused on as Foreign Secretary is empowering our missions more. Particularly in



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development aid, we are giving them larger development budgets and having more decisions taken at country level. They are in a better position to decide which projects will add value than people sitting in Whitehall. That is a better way of delivering. It is less bureaucratic than what we have had before. Yes, there are areas where we have to prioritise, but, broadly speaking, we are also making our network work better. I think we are getting more out of our staff on the frontline as a result.

Q64 **Chair:** I am going to come to Neil Coyle in a second for more on Rwanda, but before I do, do you support financial targets for foreign aid?

Elizabeth Truss: What do you mean by that?

Q65 **Chair:** Do you support 0.5% financial targets for foreign aid?

Elizabeth Truss: Yes.

Q66 **Chair:** You do. Do you think that the foreign aid target should go back to 0.7%?

Elizabeth Truss: We have pledged that it will go back to 0.7%.

Q67 **Chair:** Indeed. I am just wondering what you think.

Elizabeth Truss: The answer is that I always agree with Government policy, Chair.

Chair: There we go. I am delighted to hear it. Let's go to Rwanda.

Q68 **Neil Coyle:** Maybe it is a bit of jetlag or something, but I am really concerned about this. Is the FCDO's position that the Home Office will have staff on the ground to handle the new partnership?

Elizabeth Truss: The partnership was signed by the Home Secretary with her counterpart in the Rwandan Government. Of course, the United Kingdom and Rwanda have a very close relationship, for which the Foreign Office is responsible. This is a Home Office policy which we are working with the Home Office to deliver in Rwanda.

Q69 **Neil Coyle:** The UK and Rwanda migration and economic development partnership is a Home Office policy?

Elizabeth Truss: Yes.

Q70 **Neil Coyle:** You are quite happy for the Home Secretary to be leading on economic development partnership contracts with other Governments.

Elizabeth Truss: Yes.

Q71 **Neil Coyle:** Are you out of a job?

Elizabeth Truss: No, believe me, I have plenty to do. I have numerous colleagues working internationally, so I have the Energy Secretary signing energy partnerships with other countries. I have the Justice Secretary working on the International Criminal Court.



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The Foreign Office is a Department that delivers in certain areas, particularly in international development, but we have other delivery Departments such as the Home Office who are the experts on dealing with migration. We also have the Business Department who are the experts on dealing with energy. We work collaboratively across Government. We were fully involved in this policy development, but in terms of delivery it is a Home Office responsibility.

Q72 **Neil Coyle:** It sounds like chaos. When the UN says—

Elizabeth Truss: It is a coherent Government policy.

Q73 **Neil Coyle:** When the UN says that this is an illegal policy, an unlawful policy, do you say, “Go and talk to the Home Secretary,” as your subordinate, part of your team, as it sounds like from your recent description just then?

Elizabeth Truss: I do not recognise the premise of that question. This is a perfectly legal policy that this Government are pursuing. As I am sure you are aware, Mr Coyle, all Government policies are cleared cross-government, getting the support of all Government Departments. We have worked very closely with the Home Office on this policy.

Q74 **Neil Coyle:** As the Foreign Secretary for the United Kingdom, no country has raised concerns with you about the legality of that policy?

Elizabeth Truss: No. In fact—

Neil Coyle: Astonishing.

Elizabeth Truss: What has been raised with me by foreign counterparts is wanting to learn from the UK’s policy so that they can engage in similar arrangements.

Q75 **Neil Coyle:** As things stand, there is absolutely no plan to provide additional resource or staff from the Foreign Office to help run operations on the ground in Rwanda?

Sir Philip Barton: To be clear, what I said was we will have to come back and give chapter and verse on the arrangements that we will put in place at the high commission. We work in partnership with the Home Office.

Q76 **Neil Coyle:** On the money for this, the spending, who is responsible for the £120 million aid package? That should be the FCDO. Right? Who is overseeing that £120 million deal?

Elizabeth Truss: It is the Home Office who is responsible for that.

Q77 **Neil Coyle:** The Home Office is overseeing the aid package.

Elizabeth Truss: The ODA budget is not just spent by the Foreign Office. The ODA budget is spent by other Government Departments and it is overall managed by the Treasury, which goes back to Mr Byrne’s point earlier.



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Q78 **Neil Coyle:** On the reduction to 0.5% from 0.7%, is the £120 million—

Sir Philip Barton: It is not ODA money. It is not coming from the development budget.

Q79 **Neil Coyle:** None of the justified increase in support required to deal with Ukraine, Afghanistan and also this unlawful policy in Rwanda is included in the 0.5%. What was the purpose of reducing it to 0.5%? Was it just tokenistic?

Elizabeth Truss: The overall ODA budget is 0.5%.

Q80 **Neil Coyle:** None of this additional aid would be considered—

Elizabeth Truss: For example, the Ukraine funding is within the 0.5%. The budget that the permanent secretary is talking about is a Home Office budget. The budget we control—I can give you the numbers if that is helpful—is £8.5 billion for 2021-22 and goes up to £9.2 billion for 2022-23. By 2025, it is up to £9.9 billion, but that is the ODA allocations that are down to the Foreign Office and for which we are responsible.

Chair: Thank you.

Q81 **Royston Smith:** Foreign Secretary, thank you for coming to see us today. I want to talk a bit about state hostage taking and particularly the release of hostages recently from Iran. We have had two former Foreign Secretaries come before us and talk about the outstanding IMS debt. What were the five conditions required by the Treasury to allow that IMS debt to Iran to be repaid?

Elizabeth Truss: The core point is that the debt had to be used for humanitarian purposes. That was the key requirement.

Q82 **Royston Smith:** And that was the only requirement? Were there any other conditions?

Elizabeth Truss: That was the key requirement, as far as we were concerned; that was the potential issue for the Treasury.

Q83 **Royston Smith:** The Treasury did not have any other requirements. It was just that one. As long as you could show that it was only ever going to be used for humanitarian aid, the money could be released. That was the only stumbling block throughout.

Elizabeth Truss: You will have to ask the Treasury if there were more requirements as far as they were concerned, but as far as we were concerned that was the key area that we had to have assurance on.

Q84 **Royston Smith:** There was that condition specifically. What changed? How did you demonstrate that by paying that debt it would only be used for humanitarian aid? It is very difficult. If you release money for a particular issue, it still allows the regime to backfill in another way. How did you demonstrate categorically to Treasury that that was the only way that that debt was going to be used when it was repaid?



Elizabeth Truss: One of the issues is that I am not able to tell the Committee, because it is confidential, about the precise route that we used. That is the issue. I am unable to share that with you, regrettably, but what I can tell you is that the assurances we received about the route were enough to reassure the Treasury and get it signed off by the Treasury at all levels.

Q85 **Royston Smith:** Did you have discussions with the US Government about the repayment?

Elizabeth Truss: I talk to the US Government regularly about many issues, including the IMS debt, and indeed the issues of the unfairly detained people in Iran.

Q86 **Royston Smith:** What about other detainees in Iran now? Is there any progress on securing their release?

Elizabeth Truss: We continue to press the Iranian Government for the release of all detainees. In the case of some detainees, the families do not want us to reveal who is detained. But I can assure you that we continue to talk to the Iranian Government, and we continue to work to secure the release of all detainees.

Q87 **Royston Smith:** On hostage taking more broadly, we were in Washington last week and met Ambassador Roger Carstens, who is a Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs. He gave us a quite thorough briefing about how the US deals with hostage taking. How do we deal in general with that? How do we deal with families? How do we deal with the extended issues when a person is taken? What mechanism do we use to try to secure their release?

