



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Foreign Affairs Committee

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

Monday 14 November 2022

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

Questions 192-323

Witnesses

I: Rt Hon James Cleverly MP, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs at Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and Sir Philip Barton KCMG OBE, Permanent Under-Secretary at Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rt Hon James Cleverly and Sir Philip Barton.

Q192 **Chair:** Welcome to this meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee. Welcome, Foreign Secretary, to your first meeting with us as Foreign Secretary, and welcome back, Sir Philip Barton.

Going straight into questions, I would like to start by raising the very serious human rights situation of Alaa Abd El-Fattah in Egypt, which has obviously been a matter of great concern and great discussion across the country. Will you update us on his medical status, Foreign Secretary and on your view of his nationality status? The Egyptians seem to dispute the fact that he has dual nationality, and we obviously insist that he does have British nationality and that he should have consular access.

James Cleverly: The UK's interest in Alaa Abd El-Fattah is of long standing. He was granted British citizenship in December 2021, and we have sought to gain consular access to him from that date forward.

In terms of the most recent situation, I spoke to HMA Cairo earlier today to get an update; we have been receiving regular updates at ministerial level and official level for quite some time. While we do not have consular access, it is of course not possible for me to give the Committee the usual level of detail that we would were we not in that position, but based on the update from HMA Cairo and a letter that has been received by his sister, which I believe is now in the public domain, we understand that he is taking water.

We will continue to push for consular access and to raise Alaa Abd El-Fattah's case with the Egyptian authorities at diplomatic level, official level and ministerial level. Since becoming Foreign Secretary I have raised his case I think on every occasion—certainly on nearly every occasion—that I have spoken with the Egyptian Foreign Minister, and I know that the Prime Minister raised his case when he spoke with President Sisi at their bilateral at COP27.

We remain interested in this case. We remain interested in Alaa Abd El-Fattah's welfare. I have spoken with his sisters, and Lord Ahmad has met his sisters. We will continue to make it clear to the Egyptian authorities that we are interested in this case, and we will continue pushing for consular access.

Q193 **Chair:** Forgive me, but what is different about this case? In general, we do not have problems with Egypt giving us consular access to dual nationals, but in this case there seems to be a question about whether they recognise that dual nationality status. Could you give us a bit more detail about why there seems to be such an issue with this specific case and why it is so different?



James Cleverly: My understanding is that the Egyptian authorities feel that he has not completed the administrative process in the Egyptian system for them to recognise dual nationality. We have a good and professional working relationship with the Egyptian authorities. I met the previous Egyptian ambassador regularly and had a very good working relationship with him, and I enjoy a very good and professional relationship with the Egyptian Foreign Minister. We are able to speak regularly and frankly with the Egyptian authorities about this case. As I say, there is a difference of opinion. Our view is that the process has been completed; the Egyptian view is that the process has not been completed and that until it is, we will not be able to exercise the consular access we would normally expect with a British citizen.

Q194 **Chair:** May I say on behalf of all the Committee that our hearts go out to Alaa Abd El-Fattah's family? We all hope to see a safe, swift and healthy resolution to the situation. I hope that that can be heard where it needs to be heard.

More generally, as this is your first appearance as Foreign Secretary, we would love to know—briefly, if possible—what your priorities are for your first year as Foreign Secretary.

James Cleverly: I will try to behave myself—

Chair: Mr Bryant will be timekeeping.

James Cleverly: —and not spend two hours talking about what my priorities are. One of the things that you have to recognise when you are Foreign Secretary is that some of the Department's priorities and some of the priorities of the Foreign Secretary are defined by circumstances beyond our control; we have to be realistic about that. Obviously, the ongoing support for Ukraine's people in the defence of their homeland against Russian invasion and Russian aggression in all its forms remains a very high priority for me. On reappointing me, the Prime Minister made it clear that he expected that to remain a priority both for me as an individual and for the country as a whole.

In terms of strategic duration priorities, we published the Integrated Review. The Indo-Pacific tilt was a very significant part of that, and it will remain a significant part of our focus. I made a speech in Singapore where I made the point that the Indo-Pacific tilt is here to stay, and talked through some of the elements of making that meaningful and making it a reality. Another priority, of course, is resetting the relationship with our European partners and the resolution of some of the outstanding issues from our departure from the EU. Those are some of the things that are defined by circumstances.

In terms of my priorities as the Foreign Secretary, there are a couple of things that I feel very strongly about. One is making sure that we still deliver that responsive work with excellence, so that when events occur, we deal with them professionally and well. There will always be global events that hit us.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

However, as I have said on a number of occasions, and indeed I said it at the all-staff meeting that I conducted earlier today, I want the Department and everyone within it to make the time to think about the possible events—not the inevitable events, but the possible events that we may have to deal with. I want us to try and get ahead of those events, to do some contingency planning and a little bit of horizon scanning, ideally trying to peek over the horizon so we are preparing ourselves for possible events that might be difficult to deal with and, as far as possible, making sure that our response is algorithmic. We should do our thinking ahead of time, rather than just responsively, to buy ourselves a bit more agility in the moment.

Another geostrategic priority is those middle-income countries, middle-ground countries, unaligned countries—there isn't an easily defined name for them, but there are lots of different ways of describing them—which are currently being tapped on the shoulder by other philosophies on the world stage, trying to encourage them to move in that direction. I am trying to make sure that we are investing in the long-term relationships, the strategic-level relationships, over the next five, 10, 20, 30 years to encourage them to come into our philosophical orbit, as it were.

The other thing is to try to make sure that the organisation is a happy, effective, high-functioning organisation.

Q195 Chair: We will definitely come on to that, I can assure you. Two very quick follow-ups, then: first, how is this a substantial departure from what we saw under Liz Truss and Boris Johnson? I think people are keen to understand how the Department will be different.

Secondly, on your point about responsiveness, a lot of that comes down to consular level. The ultimate job of the Foreign Office is to keep the British people safe and protect British nationals when they are abroad, so do you agree that consular should be a required posting for all Foreign Office staff before they get to ambassador grade, so that they adequately understand the pressures? Consular is often looked down on; the Foreign Office sometimes has difficulty filling those posts, and it is definitely not seen as the high-level politics that perhaps are seen elsewhere, yet that is its most fundamental responsibility to the British people.

James Cleverly: On the first one, in terms of substantial differentiation, I am not going out of my way to be different for the sake of being different. Much of foreign policy is about continuity. One of our big offers to the world is reliability, and to a degree predictability—sometimes being even just a bit boring. That is not a bad thing. I am not tripping over myself to change for the sake of change. As I say, with things such as Ukraine, the Indo-Pacific tilt, our relationships with the United States of America, NATO and European friends and partners, it is about maintaining rather than chopping and changing. I am not trying to be different for the sake of being different.