Elizabeth Truss: In terms of the specific cases I have been involved in, we spend a lot of time lobbying Governments directly to secure the release and doing that by means of persuasion. Our teams have recently secured the release of five people from Afghanistan, for example. We also secured the release of Nazanin and Anousheh from Iran. We take a case-by-case approach on all of these issues because it depends on the Government and on the specific circumstance.

In the case of Iran we had two very clear irritants in our bilateral relationship. No. 1 was the detainees, and No. 2 was the IMS debt. I agreed with Minister Abdollahian, the Iranian Foreign Minister, that we would deal with those issues in parallel. That is the approach we took with Iran.

We took a different approach with Afghanistan. We are currently working on various other cases around the world. What we are also doing is working with our G7 partners on a more unified approach to unfair detention. In particular, Canada is leading on this initiative, and there is going to be a conference later this year. What we want is more of an "all for one and one for all" approach so that we cannot be picked off against other countries and we have a common approach to detainee taking.



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Q88 **Royston Smith:** In the US, the special envoy for hostage affairs is the point of contact. He speaks to families and walks them through the process. He makes them understand and accept that it could be a long process and that not much is going to happen overnight. Do we have a single point of contact like that?

Elizabeth Truss: We have an excellent team at the Foreign Office dealing with this.

Sir Philip Barton: We have arranged for our consular director to brief you about how the process works in practice in more detail. I am sorry that has not happened yet for diary reasons. In our Consular Directorate we have what we call a special cases team. Where it is not a run-of-the-mill case that just needs standard consular assistance, they will be responsible. They take responsibility for liaison with the family. They also, crucially, work very closely with the relevant geographic part of the Department and the overseas embassy or high commission, depending on where someone might be held, to make sure that we have the totality of UK effort behind a particular case. It is fully co-ordinated and obviously involves Ministers as necessary. This special cases team will be the one responsible for staying in touch with families over the long term.

Q89 **Royston Smith:** I have one final, small question. They were very candid with us about how many hostages they were looking at in the US and how they had categorised them. Some were not categorised as hostages in the first place, so they have a process to go through. Do you have a similar process? How many people are currently deemed to be hostages from this country?

Sir Philip Barton: I think we need to be clear around language. There are hostages in the sense of hostages held by terrorist groups. I think you are using the term in a broader sense. Those are the workload of the special cases team—

Q90 **Royston Smith:** In the sense of people who have been detained and are not allowed to come home.

Sir Philip Barton: If you are talking about the work of the special cases team, I will make sure that the director, when she briefs you, comes with the numbers of their workload.

Q91 **Alicia Kearns:** To quickly follow on from Royston, the foremost job of the Foreign Office is to keep British nationals safe abroad. I am surprised that you do not want to tell us the number of people. It is not just terrorist groups that hold people hostage. It is hostile states as well. How many British nationals are currently being held hostage around the world?

Sir Philip Barton: I do not have that number in front of me.

Q92 **Alicia Kearns:** But you can see why that concerns me.



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Sir Philip Barton: I will make sure that the director, when she briefs the Committee, comes with the numbers.

Q93 **Chris Bryant:** This is an allied question. Gholamreza Ziaei, the former head of Evin Prison in Iran, which is where Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe was held, was responsible for the inhuman and degrading treatment of prisoners at the prison. He is sanctioned by the EU but not by the UK. Why?

Elizabeth Truss: That is something I am very happy to look into, Chris. I will look into that. I was not aware of that.

Q94 **Chris Bryant:** It would be under the Magnitsky sanctions rather than, obviously, Russian sanctions.

Elizabeth Truss: Let me have a look at that. I am happy to have a look at that.

Q95 **Liam Byrne:** Following Alicia's question, how many dual nationals in Iran are at risk of the death sentence, for alleged spying for example? How many of our fellow citizens are facing that threat today?

Sir Philip Barton: I do not think it is helpful for us to talk about numbers of people held in Iran. As the Foreign Secretary said earlier, families often ask us not to—

Q96 **Liam Byrne:** I am just asking for numbers. I am asking how many Iranian British dual nationals are at risk of the death sentence for alleged spying to date.

Sir Philip Barton: I do not think it is helpful for us to go into numbers.

Q97 **Liam Byrne:** I think the Committee wants to know.

Alicia Kearns: It is helpful.

Elizabeth Truss: I think we can give you a private briefing, but one of the issues that we have with unfairly detained personnel is getting these issues resolved and making them very public. It does not help achieve the outcomes we want. Our absolute priority is getting these British nationals released.

Q98 **Chair:** That is not what Richard Ratcliffe told us. That is not what many of the other families have told us, but we can come back to that.

Elizabeth Truss: I am very—

Q99 **Chair:** There is clearly a difference of opinion here, Foreign Secretary.

Elizabeth Truss: There is, but the way that we secured Nazanin's release and Anousheh's release was through a lot of quite low-key work to get it done. Sometimes publicity does not help.

There are different cases, and different Governments are influenced in different ways. Where we feel it is helpful, we will take that approach. For



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example, securing the release of detainees from Afghanistan was done in a very quiet fashion and was successful. I think we have to be careful not to give publicity to some of these cases where the malign regime wants the publicity. That is the issue we face.

Q100 **Liam Byrne:** Even if the families would like the numbers to be known.

Elizabeth Truss: It is a different issue if the families want to publicise it. I would never, ever second-guess somebody whose family has been detained. They absolutely have a right to publicise their case. I am simply saying that where the families have requested us not to publicise it, and where we think there is a good route to get this done in a relatively low-key manner, that is the approach we will take. The private briefing with our director will be very helpful. This is a discussion that we often have internally when we are trying to deal with these cases.

Q101 **Royston Smith:** Foreign Secretary, we were not asking for names or details. We were asking merely for numbers. I do not think that is an unreasonable question. I agree with almost everything else you have said, but I do not agree with not telling us the numbers.

Elizabeth Truss: What I am saying is that I am happy that we provide that to the Committee on a private basis. That is what I am saying.

Q102 **Liam Byrne:** Should Iran be taken off the foreign terrorist list?

Elizabeth Truss: Sorry?

Q103 **Liam Byrne:** At the moment, Iran is deemed to be supporting terrorism. Is that still your view?

Elizabeth Truss: Yes.

Henry Smith: Foreign Secretary, thanks for joining us. Moving on to private and military—

Q104 **Chair:** Just before you do that, there are, as you know, British citizens who have been detained in Luhansk and Donetsk in, frankly, kangaroo courts under Putin's control. What support are you able to offer them?

Elizabeth Truss: We are offering direct support to the families. We have been in touch with the families. I spoke this morning to the Ukrainian Prime Minister about these specific detainees. You are right that they are prisoners of war. They were legitimately fighting for the Ukrainian army and we are doing all we can to secure their release.

Q105 **Chair:** To be absolutely clear, under the Geneva convention and the protocol for war they are absolutely legal and lawful combatants in a uniformed armed force for a recognised state. There is no debate about that.

Elizabeth Truss: That is absolutely correct.

Chair: Thank you.



Q106 **Henry Smith:** Moving on to illegal combatants, I understand that you recently gave evidence to the International Development Committee with regard to the Wagner Group and the mercenary activities that they are engaged in, destabilising a number of states in Africa. What are the UK Government doing to address and tackle the threat and the destabilising nature of such groups?