In terms of additional emphasis on those middle-ground countries and patient diplomacy or strategic endurance—whatever you want to call it—it



is about making sure that we recognise that you cannot build relationships overnight. You certainly cannot draw down on those relationships overnight. We need to invest now in the countries that are going to be significant players in five, 10, 15 or 20 years' time. An enhanced focus on that is perhaps something I have more than my predecessors.

Q196 **Chair:** And in terms of the consular side?

James Cleverly: The consular side is incredibly important. It is where the rubber hits the road in terms of the foreign policy that most British people will experience overseas. You make a really important point about the standing of consular and how important it is. I always make the point of having an all-staff meeting when I go out to post. I always make a point of talking to the consular team. I often find there is a huge amount of continuity of service in consular; it is not for everybody, but for the people who really get it—funnily enough and despite all the challenges—they really love it. Career management is difficult. I wouldn't want to commit to saying that you have to go through the consular route to get to being an ambassador, but I think you have to have a real understanding of it.

Q197 **Chair:** Other countries do require it, such as America and Canada. I speak to many ambassadors who are frustrated with the fact that senior people do not take consular seriously and then when we have a whole Foreign Office response, people do not have that skillset. It might be one to take away and consider.

James Cleverly: It is certainly worth considering. The whole thing about a structural change like that is that it would probably not really have an effect for 10 or 15 years, as people then start working their way up their career. I would want to make sure that I look at that as an option, but I would also want to make sure that everybody—HMAs, deputy heads of missions or whatever—recognises the importance of consular, because most of what we do is invisible. Consular is where British people experience the Foreign Office service, and it should be absolutely top quality. That is what the British people should expect.

Chair: We are going to come back in a minute to DfID merger, but we will now discuss Ukraine. Chris, could you kick us off?

Q198 **Chris Bryant:** Welcome, Foreign Secretary. Congratulations on being Foreign Secretary. You and I have corresponded about the Abramovich money going to Ukraine. The letter you sent me the other day suggests it is going to take some considerable period of time before that money actually arrives in Ukraine and will be used by a charity. As I understand what you are saying, somebody is setting up a charity in Ukraine. Who is setting it up?

James Cleverly: It is an independent foundation, and it is being established by humanitarian experts.

Q199 **Chris Bryant:** Who are these humanitarian experts?

James Cleverly: I can give you more detail, but I do not have the names in front of me.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q200 **Chris Bryant:** Can you guarantee that none of them are actually Mr Abramovich's people?

James Cleverly: Yes.

Q201 **Chris Bryant:** You are certain? They are not employed by him and they are not his associates?

James Cleverly: If you have something you want to tell me, please do. My working assumption is that they will be independent humanitarian experts.

Q202 **Chris Bryant:** Have you met them? Has there been a paper on this?

James Cleverly: This is a question that sounds a bit like a statement. If there is something you are suggesting has happened or not happened, then please let me know and I will look into it.

Q203 **Chris Bryant:** You are likely to know more than I do about who is setting up this organisation. You said that they are humanitarian experts. I am just wondering who they are.

James Cleverly: I don't have the names.

Sir Philip Barton: The key point is that for money to be moved to the foundation, a licence has to be issued by the Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation, which is part of the Treasury. It will make a judgment about the risk of sanction circumventions. That is the point at which the British system will take a view on the foundation and how it is established.

Q204 **Chris Bryant:** But there is a formal British charity already in place, run in co-ordination with the British Government. Why can't the money just go straight into that? It could have been there for months already. You could just write the cheque tomorrow.

James Cleverly: I would need to look into that. Generally, when things seem so blatantly easy that they are the obvious answer but they are not being chosen, there is a reason why. I do not know what that would be. If there is a mechanism that you think would be quicker while also giving the protections that we and His Majesty's Treasury require—

Q205 **Chris Bryant:** The Government sponsor a body that is designed to bring together all the co-ordinating of charitable work in Ukraine. I do not understand why it cannot go straight into that. It is sponsored by your Department.

James Cleverly: The foundation is being established under the framework that Sir Philip has outlined. I am more than happy to look at other vehicles, but things that seem to be a very easy answer are not always the easiest answer.

Q206 **Chris Bryant:** And sometimes when people use words like those in your letter, it is because somebody is trying to hide something.

James Cleverly: If you are suggesting we are trying to hide something, please let me know what you think we are trying to hide. Otherwise, your



HOUSE OF COMMONS

question implies something, and I cannot respond to implications. If you have a specific concern, please let me know and I will address that specific concern.

Q207 Chris Bryant: You give us the details of exactly how this foundation is being set up, and it would be great if you could look at an alternative swiftly. Otherwise, the danger is that the money will not get to Ukraine until the end of next year or even the year after that. That would obviously be a failure, because Kherson needs rebuilding now, doesn't it?

James Cleverly: We are not waiting for this money to help the Ukrainians. Just this afternoon, I signed an MOU to make sure we can support them in the reconstruction of their energy supply. The simple but sad truth is that even if the conflict were to stop today, Ukraine's requirement for international support will endure. We are going to make sure that the money gets to them, that it is useful and that it is in no way in breach of our sanctions framework. That is what we are looking to do.

Q208 Chris Bryant: Talking of sanctions, can you explain why we have only sanctioned a fifth of the individuals and organisations that the United States of America has sanctioned?

James Cleverly: Each country's sanctions regime is different. It is a very unsophisticated metric just to say how many individuals have been sanctioned. Each country works their sanctions regime in a subtly different way. Our sanctions have been incredibly effective. There was a reason why Vladimir Putin singled out the UK for criticism earlier in the conflict; it was because our sanctions were hitting his money supply and hitting it hard.

Our sanctions are done in co-ordination with our international partners. That is how they are the most effective. I feel uncomfortable with trying to play one-upmanship with regard to sanctions. We are all trying to achieve the same thing, which is to choke off the financial supply funding Putin's war in Ukraine. The conversations that I have at G7 and other international forums are about achieving that, and we will work with our partners internationally to do that.

Q209 Chris Bryant: There are various different bits of sanctioning that we do. Some of them are under Magnitsky sanctions, and that is the area where we are weakest. I think in Liz Truss's time as Foreign Secretary, only three people were added to the list. What I am trying to get at is this: I do not understand whether that is lack of capacity or whether you have come to a different determination about individuals, but, as I say, the United States of America and the EU have sanctioned five times as many people as we have, and that just seems odd. I grant that it is not a perfect metric, but five times is a significant difference.

James Cleverly: Not only is that not the only metric, but I do not think it is necessarily the most useful metric. The impact of our sanctions has been very significant. As I say, we were singled out for a reason, and it is because our sanctions were really hurting. Our sanctions were doing what they were meant to do.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q210 Chair: Forgive me, but there is one place where our sanctions have not cut through, and that is human rights. One of the great things about the Magnitsky sanctions is the ability to sanction those who profit from human rights abuses, and to use it as a human rights tool around the world. We have not done that as a country. Do you see it as your aspiration over the next few years as Foreign Secretary to really use that tool to shape human rights and minimise human rights abuses, or will we continue to use it more as a blunt tool nationally?

James Cleverly: Again, I don't agree with your description of it being a blunt tool. We want to use the tools at our disposal where they are most appropriate. It is right that we look at our human rights sanctions where they are appropriate and at other sanctions where they are most appropriate. You talk about which other countries are doing certain things. We base our sanctions on the information that we have against the legal thresholds in our legislation. Where we are able to share information with international partners, we do so. Where we are able to replicate sanctions that other countries have put in, we look to do so, and where we are not on exactly the same page because of differentials in our legislation, we look to co-ordinate as closely as we can.

Q211 Chair: But it is the absence. We are not using them to push forward and improve human rights around the world. Other countries are using them specifically for that outcome. Is that something you want to see us do? That was the whole point of widening the legislation—so that it could be used to reduce human rights abuses around the world, not just in the worst-case scenarios, such as Ukraine, but we have not yet done that mean feat. Is that something you would like to see us do?

James Cleverly: I want to make sure that we use the most appropriate tool at our disposal. When the human rights sanctions are the most appropriate tool, we will, of course, seek to use that. If there are other sanctions or avenues that are more appropriate, we will use them. Indeed, if there are ways of ultimately preventing human rights abuses rather than responding to them, that will always be our preferred option.

Q212 Chris Bryant: It just seems odd that we have used that tool less in relation to Hong Kong than the United States of America has. That seems bizarre. The only explanation I can find is that either Dominic Raab was very committed to this and it was one of the things he introduced, then Liz Truss came in and was not interested in it, and now you are not sure whether you are interested in it; or it is that somebody thinks it is not an appropriate tool, in which case they should explain why it is not an appropriate tool; or do you not have the capacity to get through the listings adequately?

James Cleverly: As I said, we will seek to use the most appropriate tool in any given circumstance. I do not have any objection to any particular way of having an influence on the world stage. Where our human rights sanction regime is the most appropriate way to bring about positive change, we will not hesitate to use that.

Q213 Chris Bryant: But there is another danger for us that, if the EU or



HOUSE OF COMMONS

America have sanctioned an individual and we choose not to, all their activity comes to the UK rather than anywhere else, so we are not acting in co-operation with everybody else. Anyway—

James Cleverly: No, I don't think it is legitimate to ask a question or make a stark statement and then wave your hands so I don't answer. The point is that we do co-ordinate our international sanctions with our international partners. That is in the same way that there are individuals and entities that we have sanctioned that other countries have not—

Chris Bryant: Hardly any.

James Cleverly: We always seek to make sure—

Q214 **Chris Bryant:** Name one. Name somebody who is sanctioned by us and not by anybody else.

James Cleverly: I don't have one in particular, but your contention that there is a not a single—

Chris Bryant: I'm pretty certain there is no one; I've been through the list carefully. To go back to Ukraine, and this is where I think we will agree, you will have seen that the United States of America and others are calling for peace negotiations and giving diplomacy a chance. I am presuming and hoping that your position is still that the only person who can determine whether there should be any negotiations is President Zelensky and the people of Ukraine. Their line in the sand is very firm, which is that not until every single Russian boot has left Ukraine, including the bits of Ukraine that were taken in 2014, can there be such negotiations.

James Cleverly: Our position is that we support the Ukrainians. The Ukrainians have a Government and President Zelensky is the head of that Government. It is right for the Ukrainians to decide when, how and under what circumstances they negotiate for peace. But you are absolutely right: it would be deeply wrong for a third country to—I am not going to suggest that it would be dictated to the Ukrainians, but ultimately it has to be for the Ukrainians. They are the ones who have lost their loved ones. They are the ones who have lost their children defending their homeland. It is right that they decide under what circumstances they agree a peace settlement.

Q215 **Liam Byrne:** I want to briefly follow up on Chris' questions about sanctions. You will know that Bill Browder was in front of the Economic Crime Committee two weeks ago, giving evidence on what is actually quite a weak Bill that is before the House. He wanted to make the point, and this is the word that he used, that it was "shameful" that the UK has not had any prosecutions for money laundering, despite our country being the epicentre of the Russian laundromat—the troika laundromat—and the Azerbaijan laundromat. We have UK corporate structures being used to launder billions of pounds, which Catherine Belton has been really clear has enabled Putin to fund the war in Ukraine. Can you tell us what you are doing to strengthen HMGs capacity to deliver these prosecutions?



James Cleverly: We take illicit finance very seriously.

Q216 **Liam Byrne:** So seriously that we have not prosecuted anyone?

James Cleverly: When I have conversations internationally, we do speak about the need to collectively crack down on illicit finance. We have made legislative changes to toughen our domestic position, and I speak regularly with international interlocutors, particularly those that have significant financial services sectors in their jurisdictions, about our joint work on this. Ultimately, prosecution in this area is not led by the Foreign Office but, as with so many bits of Government work, the Foreign Office has a keen interest in it, and we work with our international friends and allies to crack down on illicit finance.

Q217 **Liam Byrne:** Do you agree that Bill Browder is right that it is shameful that we have had no prosecutions for money laundering?

James Cleverly: When did the legislation come in?

Chris Bryant: 2018.

James Cleverly: These are often long and complicated cases, and of course we want to see people brought to justice. We at the FCDO will do whatever we can to support prosecutions. We want to see people brought to justice for this stuff.

Q218 **Liam Byrne:** When we saw President Zelensky earlier in the year, he set out five core aims that the Ukrainian state is pursuing; safe skies above Ukraine, 100% decolonisation of Ukraine—the complete elimination of Russian forces in their territory—prosecution of Russia for the crime of aggression, prosecution for individual war crimes against the perpetrators of those crimes, and the exchange of prisoners and the return of citizens. Do you demur from any of those five objectives, or are there any that you disagree with?