Elizabeth Truss: The Wagner Group is a very concerning organisation. It is destabilising countries. It is a wing of the Russian state, essentially. That is what we are seeing. We are seeing Wagner Group personnel also being used in the field in Ukraine.

We have sanctioned the Wagner Group as an entity. We did that in March this year. We are working with our allies. There is a regular discussion at the G7 about what more we can do collectively to target the activities of the Wagner Group.

The other point is that we need to be providing security alternatives to Governments around the world. It is a similar point to the point I was making about economic security. If countries want their security improved, we need to be working with them on counter-terrorism agreements and on areas like joint military exercises and intelligence support so that they are not pulled into the orbit of the malign activities of the Wagner Group or anything else. It is not good enough just to say, "We don't like what the Wagner Group is doing." We also need to be collectively, as the free world, providing alternatives to help countries bolster their own security.

Q107 **Henry Smith:** If I could ask you to expand on that a little bit more, first of all which countries are you particularly concerned about with regard to private military organisations? What does giving an alternative choice to those countries, as you have just been articulating, look like, particularly in working in partnership with our allies?

Elizabeth Truss: In terms of the countries that we believe the Wagner Group has been running deployments to, Syria, Sudan, the Central African Republic, Mozambique, Libya and Mali are all countries where we believe these deployments are.

The point I was making about strengthening our security arrangements is not necessarily with countries that have the Wagner Group active at present. It is also preventive. Having a positive security relationship with the United Kingdom or one of our G7 and NATO allies helps prevent infiltration by the likes of the Wagner Group into those countries. As I said, we have signed co-operation agreements with Indonesia very recently. We work as part of the five-powered agreement with countries like Malaysia in south-east Asia. We are in exploratory talks with a number of African countries about security partnerships. This is an absolute imperative for the free world. As well as challenging the belt and road initiative and other initiatives of economic coercion, we need to be looking at how we collaborate more closely on security.



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Q108 **Chair:** Can I pick up on some of that? You have spoken about a few of the countries you are worried about. One of the countries many of us are worried about at the moment is Libya, which you will be all too well aware is one of the main trafficking routes for illegal migration and is, tragically, seeing huge numbers of people effectively trafficked into slavery, sexual abuse and extreme violence and very often death on the routes that lead up to the Mediterranean coast. What engagement have you had recently with Libya?

Elizabeth Truss: Minister Cleverley has had significant engagement with Libya. He has visited very recently. I do not have the most recent date, but we are in regular touch, urging that elections take place in Libya. That is very important.

Q109 **Chair:** The reason I raise it while we are talking about private military companies is that the person who certainly has a reasonable claim to be the current Prime Minister of Libya has spoken publicly about the threat of the Wagner Group and the different Russian mercenary elements in Libya. Have you met him to discuss it? I believe his name is Bashagha.

Elizabeth Truss: I have not, no.

Q110 **Chair:** I know he was meeting various people in Parliament last week or the week before, so I wondered whether you had had the opportunity.

Elizabeth Truss: No. What we want as the United Kingdom Government is an election to take place so that we have proper process in place in Libya.

Q111 **Chris Bryant:** Do you want an amendment to the international law on mercenaries? In the Geneva conventions there are six clauses you have to fulfil for somebody to be termed a mercenary, and it is really difficult to get any kind of conviction.

Elizabeth Truss: It is an interesting idea.

Q112 **Chris Bryant:** You do not know.

Elizabeth Truss: I do not know. It is an interesting idea, which I will look into.

Chris Bryant: Could you write to us?

Q113 **Chair:** Can I come back briefly to Libya again? Given that we have been speaking this year about the threat of hydrocarbons splitting the NATO alliance and splitting the European partnership that is supporting the coalition helping Ukraine, and given that we are quite rightly focused on illegal migration and the influence it could have on not just the United Kingdom but actually European co-operation, and given that we have been speaking about food security and the threat that that could have to sub-Saharan Africa and indeed many parts of north Africa in terms of unrest—let's not forget that the price rises that were one of the triggers of the Arab spring in 2011 were significantly lower than now—are you worried about the direction of travel in Libya?



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Do you not think it would be one of those areas where the UK's active involvement would have major repercussions, not just for illegal migration to our country but the stability of Europe and the possible trafficking of not just a few million people, as came out of Syria in recent years in 2014 and 2015, but tens of millions, possibly even a hundred or so million people moving north from sub-Saharan Africa?

Elizabeth Truss: Of course, I am extremely concerned about the global energy crisis and the food crisis that we are facing. The UK attended the food crisis summit last week. We are putting more money into support, and we are also working very hard to help get the grain out of Odesa and out of Ukraine overall. Those are absolutely key concerns.

We are pushing on action in Libya. We think the way forward is to have the election. We need people to get round the table and talk to make that progress. We are playing an active role, and James Cleverley is very much leading on that.

Q114 **Chair:** One of the two principal actors in the Libyan scene was in London last week. Was it a policy decision not to meet him, or was it simply timing?

Elizabeth Truss: We need to make sure that we are speaking to both sides in Libya.

Q115 **Chair:** You could invite the other one too.

Elizabeth Truss: I was out of the country.

Q116 **Chair:** Sure, but you have several key Ministers, and you have many officials.

Elizabeth Truss: It was not a policy decision is the answer.

Sir Philip Barton: He was here on a private visit, Chair. Officials meet him as part of our engagement with the whole spectrum of Libyan actors in support of the UN-led efforts to secure political progress, working closely with the P3, France and the US, also Germany and Italy.

Elizabeth Truss: I think it is important that we are even-handed. That is very important from our perspective.

Q117 **Chair:** I completely accept that, but you could meet both of them.

Elizabeth Truss: Believe me, if there was any action that we could take that would resolve the situation in Libya we would take it. What is important is that the parties get round the table and deal with the issue.

Chair: Forgive me, but we are talking about stopping a few hundred people coming to the UK and who we are going to send to Rwanda, and we have literally tens of thousands and possibly even millions crossing from Libya. It would strike me that stopping the leaking tap while ignoring the raging torrent would seem an unwise thing to do. Anyway, we can move on from that with Alicia.



Q118 Alicia Kearns: I want to briefly touch on Bosnia. Parliament and the Foreign Office, under your leadership, have been a very strong voice on the Balkans, which is absolutely right. How are we ensuring that the Balkans are not forgotten, given the immediate crisis? The NATO summit is coming up today, for example. Given that the EU quite clearly is not doing what it needs to do in focusing on the Balkans and bringing them in, my particular concern is that Dodik only a few weeks ago said that Putin had told him, "We are not leaving our friends and the Serbs are just waiting for time." Given the Republika Srpska's quite open desire to restart the Bosnian war, will you be asking EU leaders to join the UK and US in the sanctions regime that you have put forward?

Elizabeth Truss: The answer is yes, I have urged our EU allies to follow us on the sanctions. I recently visited Sarajevo. It is very important that we do not allow the situation to drift and go back to what was an appalling time in the country. I met the Presidents of Bosnia and made that very clear to them in the meeting. I am also concerned, as you say, about Serbia. I was very pleased that Sergey Lavrov's flight was prevented from entering the country, but I am concerned about malign Russian influence in the region, as well as economic coercion by China.

We have recently seen a coal-fired power station funded by China in the country. This is why, as well as providing security assistance, which the United Kingdom is doing—I saw some of the equipment we are supplying in Bosnia when I was there—we need to provide more economic support. I announced £100 million of UK-backed investment by 2025 and opening new UKEF credit lines for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We also need to see our allies act. We recently discussed this at the G7 meeting. I know the Germans are keen to do more. The United States is keen to do more. We are pushing that very hard. While the war in Ukraine is the absolute immediate issue, we cannot have other parts of Europe being destabilised by malign Russian activity.

Q119 Alicia Kearns: Moving to a very different part of the world, looking at the Pacific I really welcome the British International Investment effort and the G7 efforts about this, making it an economic power to counter hostile influence. When we talk about an Indo-Pacific strategy and the tilt, there is a lot of focus on the Indo. What successes, if any, have we had in the Pacific with small states?

Elizabeth Truss: We are doing a lot of work on refocusing our investment offer to the Pacific states, particularly working with Australia and New Zealand, who have very close relationships with those states. At the Commonwealth Heads of Government summit last week, I met both Australia and New Zealand, as well as a number of the Pacific states, to talk about how we can partner on investments to that area.

We have also recently signed up to a joint initiative with the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Japan—Pacific Blue Partnerships; I hope I got that name right. It is all about providing support to small



island states in the Pacific. This is an area where the G7 and our allies, like Australia and New Zealand, really understand that we have to step up.

Q120 **Alicia Kearns:** I think the Committee would be very keen to see a specific strategy or specific plan for what we are going to see in terms of small island state engagement rather than the bigger players that we are used to having that relationship with, if that is possible.

Elizabeth Truss: I hope that you will be able to see more very soon. Jacinda Ardern will be visiting London next week. We are working particularly closely with New Zealand on this issue. I hope we will be able to say more in the coming weeks.

Q121 **Alicia Kearns:** Atrocity prevention is something I have raised time and again on this Committee since I joined it. We are obviously living through a real period when we see continual atrocities on different levels, with hostile state actors but also non-state actors.

Is the conflict centre doing what it should be doing? What are the efforts that are meaningfully being put in place, Sir Philip, under your leadership to improve our atrocity prevention capabilities? As part of that, have you had a chance to consider the recommendations of our Afghanistan report? That specifically looked at crisis planning and administration around preventing atrocities. What efforts have you made to put in place those recommendations?

Sir Philip Barton: On the Afghanistan report, I have read it and we have considered it very carefully. The Government will reply in the normal way. As you know, and as I wrote to the Chair back in March, we did, in light of our experiences last year, conduct a very thorough internal lessons learning process on our Afghanistan response and what that meant for our crisis capability going forward. We took many of those lessons into the way we organised ourselves to respond to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

As you know, and as you said, we have the Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation. That is established and is absolutely working across the whole of the Department in our global network on our atrocity prevention work. It is looking at how we can create a dedicated hub to, basically, take a comprehensive approach to this sort of work in priority countries. It is developing tools like early warning and how and who we engage with, both bilaterally and multilaterally, and what sort of programmatic support we can put in place.

Q122 **Alicia Kearns:** Forgive me, you said we need to look at how we create a hub. When I was elected, I fought for a conflict centre to be established, and it has been established. Why are we looking to create a hub when we already have the conflict centre?



Sir Philip Barton: The conflict centre looks across the whole range of conflict issues, not just atrocity prevention. Atrocity prevention is clearly a key part of that, but it is not the only part.

Q123 **Alicia Kearns:** Would you be able to assess that under your leadership the capabilities of the Foreign Office and its ability to tackle atrocities and prevent them has improved?

Sir Philip Barton: We have not formally assessed that. I would be giving you an instinctive answer, but we are organised around this office and looking in particular at the area.

Q124 **Alicia Kearns:** Perhaps I will put a marker down that, as I asked it last time, you can expect that within the next year I will be asking it again. It would be great to get an actual assessment, because the foremost job is to keep people safe, and therefore that means preventing atrocities. It would be very good to work out how we are going to assess it. The Foreign Office should not be doing any work unless it can assess whether or not it is achieving any outcomes or impact. I would like to come back to China later, Chair.

Elizabeth Truss: I have the details of the partners in the Blue Pacific. We put out a joint statement on 25 June: Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the UK and the United States are establishing partners in the Blue Pacific. It has three aims: delivering results for the Pacific more effectively and efficiently; bolstering Pacific regionalism; and expanding opportunities for co-operation between the Pacific and the world. This is specifically on investing in the Pacific islands. I am happy to share more details of the initiative as they emerge.

Q125 **Chair:** That would be great. Is that connected to the Solomon Islands as well?

Elizabeth Truss: Yes, that is part of it.

Q126 **Chair:** And the response to China's increased presence?

Elizabeth Truss: Absolutely. We are actively looking at what we can do with New Zealand to invest more capability in the Solomons.

Chair: Thank you very much. That came up quite a lot in the United States, as I am sure you would imagine.

Q127 **Henry Smith:** Staying with the Indo-Pacific region, you have recently spoken about the idea of there being a global NATO and how it might be able, through partnership, to help defend democracies in the Indo-Pacific region. How would you envisage that sort of organisation working? What sort of partnerships are being worked on with regard to that? For example, you mentioned earlier a security arrangement with Indonesia and, in response just now to the Chair, working with partners like New Zealand with regard to issues like the Solomon Islands.

Elizabeth Truss: Absolutely. On the global NATO, in this week's new NATO strategic concept there will be strong reference to China. We



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recognise that China has built up its armed forces. It is more active in the European area and therefore NATO needs to be more actively looking at the threat from China. This is a key step forward for NATO in its actions on China.

In the relationships that the UK has in the region, we are working with Australia and New Zealand on investment partnerships. We are also working with Japan on joint investment partnerships. I mentioned the Blue Pacific new initiative with all of those partners and the United States as well.

We have a number of security arrangements. AUKUS is very important. At Kigali last week I met the new Deputy Prime Minister of Australia, who is keen to push forward on all aspects of AUKUS, including pillar 2, which is looking at cyber and technology, as well as pillar 1, the submarines. We want to build on the five powers relationship we have in the region with the likes of Malaysia, and to deepen our security relationship with Japan. I will be going to Japan fairly soon. We are in talks about closer security co-operation. It is a network across the Asia-Pacific region, working with all of our key partners.

Q128 **Henry Smith:** I am very pleased to hear all of that. I think that is extremely important, so why has the China strategy been delayed?

Elizabeth Truss: I didn't know there was—

Sir Philip Barton: Sorry, could you elaborate on that?

Q129 **Henry Smith:** I understand it was due to be published imminently.

Alicia Kearns: There were also media reports about the fact that it was brought to Cabinet and was then shelved. We were told by officials a number of times that the China strategy was due to be published in June.

Elizabeth Truss: I am afraid we—

Q130 **Alicia Kearns:** Did it come to Cabinet and was it shelved?

Elizabeth Truss: Clearly, the Government have regular internal discussions about China and Russia and about key threats, essentially, but there was no intention as far as I am aware to publish a China strategy. We published the integrated review last year. We are now following up with the network of liberty work on expanding our partnerships in the region, both security and economic partnerships, as well as bolstering the G7 as an economic agency. We are doing all that, but there was no intention as far as I am aware to publish a strategy on China.

Q131 **Henry Smith:** But we do have a China strategy.

Elizabeth Truss: Yes. It is encapsulated within the integrated review.

Q132 **Henry Smith:** Why can't it be published then? It is a key piece of foreign policy, as you acknowledge, in terms of work with the G7 and other



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international partners. Surely, there should be a clear, articulated policy. I appreciate it will be an evolving policy.