James Cleverly: As I said in response to the previous question, it is ultimately for the Ukrainians to decide under what circumstances and conditions they would want to have a peace settlement. Our job as an international friend is to ensure that they can continue to defend themselves against Russian aggression and push back Russian forces. The Prime Minister has made it absolutely clear that our commitment to the Ukrainians is unwavering, but it is ultimately for the Ukrainians to decide under what circumstances they would sue for peace.

Q219 **Liam Byrne:** So there is no one of those five items that you would encourage the Ukrainians to drop?

James Cleverly: I think it would be wrong for a third country to start saying to Ukraine what they should or should not accept in a peace settlement. That is for them—they are the ones that are defending their country and have lost people in defending their nation. It will be their decision.

Q220 **Liam Byrne:** You said at UNGA that there should be no impunity for



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Putin's hostility. Those were the precise words that you used. Is it not now time that we should think about proscribing the United Party of Russia in the way that we proscribe political organisations such as Hamas?

James Cleverly: There are grounds to look at wider proscriptions. You will know, and I have said a number of times at the Dispatch Box, that we do not speculate in public about future proscriptions and designations.

Q221 **Liam Byrne:** I am not asking you to speculate about it; I am asking you to get on with it. Is that something that you can do?

James Cleverly: Answering that question would be speculating about future designation, would it not?

Q222 **Liam Byrne:** So it is not impossible.

James Cleverly: It is not impossible, no.

Q223 **Liam Byrne:** What about designating Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism? We have heard on this Committee that we have obviously designated Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism since 1983, and Russia is providing sanctuary for the Russian Imperial Movement, which is designated as a terrorist group by the United States. Should we not take that step now of designating Russia as a terrorist state?

James Cleverly: As I said in answer to previous questions, I am not going to speculate about future designations. The point is that we will always look to make sure that we hamper Russia's ability to wage war in Ukraine. We have been doing that through our sanctions work. We have made sure that we continue to support the Ukrainians as they defend themselves. I had meetings with the chief prosecutor of the ICC, Karim Khan, a few weeks ago about ensuring that there is a framework to bring to justice the perpetrators of war crimes and human rights violations. We will continue to ensure that there is the preservation of evidence and all the things that need to happen in order to facilitate future criminal actions against those people who are brutalising Ukrainians.

Q224 **Liam Byrne:** Why would we not designate Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism now? Surely the evidence is there.

James Cleverly: As I say, the priority of the UK Government is to hamper their ability to wage war in Ukraine. That is where our focus is and that is where we will continue to focus because that is what we need to achieve in the short term. In terms of future designations, as I say, we do not speculate. I know it is frustrating to the Committee and sometimes frustrating to observers that that is our position. Nevertheless, we will always consider what is the best way of bringing about our strategic aims. Our strategic aims at the moment are hampering Russia's ability to wage war in Ukraine and supporting the Ukrainians as they defend themselves.

Q225 **Liam Byrne:** I think it looks weak not taking these steps to proscribe the United Russia party or designate Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism, but let me pick you up on that last answer. You said it is our business to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

supply Ukraine with what it needs to win. Now that Kherson has fallen after the brave operations of the last week or two, Crimea is in the crosshairs and the battle for the Black Sea is now in sight. Ukraine could hit Russian navy forces now in Crimea if we supplied it with missiles that can be fired from HIMARS with a range of 300 km. Why are we not now supplying Ukraine with the munitions they need to take out Russian navy forces in Sevastopol, which are currently capable of firing Kalibr cruise missiles back into Ukraine?

James Cleverly: Throughout this conflict, we and other international partners have liaised with the Ukrainians about what equipment they need. Through this conflict, their requirement has evolved. At the start, during the assault on Kyiv, for example, Javelin and NLAWs were very much the weapons that they required. As they pushed the Russian forces back and we saw a move towards attacks from the air, the requirement was for air defence systems—both ground-based air defence systems and air-to-air air defence missiles—which we have also provided. We will continue to liaise with the Ukrainians about what equipment they require and how best we can help—I mean “we” both as the UK and as the wider international community—with those things. That will always be an ongoing conversation.

Q226 **Liam Byrne:** So we are not ruling out supplying ATACMS at this stage.

James Cleverly: As I say, our support to the Ukrainians is always done in co-operation with them and in co-ordination with our allies.

Liam Byrne: Okay, but we are not ruling it out; that is progress.

Q227 **Royston Smith:** The Foreign Affairs team was in Washington and New York in March or April, and one of the conversations that we had, right up to UN level with the Secretary-General, was what happens if cracks start to appear in the international coalition—if fatigue sets in not only with politics and politicians, but with Governments and then people.

I was in New York last week for the mid-term elections. Two things struck me. One was talk among politicians about peace negotiations; as you said, that is not really for us or the US. The other thing was almost a throwaway line, but it highlighted the point that there should be no blank cheque. That was from an American politician—I will not attribute it to anyone, but that was the thought process.

I have asked this question over and over. Early in the conflict, everyone was on the same page, saying, “This won’t happen” and “The coalition is strong”. Perhaps it is—I hope it is, and I am sure that everyone else does—but what if it is not? What happens then? What role will the UK Government take to ensure that Ukraine still gets the support it needs to repel the aggressor?

James Cleverly: I am not conformable speculating about a scenario like that, because—I mean, I have recently come back from the G7—

Q228 **Royston Smith:** I understand about not speculating, but you said something that I felt was very powerful, which was about asking people



HOUSE OF COMMONS

in the Foreign Office not just to look to the horizon but to try to peek over it. I am asking you in that context.

James Cleverly: Hoist on my own petard. In the conversations that I had most recently at G7 Foreign Ministers in Münster, there was still real solidarity in the Governments of the G7, and also support from the leadership of the African Union and a number of African leaders, in terms of our ongoing support for Ukraine.

Times are tough around the globe, economically. The economic situation in the United States of America is tough, just as it is here in the UK. But the point that I have made, and I am certainly not the only person on the international stage to make it, is that the cost of not doing this properly will be much higher—the cost in human lives, the financial cost, and the negative impact of the message, if it were broadcast around the world, that an aggressor can just have more patience than the international community and win almost by default. That would be an incredibly dangerous and toxic message to pump out into the world. We have to endure. We have to have that strategic resilience, that willingness, to stick with this until the job is done properly, because the cost against every metric will be so much higher if we fail to do so.

Understandably, there will always be voices in the international community that are concerned about the cost of supporting Ukraine. I am very proud that the Prime Minister has committed the UK's ongoing support, and that was very much the message coming out of the G7. The Prime Minister is at the G20 as we speak, and he will be looking to encourage a wider coalition of support from the international community.