Elizabeth Truss: We have a very clear, articulated China policy, which I am happy to talk through with this Committee, but we did not commit to publish a strategy.

Q133 **Alicia Kearns:** Forgive me, there is a separate strategy that has been developed under the integrated review because I have met the officials who are drafting the strategy and have been working on it. There is an intention to have a specific China subset strategy, which has been agreed cross-government and has been going round different Government Departments. The understanding was that in part that would be published. If it is not going to be published, has it now been finalised across all Government Departments? Did it come before the Cabinet, and was that shelved as a discussion?

Sir Philip Barton: I think it is in the process of being finalised.

Q134 **Hon. Members:** So there is one.

Sir Philip Barton: As with many countries, including countries like Russia, clearly a lot of our work is sensitive and not easily put into the public domain.

Q135 **Bob Seely:** With respect, we have been repeatedly promised a China strategy, which would be a really important part of the Government's foreign policy going forward. We have been waiting for it. We have been promised it for over a year and there have been statements made to that effect. I think we are all a bit confused that all of a sudden—

Elizabeth Truss: I am very happy to go away and look at this. I am very clear that we have a China strategy which I am currently implementing in everything I do, but in terms of a written document I will go away and look at that, Bob.

Q136 **Bob Seely:** Could you? When we have asked specifically about China in the past two and a half years, we have been promised that a China strategy was coming, almost as a way of articulating the fact that we are looking again at our China strategy because of the change in our relationship with authoritarian states like Russia and China, because of the threat that they pose to the open order and because of the changing nature and the increased authoritarianism in those states. We were repeatedly given holding answers in light of expecting a China strategy.

Elizabeth Truss: I do not believe I have given you those holding answers. I do not believe I have said anything on that.

Q137 **Alicia Kearns:** I completely appreciate that there is a meta China strategy, and I think you are very clear in your direction on China, but, Sir Philip, in terms of you saying it is almost finished, when did you last see the internal China strategy which is cross-government and has been going round Government Departments for months?



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Sir Philip Barton: I would have to come back to you. I cannot recall exactly when I last saw a document.

Q138 **Alicia Kearns:** How do you know it is almost finished?

Sir Philip Barton: I think I said it was in progress.

Q139 **Alicia Kearns:** You said it is almost finalised, I think you will find. It is very concerning that for what should probably be the most important internal policy document for setting the direction of protecting our world order and our country between now and 2050 you do not know where it is, Sir Philip. I understand why it might not come to you yet, Foreign Secretary, although the media seem to think it has, but it definitely exists.

Sir Philip Barton: The Foreign Secretary has very clearly set out, since she has been Foreign Secretary, the overall approach to China. That is what the FCDO is, and has been, implementing. There is obviously wider work across Government led by the National Security Adviser and the National Security Secretariat on things that go to the National Security Council like the China strategy.

Q140 **Alicia Kearns:** But there is one specific strategy that gives civil servants actual outcomes and KPIs on what they deliver, the same as we all knew what the strategy was on countering Daesh, but there was a specific strategy that was agreed cross-government. It would be very helpful if you could write to us about where exactly we are with that. We are all very clear that it exists—

Bob Seely: And it was cross-government. That was the point. This was a cross-government—I am sorry to interrupt, Alicia—strategy that you were working towards.

Alicia Kearns: I think the China team might be sat in the Foreign Office. It is a bit worrying.

Neil Coyle: They are probably in the Home Office.

Q141 **Chair:** Okay, we have Schrödinger's strategy now. It both exists and does not exist at the same time. It's rather wonderful.

Can we move to Afghanistan very briefly? It has been about a year since the Taliban seized power. There are various aspects we could look at, and I would just like to focus very narrowly on a single aspect. We have very clear consular and diplomatic relations with many neighbouring countries that have enormous importance to the United Kingdom. You do not need me to go into them.

How is our policy in Afghanistan in any way supporting our aims in neighbouring countries? How is it supporting the needs of the Afghan people, who, today, must frankly feel pretty abandoned except, as I noted today, by Chinese aid, which seems to be coming in extremely regularly?



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Elizabeth Truss: We are working very closely with our international partners. We recently held a fundraising event to secure more aid to Afghanistan. We immediately had the issue of securing the release of British detainees from Afghanistan, but the situation continues to be appalling. What has happened to women's and girls' rights is appalling. The UK is working with our allies to challenge the Taliban and to hold the Taliban to account.

Q142 **Chair:** Do we have any influence at all?

Elizabeth Truss: I think the global community has influence collectively on Afghanistan in getting the Taliban to move in the right direction.

Chair: Okay. Chris, sanctions.

Q143 **Chris Bryant:** There are a few sanctions, and the first is one I mentioned to you yesterday, so I hope we might be able to clear it up. On 13 April, you announced that 178 individuals would be sanctioned under the Russian sanctions regime. The press statement said that Vladimir Yevtushenko, the chair and owner of PJSC Sistema was being sanctioned. That is a major Russian conglomerate with holdings in a wide range of industries. Your statement said that Sistema and the companies it owns or controls were covered by this designation.

Unfortunately, what he of course immediately did was to give 10% of Sistema to his son, Felix, so Sistema is now not sanctioned. I wonder whether you will now sanction Sistema and, for that matter, Felix and Tatiana, his daughter, who runs an investment arm in London.

Kumar Iyer: I am happy to answer that, Foreign Secretary. I do not want to go into details on specific cases, but what I can say is that we are looking at cases exactly like that one. We are doing three things in that regard. First, we are looking to close loopholes as and when they arise in trust structures and legal structures, as were used in that case. Secondly, we are working with OFSI and the NCA, who lead on the implementation and sanctions enforcement, to make sure there is no evasion around it. Thirdly, we are working with the business community, with banks and lawyers, to make sure that it is not possible to take advantage of loopholes.

Q144 **Chris Bryant:** I do not understand why you cannot say whether you are going to sanction Sistema, because you announced in April that you were intending to.

Elizabeth Truss: Sanctions have less effect if you announce them in advance.

Q145 **Chris Bryant:** But you announced it on 13 April, and now it has fallen apart.

Elizabeth Truss: Kumar has been very clear that we are seeking to deal with loopholes.

Q146 **Chris Bryant:** It is bizarre. Moving on to Magnitsky sanctions, your



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predecessor sanctioned 105 individuals. I thought that was a great record: excellent. You have only done three to date. I know you have not been in post as long as he was there, but so far the UK has sanctioned less than 15% of the perpetrators sanctioned by the US under its Magnitsky sanctions regime in countries including Venezuela, Uganda, Rwanda, Cameroon, Sudan, the Philippines, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Iran, Mexico, Nigeria, the DRC and China. Why are we doing so poorly on Magnitsky sanctions?

Elizabeth Truss: First of all, on sanctions overall, we have sanctioned more individuals and entities concerning Russia than any other country in the world. As I explained at the last Foreign Affairs Committee, we have tripled the size of our sanctions team. We have given it new impetus under Kumar's director generalship and we have changed the legislation completely. We have overhauled our sanctions regime. It is a lot more effective. We have led the G7 in terms of delivering sanctions on Russia.

On the specific areas you mentioned, we have put in some sanctions, but, of course, we continue to look at what more we can do.

Q147 **Chris Bryant:** Going back to the Russian—

Elizabeth Truss: You already suggested one earlier, Mr Bryant.

Chris Bryant: I have another one in a moment.