Defending the UN charter, the rule of law and the concept of territorial integrity is incredibly important. It is not just about Ukraine. That is why these things are so important, and that is why we will remain committed. That is the message that I will continue to promote on the world stage.

Q229 **Chair:** To loop those two points together before we come to Bob and then move on to another topic, one of our concerns is that even last May, we were hearing about the divide between the global south and the global north, and how acutely world leaders are feeling those concerns. That goes to Liam's point that if we were to designate Russia as a terrorist state, that would force the entire world to shift in terms of their engagement with Russia, in terms of maintaining their relations with us, and the implications of that for the world system. Being the leader in terms of designating them would fundamentally shift the system, particularly as we go into a difficult winter that many countries may not wish to see again. For us, that feels like such an important ask. We may come to you in a few months' time to see if the Foreign Office has moved any further on that.

James Cleverly: I hear the point that you make. I have had a lot of conversations with world leaders, particularly in the global south, about Russia's attack on Ukraine. A number of countries see things very differently from us. This is where diplomacy matters. This is where our



HOUSE OF COMMONS

ability to persuade of the righteousness of Ukrainian defence, and to persuade the world that what Russia has done is wrong, matters. And we have—it is not just the UK; we do it in co-ordination with others—been really successful. The vote at the UN General Assembly in condemnation of the initial invasion, with 141 votes, was thought to be a high water mark, but the vote when the illegal annexation of eastern and southern Ukraine by Russia happened was 143 votes. We were gaining support.

But we should not be blasé—I am not suggesting you are—and we should not just assume that the whole world will agree with us on these issues. We still have to do a lot of persuasion. There are many countries in the world that are hungry, and Russian disinformation is trying to persuade those countries that it is the Ukrainians and their allies around the world who are causing that increased hunger. It is not, but the Russian disinformation is pushing that very hard. We have to fight back in the information war, as it were, to persuade people who are hungry and scared that it is Russia's invasion that is causing the hunger, not our defence of Ukraine.

Q230 Bob Seely: On this point, the Ukrainians were specifically saying, “We need greater support throughout the developing world,” so what are we doing, in a nutshell—briefly—to enable Ukraine to talk to those people in the developing world who are less supportive of their struggle?

James Cleverly: The Ukrainians are doing a lot of that themselves, but, as I said, at the G7, Germany, which had the chair of the G7, invited representatives of the African Union and African countries—it was absolutely right to do so—to explain that it is Russia that is causing the question marks over food security. We—

Q231 Bob Seely: I know the messaging. I am asking, what are we doing to support it? It is one of the things that the Ukrainians are asking for specifically: more diplomatic support from the UK and the US in the developing world.

James Cleverly: I will check through the readouts to make sure that I am not misleading the Committee, but I am pretty certain that in every bilateral conversation I have with a leader in the global south, I highlight the fact that we take their food insecurity very seriously, that we are not hampering grain or fertiliser exports from the Black sea, and that they should recognise that it is Russia's aggression rather than Ukrainian defence. That is in every conversation I have with the global south.

Q232 Bob Seely: That does not sound like you are part of a co-ordinated campaign, but moving on to my second point—

James Cleverly: I disagree. This was an issue that we brought up at the G7 with African leaders—both multilateral leaders through the African Union and bilateral leaders. This is something that we are co-ordinating with our international allies.

Q233 Bob Seely: Okay. Secondly, as far as I can see, there is a two-pronged policy. We are talking about strategic patience. The Russians are trying to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

hold a defensible line, hence their withdrawal from Kherson; and with their attacks on electricity and water, they are also trying to trash Ukrainian civilian infrastructure to destroy the morale of the Ukrainian nation to continue the struggle. First, how are we moving to humanitarian support, so they have electricity and water? Secondly, on the damage to the internet cables between the UK and Shetland, was that the Russians?

James Cleverly: The first part goes to the point about the evolution of our support to the Ukrainians. This afternoon, I signed an MOU to give support to their electricity supply, because you are absolutely right: what Russia is now doing, having received setback after setback on the battlefield, is targeting civilian infrastructure. Russia wants to make the Ukrainians cold, hungry and demoralised. I think it will be unsuccessful, certainly in demoralising the Ukrainians, but our support has evolved from being predominantly military to increasingly being humanitarian and that energy support. We will keep talking to the Ukrainians about what they need next, but I assure the Committee that we are responding to their requests. When it became clear that support for their energy infrastructure was what they needed in the here and now, we evolved our support to them to respond to that.

Q234 **Chris Bryant:** Moving on to authoritarian regimes for a moment, in relation to Iran, do the demonstrations that have followed on from the horrific murder of Mahsa Amini fill you with hope?

James Cleverly: It is inspirational seeing those Iranian women—actually, not just the Iranian women, but the Iranian women and their supporters. This is an organic response to oppression by the Iranian Government. It should be seen by the Iranian regime as a warning that they need to change and reform, and that the Iranian people themselves are not at all happy with the Iranian regime.

Q235 **Chris Bryant:** So would you support similar demonstrations by gay people in Qatar?

James Cleverly: I have spoken with the Qataris about their legislation about homosexuality. My personal view but also the UK Government's view is that we would always promote not just tolerance but a real embracing of diversity. We fly the rainbow flag at our missions across the world, including in the middle east. I would be very happy if that was a change, ultimately, in the Qatari system. But ultimately—

Q236 **Chris Bryant:** So you would support demonstrations during the World Cup.

James Cleverly: No, I wouldn't.

Q237 **Chris Bryant:** Because you think gay people should respect Qatar's views?

James Cleverly: What I have always said—and this is the universal travel advice—is that when British nationals travel overseas they should respect the laws of their host country. It is my job—we talked about consular—to make sure that British visitors overseas are safe, and it is the default



HOUSE OF COMMONS

setting, in terms of our travel advice, to respect the laws of your host country, just as we would expect visitors coming to our country to respect our laws.

That said, we do champion gay rights around the world. We are very proud of the fact that we champion gay rights around the world, including in the middle east.

Q238 **Chris Bryant:** That is not what your comments came across as, I'm afraid.

James Cleverly: Well, how they came across and what I said is not necessarily the same thing.

Chris Bryant: Well, maybe you need to think—I'm sorry, I don't mean to sound patronising—

James Cleverly: But you will.

Chris Bryant: But maybe you need to think a bit more about how you address this, because—

James Cleverly: I am generally curious. What advice would you give to gay travellers going to Qatar?

Q239 **Chris Bryant:** Well, I don't think that anybody should be going to Qatar other than the teams to—I don't think the World Cup should have been given to Qatar, because workers have been killed in building the buildings, migrants have been treated appallingly, gay men are regularly entrapped by police officers and then sent to prison, and, in particular, if you are a Muslim in Qatar you can face the death penalty. It has not been used, but you can face the death penalty. So I don't think any of it should be happening. But then when you come out and say, "No, gay people should respect Qatar," it does feel a bit of a slap in the face.

James Cleverly: The point is there will be gay football fans—there will be LGBTQ+ football fans—going to Qatar. I want them to be safe, and genuinely my question is: for those gay fans who want to go and watch the football, what advice realistically should I give, other than the advice that I believe will keep them safe?

Q240 **Chris Bryant:** And what advice have you given to the Qataris?

James Cleverly: I have told them—I have had conversations with the Qatari authorities about how important we feel it is that they respect gay fans. I have had detailed discussions about what they will do to ensure the safety of LGBTQ+ football fans who are going to see the World Cup. But I ask again, genuinely: if gay fans choose to go and watch the football, realistically—

Chris Bryant: Are you going, by the way?

James Cleverly: Realistically, what advice do you think I should give? Because if you are suggesting that I should give advice that might put



HOUSE OF COMMONS

them in a difficult situation, I don't think that that is the professional thing for me to do.

Chris Bryant: I don't think they will be safe to go, so I would advise them not to go.

James Cleverly: But what advice would you give them if they did go?

Chris Bryant: Well, I have given my—it is not my job to give the advice.

James Cleverly: But you have criticised the advice that I have given, which I believe is the best way of helping them to stay safe while they are visiting the country.

Q241 **Chris Bryant:** Can I just ask: are you going?

James Cleverly: I will be going.

Chris Bryant: To the World Cup.

James Cleverly: I will be going to the World Cup.

Q242 **Chris Bryant:** Why?

James Cleverly: For a number of reasons. First, there will be—

Chris Bryant: Because it's a jolly? Because you want to go?

James Cleverly: Because I am the Foreign Secretary and it is my job to ensure that British visitors stay safe. I have visited Qatar in the lead-up to the World Cup and when I go to the World Cup I will be speaking to the security authorities to ensure that English and Welsh fans, or whatever other British fans who might be going to the World Cup—

Chris Bryant: Even Sepp Blatter thinks that it was awarded corruptly.

James Cleverly: —remain safe.

Q243 **Chris Bryant:** Do you think it was awarded corruptly?

James Cleverly: If your criticism is about Qatar hosting the World Cup, that is a criticism you had best bring up with FIFA, because they were the awarding body. My job is to make sure that when British fans go to watch the football, they are safe. I have had conversations with the Qatari authorities to ensure that that is the case, and the travel advice, including the LGBTQ+ travel advice on the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office website, is also about making sure people stay safe. I understand that there will be people who are uncomfortable with Qatar hosting the World Cup—I get that—but my job is to make sure that those people who do visit stay safe.

Q244 **Chris Bryant:** I think you had a phone call with the Saudi Foreign Secretary on 27 October.

James Cleverly: Quite possibly.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chris Bryant: Well, you publicised it. Did you raise human rights abuses in Saudi Arabia with them during that call?

James Cleverly: I would need to read back the read-out from the conversation, but from the UK we champion human rights regularly in conversations around the world.

Chris Bryant: But you cannot remember whether you did on this occasion.

James Cleverly: I make plenty of phone calls a day—

Q245 **Chair:** Perhaps you can write to us about that one specifically to let us know if you did raise that. Obviously, the issue is that Liz Truss told us that she had raised human rights and there had been regular engagement with middle east leaders, but that then appeared to not be the case.

James Cleverly: I do raise human rights regularly.

Chair: On this case, will you write to us?

James Cleverly: Yes. I cannot say for certain, without looking at the minutes of the conversation we had, what specific subject or subjects I raised.

Q246 **Chris Bryant:** Does the UK ever raise the issue of Jamal Khashoggi with the Saudi Government?

James Cleverly: We have done, yes.

Q247 **Chris Bryant:** Saying who was responsible?

James Cleverly: We have raised, and we do raise, human rights issues with interlocutors. Again, without referring to the minutes of conversations I have had, I cannot remember exactly when it was raised most recently.

Q248 **Chris Bryant:** Will you write to us about that as well?

James Cleverly: I can give you a download of the conversations.

Q249 **Chair:** The key point on FIFA is that we are a multilateral asset in the world, and we have a say in telling FIFA that we expect to see an end to giving World Cups to Russia, Qatar and countries where our people are fundamentally unsafe. I think all of us will want to see a strong response from the Foreign Office over the coming weeks should the right to protest, which I believe legitimately exists in Qatar—people are allowed to undertake protests. Should British nationals choose to protest, they should be protected, within or outside the drink zone. There are concerns about Turkish police. We are looking to the Sports Minister and yourself to make sure that any consular response is immediate and that we see that real strength.

Moving back to subjects of strategic endurance that we were talking about earlier, Rishi promised that as Prime Minister we would see a change in China policy from day one. What changes have we seen?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

James Cleverly: I have made sure that the UK's posture towards China recognises that the relationship with China is an incredibly complicated one globally. We have a lot of integrated supply chains. China is a large and significant economy, but also China has a number of behaviours that we are deeply opposed to, and we raise those. When I had a bilateral conversation with Wang Yi at the United Nations, I raised the persecution of Uighur Muslims and China's failure to abide by the agreements with regard to Hong Kong. I also raised China's sanctioning of British parliamentarians and made it very clear that that was unacceptable, and we will continue to do so.

Obviously, we are now seeing the bilateral meeting between President Biden and President Xi. We want to steer China in a better direction and encourage China to be a good player on the world stage and abide by the international rules and norms that we subscribe to.

Q250 **Chair:** Forgive me, but that is not a change from what we saw under Liz Truss or Boris Johnson. How is Rishi's foreign policy on China going to look significantly different under your leadership?

James Cleverly: What we want to do with China—it goes to what I was saying about trying to think ahead—is to influence them in the right direction. That is what foreign affairs is about. It is about making change, having agency and using the tools at our disposal to steer things in a better direction. With regard to China, we want to encourage them to change the behaviours that we disagree with. That is what we will do in our bilateral engagement with them, and that is what we will encourage other countries to do. It is exactly what I do when I travel on the world stage.