Elizabeth Truss: You have another one? Well, there we are.

Q148 **Chris Bryant:** I have dozens actually, if you want them. In fact, the US has—

Elizabeth Truss: If you want a job in the Foreign Office sanctions team, let me know.

Q149 **Chris Bryant:** I would love one; thank you. In fact, I would not mind being an ambassador somewhere, but anyway. Except I am not very good at diplomacy.

Elizabeth Truss: That could kill two birds with one stone.

Q150 **Chris Bryant:** It might not improve relations with that country.

Elizabeth Truss: I can think of some countries I would like to send you to.

Q151 **Chris Bryant:** The US has sanctioned an awful lot more people than we have. What worries me is that this may be about capacity. It is tough and I know you have had to triple the number of people working on it. Most of them, I am guessing, are still working on the Russian ones. Some of those, under the emergency provisions, lapse after two bouts of 56 days.

Elizabeth Truss: Exactly.

Q152 **Chris Bryant:** Will all of those be hoovered up now?



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Kumar Iyer: We are working on those. The only ones that will not be renewed are those that we do not think should actually be followed. The sanctions that we implement have to meet our legal standards and the UK's legal tests. What we are able to do with the emergency measure is mirror what others have done and then apply our standards to them, so I don't want to guarantee—

Q153 **Chris Bryant:** Are you confident that nobody will fall off that list?

Kumar Iyer: What I cannot prejudge is that, for example, the Canadians have met our legal standards, but what I can say is that we will process them all.

Q154 **Chris Bryant:** That is a bit concerning. Let me give you one more. The Sudanese central reserve police have been responsible for the use of excessive and lethal force against protestors, human rights defenders, medical workers and opposition figures since the military coup in October 2021. The US sanctioned them in March this year. Why can't we sanction them? Can you have a look at it?

Elizabeth Truss: I will.

Q155 **Chris Bryant:** I have just one thing about assets. It is one thing to freeze an asset. Wouldn't it be much better if we could seize some assets and redeploy them for the victims of Russia's attacks in Ukraine?

Elizabeth Truss: I am supportive of that concept. We are looking very closely at it. The Canadians have, in fact, just passed legislation on it. This is an issue that we are working on jointly with the Home Office and the Treasury, but I certainly agree with the concept. We just need to get the specifics of it right.

Q156 **Chris Bryant:** Presumably, that would need legislation.

Elizabeth Truss: Most probably yes, but not necessarily.

Q157 **Chris Bryant:** Is it in prospect?

Elizabeth Truss: We are looking at it.

Q158 **Liam Byrne:** As a matter of policy, should we be sanctioning former Russian intelligence officers who have worked to undermine the British state? You said at 11.20 that Russia is our No. 1 threat. It would seem to many on the Committee that we should be sanctioning former Russian intelligence officers, especially those who have been based in the UK, who have in the past worked to undermine our interests. I am interested in the policy question.

Elizabeth Truss: Russia is our No. 1 immediate threat, although I believe that in the long term we should be very concerned about China. I just wanted to adjust that point.

We have to look at these issues on a case-by-case basis as to whether or not somebody should be sanctioned. In principle, if the individuals are



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actively involved in being of key strategic interest to the Russian state, and that is what we changed when we put through the legislation earlier this year, of course we should look at them on our sanctions list.

Q159 **Liam Byrne:** Should people like Yuri Kudimov be on the sanctions list?

Elizabeth Truss: I cannot comment on specific cases.

Q160 **Liam Byrne:** This is an individual who was expelled from our country in the 1980s. He was one of the conduits for running Russian money to the Front Nationale in France. He is somebody who commutes between Moscow and London. I do not believe he is on the sanctions list. I am interested in why not.

Elizabeth Truss: Our team continues to work through cases of people who ought to be sanctioned. We clearly do not announce them in advance of those individuals being sanctioned because we do not want them to be able to hide their resources. Two weeks ago, we sanctioned Patriarch Kirill, for example, who has been preaching in favour of the war in Ukraine. We continue to look. We have a rolling programme of people we are looking at.

Q161 **Liam Byrne:** He is a Russian intelligence officer who was expelled from our country in 1985. He has been an active agent of influence for Putin in western Europe, and he does not appear to be on the sanctions list. I am just curious about the oversight. Is it an oversight? Have you just not got round to it?

Elizabeth Truss: I would not say it is an oversight because there is a very long list of people we have been working through. I remember coming to this Committee a couple of months ago and being asked why X or Y had not been sanctioned. We are now in the position where the United Kingdom has sanctioned more individuals and entities than any other country in the world.

Q162 **Liam Byrne:** Apart from former Russian intelligence officers that we have expelled.

Elizabeth Truss: I take on board your suggestion. I will make sure that alongside all the suggestions by Mr Bryant it is definitely on the list we are looking at. Chris asked earlier about the Magnitsky sanctions. We have already tripled the size of our team to 150 people, but they have a long list to work through, I think it is fair to say.

Sir Philip Barton: That is right.

Elizabeth Truss: I do not know if the pipeline has reduced. I doubt it. They were working at full pelt.

Q163 **Liam Byrne:** I think we've got the point. Will future sanctions policy be applied to Chinese companies that are at risk of stealing intellectual property, technology and data?



Elizabeth Truss: I certainly think that, together with our allies, we need to be a lot more careful about technology exports to China. We have already put in place investment screening, so we are more careful about who is investing in our country. We are certainly looking, in line with the whole concept of the G7 acting as an economic NATO, at how we can pay more attention to China's activities and stop it undermining the global economic system. Yes, that is something—

Q164 **Liam Byrne:** There are 1,100 Chinese companies under some form of US control today. Do you know how many Chinese companies are subject to UK Government controls?

Elizabeth Truss: No, I do not.

Q165 **Liam Byrne:** It is one.

Elizabeth Truss: I will add that to my list of suggestions as well.

Q166 **Alicia Kearns:** On sanctions, when we met with the US last week, they were very surprised that Britain has not done more on looking at things like polysilicon imports and solar panels. For example, this impacts us as constituency MPs as well; Canadian Solar, a Chinese company, planned to build in my constituency, despite the fact that they had been found to be complicit in Uyghur genocide. Could you provide some sort of update on where we are in terms of things such as polysilicon and solar companies that have been sanctioned by the US and had their shipments withdrawn but that we are allowing to continue to build new sites in the UK?

Kumar Iyer: We are continuing to work through the list of companies. I am sorry, it is very difficult to go into individual companies if that is okay, for obvious reasons. What I can assure the Committee is that we are looking systematically, not just on our own but with allies, at companies and what they are doing, not just Chinese ones. We are looking at hostile state actors writ large. We are looking at what that means for our supply chain.

I think what is really important, as the Foreign Secretary has referred to before, is that we do not do this on our own as the UK. It does not work if we do it on our own. We have to do it with allies. What we have secured in the G7 leaders' text coming up is an agreement from the G7 as a whole to look at enhanced economic security co-ordination mechanisms, which is a real significant step forward.

Elizabeth Truss: We are really moving this forward to tackle economic coercion from China.

Q167 **Alicia Kearns:** Moving to Ukraine, which I know colleagues are keen to discuss, it would be interesting to get your view, Foreign Secretary. The Defence Secretary is clearly concerned about the west's ability to sustain its supply of weapons. There has been a lot of conversation within the Committee that we almost seem to be taking an approach that, when you take enough antibiotics, the virus becomes resistant and resilient. By not



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giving enough weapons with sufficient up-frontness, we will sustain Russia in some way.