Q251 **Chair:** In terms of pushing them in the right direction, it is almost a month since the Manchester consulate attack, where the consul general attacked someone seeking refuge in this country. That is the Chinese Community Party overreaching. That is wolf warrior diplomacy turning into all-out brutal attacks on those seeking refuge in our country. China is not abiding by the rules on our shores, so how are we pushing them in the right direction internationally? Can you give us an update on that police investigation and the legal status of these police stations that operate in the UK incredibly dubiously, and solely, it seems, to intimidate those who seek refuge in our country?

James Cleverly: With regard to what have been described as Chinese police stations, the Security Minister made a statement in the House on 1 November. We take those accusations incredibly seriously. With regard to the specific events that took place at the Chinese consulate in Manchester, the Greater Manchester police have initiated an investigation. One incredibly important thing is to send a message to the world in general and to China in particular that we abide by the rule of law and that we have due process. I will therefore wait for the outcome of that police investigation before deciding what further action to take. That is one of the things that sets apart Governments like our own from other



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Governments around the world. We have a process and we will abide by that process, and doing so sends a really important signal.

Q252 **Chair:** I do not dispute that we are trying to land a point here about rule of law. The outcome will be the same: the Chinese will not rescind their diplomatic protections, and we will have to expel the individual responsible. In a British court case where a British individual had attacked another British individual, admitted guilt on TV and said they had a duty to commit GBH and hospitalise somebody and would do it again, I am sure the CPS would go straight to prosecution, because you have an admission of guilt. It seems odd that we are now a month into the investigation and no further on this.

James Cleverly: We summoned the most senior Chinese official in the country at the time. We made it absolutely clear that that behaviour was unacceptable. We also made it clear that we would await the outcome of the police investigation. I appreciate that for some that will be frustrating, but it is really important that we demonstrate our respect for due process, particularly in light of other regimes that do not—

Q253 **Chair:** There is no disagreement on that at all. The point is the time it is taking. I cannot believe that if one of my constituents had committed that crime and had then gone on TV and shouted about it, the CPS would not have moved to prosecution by this point.

James Cleverly: I completely understand the point you make, but, having said that we are going to await the outcome of the police investigation, I think it is incredibly important that we do so.

Q254 **Henry Smith:** Foreign Secretary, thank you for appearing before us. As you know, the so-called China belt and road initiative has seen interference in Commonwealth countries in the Pacific and in the Caribbean. A week last Thursday you issued a written parliamentary statement on starting negotiations with Mauritius over the future of the British Indian Ocean Territory. There are legitimate concerns about Chinese influence in the Indian ocean. Can I have an assurance that the Foreign Office, in those negotiations with Mauritius, will have an absolute red line on British and, I might add, US security interests in the British Indian Ocean Territory, particularly when it comes to Chinese influence in the area, but not exclusively, and other foreign actors who might wish to take advantage of Britain's indication of a changed status?

James Cleverly: I can give an absolute assurance in that regard. This is an issue that we take incredibly seriously. We are very alive to that, and we will make sure that that is at the heart of the British position on the negotiations that we have in Mauritius.

Q255 **Henry Smith:** In terms of consultation on the future of the British Indian Ocean Territory, the vast majority of the Chagos community support British sovereignty and are very concerned about a potential change in status. What consultations will you initiate with members of the Chagossian community, many of whom are residents in this country?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

James Cleverly: We absolutely recognise the strength of feeling on this, and we will ensure that we have conversations with the Chagossian communities. We will make sure that we are very conscious of that strength of feeling as we progress with the negotiations. It would not be right—indeed, it is not necessarily possible—for me to speculate as to the outcome of those negotiations, but we know the strength of feeling on this. I can assure you that we take their views very seriously.

Chair: Their foremost champion in Parliament, after all, is Mr Smith.

Q256 **Bob Seely:** Let me follow up on what Alicia was saying. We have been repeatedly promised a cross-Government—not just FCDO—strategy on China. Is there one? If there is not, when can we expect one? We have been repeatedly promised one.

James Cleverly: My understanding is that there was not a commitment to supply the Committee formally with a China strategy. There has been, of course, cross-Government work on our posture towards China. There is the Integrated Review, and from that there have been various cross-Government workstreams, including on China. We are revisiting the IR in the light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but as I said in my speech in Singapore last month, the UK's commitment to the Indo-Pacific tilt, and our focus on that part of the world, is undiminished. That will be a cross-Government—cross-Whitehall—piece of work.

Q257 **Bob Seely:** If the answer is no, the answer is no. Are the Government planning to produce a cross-Government policy for China?

James Cleverly: There are cross-Government policies for China already. I am concerned that there is an expectation that we will produce something like a ring-bound folder with an introductory statement from me. I think the Committee had a different understanding of what was expected, but of course we are working across Departments on that.

Q258 **Chair:** There is high classification, and we appreciate that the Government have to look at those. I think the Committee would be reassured by, perhaps, a private briefing with the Foreign Office. There will also be an "official sensitive" one, which will allow people across the whole of Government to work on it. It would be very reassuring for the Committee to get an idea, privately—Chatham House rules, and completely discreet—of, "There is a pillar on resilience, a pillar on supply chains and a pillar on sanctions."

James Cleverly: I am very comfortable with giving an update to the Committee on that on those terms.

Bob Seely: Do you mind if I ask a question about the Magnitsky Acts and their relationship to human rights? Is that appropriate?

Chair: We have covered that, but go on.

Q259 **Bob Seely:** Thank you, and I apologise for being late. On Wednesday, it will be 13 years since the torture and murder of Sergei Magnitsky, and 10 years to the month, roughly, since the late, great John McCain brought in



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the first Magnitsky Act in the United States. We brought in similar legislation ourselves in 2018 after a global campaign by Bill Browder. Are we using the Magnitsky legislation enough in the UK? Are we encouraging other nations around the world to use their Magnitsky Acts more to sanction senior officials in other countries that conduct significant, systemic human rights abuses, not only in Russia, but in Iran and places such as China, in relation to the Uyghurs in Xinjiang province?

James Cleverly: We touched on this earlier, and the point I made was that this is part of our arsenal of responses. For example, last week, I sanctioned the Iranian morality police for their actions against female protesters in Iran. We are able to respond to human rights abuses through the sanctions regime, although that is not the only way of doing it. I appreciate that it is the most famous and high profile of our package of sanctions of responses, but it is not the only one we use. We do use it; I am very happy to use it where it is the most effective and appropriate way forward. Encouraging other countries to work with us, in terms of the individuals and entities that they sanction, will always be part of our overall sanctions strategy.

Q260 **Bob Seely:** Are you using it enough with big nations like China?