Do you agree with the Defence Secretary's concerns? Moreover, do you think there should be a 20% increase in the defence budget over the next five years and that we should move to 2.5% of GDP?

Elizabeth Truss: I agree with the Defence Secretary's concerns. We have a real issue in terms of the availability of defence equipment, given the hugely increased security threat in Europe. We need to increase our industrial capacity. The Defence Secretary recently chaired a meeting with the defence industry to talk about just that. We are also working on it with our allies and partners. For example, we have a defence agreement with Poland. We are working on how we get more kit. I very strongly agree with that.

I have said before that the free world did not spend enough on defence post the cold war and we are now paying the consequences. We also made all kinds of other strategic errors, particularly on the economy and becoming independent on Russian oil and gas. I support the aims of increasing defence spending through this NATO summit, but I am not going to get involved directly in negotiations between the Chancellor and the Defence Secretary. I have my own negotiations with the Chancellor, which Mr Byrne was asking me about earlier, on things like SDRs.

Q168 **Alicia Kearns:** The Chief of the General Staff, who is fantastic—General Sir Patrick Sanders—has said that British troops need to be ready to fight in Europe again and that they may be called to serve. What is your view on those comments?

Elizabeth Truss: I very strongly agree with his comments. I think that is right. We cannot be complacent. The best thing we can do now is to double down on our support for Ukraine, to get more weapons quicker, to get the higher spec weapons and encourage our allies to do that as well. It is a vital strategic aim that Ukraine prevail. If they do not, it will have untold consequences for the rest of Europe.

Q169 **Alicia Kearns:** Why are some allies not supporting that hard and fast approach?

Elizabeth Truss: There is always a tendency, which we have seen prior to the Ukraine war, towards wishful thinking, to hope that more bad things will not happen and to wait until it is too late. We should have done things earlier. We should have been supplying defensive weapons to Ukraine earlier. We need to learn that lesson for Taiwan.

Every piece of equipment we send takes months of training, so the sooner we do it the better. I think there are those who are still hoping that things will just get better, and this war will go away. That is not going to happen. It is only going to happen by our active involvement in supporting Ukraine and stopping Russia.



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Q170 **Bob Seely:** I want to follow up what Alicia was saying about the long-term nature of the war. Before I do, can you give us an update on what seems to be something that will become increasingly critical, and that is the ability of the Ukrainians to export their grain? It is an important part of the Ukrainian war effort—the non-military side—and has profound international economic implications for the price of food, especially in the developing world. I know that the UK Government are trying to do a lot. Can you update us on what you are doing and how successful it is in getting Ukrainian grain out of the country?

Elizabeth Truss: First of all, we are helping the Ukrainians with rail infrastructure to try to get more grain out through routes such as through Romania. We are also working with the Ukrainians and the Turks on how we can get shipments of grain out, particularly from Odesa, but also from other Ukrainian ports. I was in Ankara last week talking to the Turks about how we do that. We have also had the Defence Secretary there. We have had naval personnel there as well to look at those issues.

Q171 **Bob Seely:** Is there a practical way of shipping grain out of Odesa that does not include NATO shipping providing a military escort? What is the danger of NATO vessels providing a military escort for grain convoys?

Elizabeth Truss: There are currently talks taking place between Ukraine, Russia, Turkey and the United Nations to try to effect a safe passage for commercial vessels.

Q172 **Bob Seely:** Without NATO escorting them in some sort of transatlantic world war two-style convoy.

Elizabeth Truss: Yes. One very important thing is that there is proper protection for the ports themselves. That is a major concern, understandably, for the Ukrainians. There is also the issue of mines in the Black Sea. Where I think the United Kingdom can really offer support is in areas like maritime insurance. Clearly, it is quite a high-risk venture using commercial vessels to take the grain out.

Q173 **Bob Seely:** It is not in the Russian regime's interest to get this grain out. They do not really care about the suffering and they want to—

Elizabeth Truss: They are weaponizing it on purpose.

Q174 **Bob Seely:** They are. What is the likelihood of getting the grain out by vessels? The vessels enable you to get it out in significant quantities, whereby with other means you are going to be very limited in the quantities that you can bring out.

Elizabeth Truss: You are right. We are doing all we can to increase the capacity, together with our allies. I know that the EU is trying to relax customs controls and so on to make it easier to get the grain out of ports in Romania, for example. The only way you can really get the big quantities out is by sea. You are right about the issue with Russia. What we are doing is exploring all possibilities with our allies, as well as pushing the UN solution and really putting the pressure on Russia. It is



them blockading the ports so that the grain cannot come out, which will cause untold hunger and famine around the world.

Q175 **Bob Seely:** When will it result in failure if you cannot get a deal? Do you have a month to get the grain out before it rots? Do you have two weeks?

Elizabeth Truss: It was a month last week when I was in Ankara. There is a month's timetable to get this done. We are putting the maximum pressure we can through the UN, but also looking at alternatives.

Q176 **Bob Seely:** How do you define long term? What we define as long term may be other people's short term. Putin, one suspects, is just going to wear us down and say, "How long do you want to play this game for?" He will continue grinding through Ukrainian territory using an artillery-led approach for months, if not years ahead, maybe calling ceasefires in order to recalibrate when he has seized and can hold a land corridor.

Have we underestimated the amount of kit that we need to supply in order to keep the Ukrainians in the game in the east, but also have the potential to break the land corridor which implies a southern front through Kherson? Have we underestimated how much kit we need to supply and potentially how long it is going to take?

Elizabeth Truss: We have always been clear that this could take a significant amount of time and that the United Kingdom is in it for the long haul. We will take however long it takes to help the Ukrainians to push the Russian army out of their territory. We have always been clear about that.

As I have said, we need to get the modern equipment into Ukraine as quickly as possible. We are seeing good co-ordination among allies through the Ramstein process, being led by the United States. They are, of course, absolutely critical in making sure that Ukraine has the relevant equipment because they have greater depth of supplies than other nations. Of course, it is one of the key issues that I shall be talking to Tony Blinken about at the NATO summit. We will meet later today or tomorrow. This is exactly what we are all going to be talking about at the NATO summit, to make sure that we are pulling out all the stops to get the Ukrainians the equipment they need as soon as possible.

Q177 **Bob Seely:** Where are the production lines for ammunition going to be coming from? Is it out of Poland and the Czechs because they can still make Soviet-era kit? Are we going to be setting up ammunition lines to supply 155, rocket or MLRS? Is most of it going to come from the United States? For every round that the Ukrainians are firing, the Russians are firing 10. They have better logistics supply because they know their kit. A lot of this kit is coming to the Ukrainians new. The German stuff and the British stuff—all of it—has a long logistics tail, as you pointed out. How can we keep the amount of kit up to a required level for the Ukrainians to keep the first front and open up a second front without running out of time and, frankly, people?



Elizabeth Truss: The answer is all of the above in what you have just said. What the United Kingdom is doing is providing significant training support to make sure that the Ukrainians are trained in how to use the next generation of weapons and supplies. That is what we are very focused on. The Prime Minister, in his recent visit to Kyiv, made an announcement about the extra levels of training that we are providing.

Q178 **Bob Seely:** Foreign Secretary and Sir Philip, there is an argument to suggest that Black Swan moments used to be relatively rare, especially during the cold war. Do you think we are now living in a world where we are seeing epoch-shaping events happening at a quicker pace than in the 1990s, or is that just a misunderstanding of the world we live in?

Elizabeth Truss: I think it is two things. One is that the war in Ukraine that is being perpetrated by Russia is partly due to a failure to do the right thing after the cold war. I talked earlier about wishful thinking. There was huge wishful thinking about the direction that Russia was going in, and we collectively failed to take enough action to prevent it.

There are also the aftershocks of Covid really impacting the world. You can see through the inflation price spikes and what we see happening in energy and food that there is instability around the world. A considerable amount of that is about the Covid aftershock. We have had a combination of events: the rise of China economically; the fact that Russia went unchallenged; and the aftershocks of the biggest pandemic in 100 years. I would not exactly describe them as Black Swan events. It is a perfect storm.

Bob Seely: I was thinking more of the last 20 years.

Q179 **Royston Smith:** Foreign Secretary, we were out in Washington and New York last week. One of the things we talked about a lot was whether or not you can keep the coalition together, whether you can keep the countries that are supporting Ukraine together. There are things coming along that will make that more difficult. If the mid-terms in the US result in a change in political representation, they may see that being part of the whole problem as energy prices continue to go up and as fuel prices go up. It is going to make it very difficult to keep the coalition together. No one seems to want to talk about it, and I understand that, but from your point of view do you think that is one of the biggest challenges if we are to see this through long term, as Bob suggested?

Elizabeth Truss: We have heard this idea that somehow the coalition is becoming more divided over time. In fact, at the G7 we saw huge unity, with G7 leaders saying that Ukraine has to prevail and that Russia must be pushed out of Ukraine. There can be no early unfair peace settlement. I think we have seen continued unity from the G7.

In fact, the Commonwealth published a statement from all 54 countries on sovereignty, self-determination and Ukraine. That is a wide range of countries, not just the G7, coming out in support of Ukraine. Yes, there are attempts at Russian disinformation claiming that sanctions are



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responsible for the rising prices, which certainly is not true. We do not have sanctions on food. I think that is a very important point to make.

What I think we are seeing is the coalition holding together over time and remaining firm over time. You mentioned Congress. I was in Washington a couple of months ago. It seems to me that on both sides of the aisle, whether you speak to Nancy Pelosi or Mitch McConnell, they are all absolutely determined in their support for Ukraine and want the United States to be sending heavy weaponry to Ukraine to support it. I think almost regardless of the results of the mid-term elections, we will continue to see very strong support for Ukraine in Congress. I was very struck by how strong it was when I was out there.

Royston Smith: They mentioned to us—this was in a conversation we had with a Congressman—that they felt that was a challenge and that the elections would be something that would make people reconsider their position. Once the electorate start to turn against your policy, it makes it very difficult to hold it together.

Q180 **Chair:** We have just a few minutes left. I know that a few other people want to jump in. Very quickly on the Commonwealth, I am sure you celebrate the reappointment of Baroness Scotland as chair of the Commonwealth.

Elizabeth Truss: As you know, we publicly supported Kamina Johnson Smith, who is the very good Jamaican Foreign Minister. The election was a close-run thing. Baroness Scotland won, and of course we respect that democratic result.

Chair: Delighted to hear it.

Q181 **Henry Smith:** Foreign Secretary, turning to the British Indian Ocean Territory, there have been some worrying signs I think coming out of the Mauritian Government. It is now apparently illegal for Mauritians or anyone to criticise Mauritian sovereign claims over the Chagos Islands. Additionally, there have been a number of environmental concerns which the Mauritian Government have not handled very well. There was a publicity voyage to Chagos several months ago, ostensibly for environmental reasons but really to plant Mauritian flags. There is also concern about growing Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean, with Port Louis. Will you restate your belief, as I understand it, that there is no question as to UK sovereignty over the Chagos Islands?

Elizabeth Truss: We are very clear that the UK has sovereignty over the British Indian Ocean Territory. We have held it since 1814. Mauritius has never held sovereignty and we do not recognise its claim. Last week at Kigali, I met the Mauritian Foreign Minister to talk about how we can work more closely together in areas like the economy and security, to build a closer relationship on those other issues.

Q182 **Chris Bryant:** Colombia has been a key ally of the UK in Latin America for a very long time under successive Governments, even when they



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have been really difficult Governments like Uribe's, and when there has not been much progress on peace and there are still many millions of people who are displaced. It has one of the largest areas of displaced people in the world. There are issues around the relationship with Venezuela and drugs.

A new election and a great new President: I am sure you welcomed his election and his deputy's, the first black woman to take such a role in Latin America. It is a major step forward. Do you have anything to say about Colombia?

Elizabeth Truss: Colombia is a very important partner for NATO. It is our only Latin American global partner and obviously we work very closely on security, defence and countering narcotics. I congratulate Gustavo Petro on his recent election.

Q183 **Chris Bryant:** He has said that he wants to end the war on drugs. How do you feel about that?

Elizabeth Truss: As I say, we are determined to work closely with the Colombian Government on countering narcotics.

Q184 **Chris Bryant:** Would you encourage him to sort out the land issues that have bedevilled many millions of people and have made it impossible to achieve peace?

Elizabeth Truss: We continue to support the implementation of the peace agreement.

Q185 **Alicia Kearns:** Going back to Royston's point, I stress that in our meetings with ambassadors from around the world—not the G7, not the key ones—there were a number of countries that genuinely said that they are more focused on food. The argument that the sanctions are not affecting food, which we know is not the reality, is however genuinely taking bite. They are more focused on being seen to not take sides and to make sure they do not end up in a food crisis than they are about supporting Ukraine. I think that was quite striking. I will not name the countries, but there are a large number of countries.

Just now, when I asked you about Ukraine, you said that we need to learn the lessons for not arming Ukraine early enough when it comes to Taiwan. Are there active conversations taking place about providing defensive weapon systems to Taiwan, and can you give us an idea of what that looks like for you?

Elizabeth Truss: What we have been talking about with our G7 allies is making sure that Taiwan has the capabilities to defend itself.

Q186 **Alicia Kearns:** Have any of those capabilities been provided as yet?

Elizabeth Truss: We provide capabilities to Taiwan, as do other allies around the world. What we are doing is working with our partners to make sure that they have those capabilities because we need to defend the country.



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Q187 **Chair:** Could I briefly go back to Libya, as we close? You made an interesting point that I would like to pick up on. You said this was all about the elections. Did your officials brief you on the conversation that was had about elections?

Elizabeth Truss: What conversation?

Q188 **Chair:** With Bashagha.

Elizabeth Truss: I have had conversations with my officials about the issue. I am not sure if I was specifically briefed on that conversation.

Q189 **Chair:** I will take that as a no. You said you were out of the country. You did go to the fundraiser on Monday night, didn't you?

Elizabeth Truss: Yes, I did.

Q190 **Chair:** He arrived on Monday morning. Given that it was not a policy position, would you meet with both of the candidates, one of whom has been disqualified by the UN for the position of—

Elizabeth Truss: I would be very happy to meet both, yes.

Q191 **Chair:** Excellent. Has your ambassador in Tripoli had any contact with any of them?

Elizabeth Truss: I believe they have, but I cannot comment further.

Sir Philip Barton: I am sure she would have done, but I will double-check.

Chair: Excellent. We promised you would be out by one o'clock. We are three minutes early.

Elizabeth Truss: Thank you for moving the meeting forward so that I could get to Madrid.

Chair: Indeed. It matters to all of us. Please take our huge support for Sweden and Finland joining NATO. Thank you very much.