James Cleverly: Are we using it enough? There will be a range of views. Given the tone the Committee is taking, you seem to think that I am not using it enough, but the point is that we will always use the most appropriate and effective sanctions mechanism. It is not always the Magnitsky sanctions. As I say, we used a different vehicle for the sanctions against the morality police, but we were nevertheless able to move quickly and effectively in sanctioning that entity.

Q261 **Chair:** Before we head back to China, on that exact case—linking to Iran and human rights sanctions—there is an epidemic of femicide and corruption taking place in Mexico. This is about your ability to use sanctions. I know that you will not comment on whether we would use sanctions, but I want to raise the case of Claudia Uruchurtu Cruz, whose sisters are British nationals. This is the first time in history that a Mexican elected official has been taken to court for what looks to be the murder of a human rights defender. That is a corruption issue, a femicide issue and an attack on individuals' human rights. Are you aware of that case, and will you raise it with your Mexican counterparts? The new governor of Oaxaca, who is due to come in at the end of the month, is believed to be considering releasing those individuals, and therefore denying justice in the first ever case of its type, which could change history in Mexico. Is that the sort of case where you think Britain could use sanctions, and will you raise it with your Mexican counterparts?

James Cleverly: My understanding is that we have raised it at officials' level in Mexico. I will look in more detail at what escalatory measures may be the most appropriate in bringing about the desired outcome.

Q262 **Chair:** Thank you. That is one of the points from our human rights conversations. Even saying that Britain is watching and has this human rights legislation that it could use to shape human rights is fundamentally



HOUSE OF COMMONS

important. Very few other countries would be willing to step forward to use sanctions to improve human rights, and that is where our moral leadership, as a UN Security Council member, really comes to the fore.

Let me go back to China briefly. What is our strategy on Taiwan, and are we arming them at the moment?

James Cleverly: Our position on Taiwan has remained consistent. We have a strong unofficial relationship with it. We have a strong trading relationship with it. On your specific question about whether we arm it, we have a defence export relationship with it. From 2019 to 2021, the UK issued individual export licences to the value of £200 million. We have a commercial export relationship, as we do with many other places around the world.

Q263 **Chair:** I understand that we have now decided to suspend defence exports to Taiwan on the basis that we are a democracy, so we are transparent and publish those defence exports in *Hansard*. That is a conversation that the Committee and CAEC might want to have separately. Despite Britain having to stop doing so because it essentially tells other nations that might have an interest what weapon systems or defence capabilities are being provided, are you confident that support for Taiwan remains steadfast and that other allies will step in where we have had to step back?

James Cleverly: As I say, our position towards Taiwan has remained unchanged.

Q264 **Chair:** Although we have not done any exports since 2021, so there is a change in terms of defence exports.

James Cleverly: The granting of export licences is always assessed on an individual case-by-case basis. I will look at the situation with the most recent export licences. As I say, our long-standing and very consistent position on Taiwan has remained unchanged.

Chair: It would be great if you could write to us on that.

Q265 **Neil Coyle:** I want to go back a step on China more widely. To be clear about the Chinese consular staff, if the work of the Manchester police and the CPS does not result in prosecution, will it be the FCDO's position to seek expulsion of the consular staff?

James Cleverly: I await the response. I will see what the police report comes back with before deciding what further action to take. It would go against the point I was trying to make about due process if I were to then start making decisions ahead of the result of that investigation.

Q266 **Neil Coyle:** But if a British consular member of staff—you have spoken really positively about their work across the planet—was acting in a similar way, and there was video footage of it, I am assuming the FCDO would recall that member of staff. You would expect them to be leaving that country if they had behaved in that way.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

James Cleverly: I do not think it is surprising to say that the way the British Government is conducting itself and the way the Chinese Government is conducting itself are different. We would want the Chinese Government to do the right thing, but as I have said, I am going to await the outcome of the police investigation before deciding what further action to take.

Q267 **Neil Coyle:** So when Rishi Sunak said that he was fed up with seeing the red carpet being rolled out to China and a blind eye being turned to its nefarious activity, what nefarious activity was he referring to? In your day job, what nefarious activity are you highlighting?

James Cleverly: The situation we saw in Manchester, which was on the street and in public, would not be the kind of thing that the Prime Minister was referring to. Where China have systematically taken action—where they have abused the Uyghur Muslim minority in Xinjiang, failed to abide by the agreements over Hong Kong, sought to exert influence through their economic leverage in parts of the developing world, and indeed chosen to sanction British parliamentarians—those are things that we have criticised, and I have done so directly with the Chinese Foreign Minister.

Q268 **Neil Coyle:** But a Hong Kong democracy campaigner being physically assaulted does not quite meet the category of “nefarious activity” somehow.

James Cleverly: I will wait for the outcome of the Greater Manchester police investigation before deciding what further action to take.

Q269 **Neil Coyle:** Is the UK still training any Chinese police or military personnel?

Sir Philip Barton: I do not know the answer to that, to be absolutely clear.

Q270 **Neil Coyle:** It is a priority of the new Prime Minister, and you are unaware of whether it is even still happening. That is not massively reassuring, but I assume you will write to the Committee on that specific point.

James Cleverly: I’m sorry?

Neil Coyle: You will write to the Committee explaining whether there is still any training of People’s Republic of China military or police personnel.

James Cleverly: We will. Sorry, are there specific instances that you are thinking of that I can respond to?

Q271 **Neil Coyle:** I am asking whether it still happens. Clearly, you are unaware on the spot. That is fine—just fill us in afterwards—but I do not think it necessarily reassures us that there has been a significant change in China policy if you are unaware of what training was being provided previously.

Then, as the Chair has touched on, there is this issue around Taiwan. When it comes to Ukraine, a lot of people have criticised the apparent



HOUSE OF COMMONS

lack of preparedness of the international system. How quickly could the UK implement sanctions, were Xi Jinping's aspirations regarding Taiwan to be realised?

James Cleverly: Sorry, on that first point—the criticism of what, sorry?

Neil Coyle: The feeling that the international community was not fully ready, despite Putin's clear intentions regarding Ukraine. The parallel with Taiwan is there.

James Cleverly: I would disagree with that.

Q272 **Neil Coyle:** Interesting, but that is not the question. Can we stick with Taiwan, just in the interests of time? How quickly can the UK act when it comes to sanctions for China? As Xi Jinping has just said at the Chinese congress, his aspiration is still to take back Taiwan, militarily if necessary. How quickly will the UK respond, were that to happen?

James Cleverly: As we demonstrated in our response to Ukraine, we have an agile response to world events. I am not going to speculate on our response to any particular events. I have already said this, and I know it is boringly repetitive, but we do not discuss or speculate about future sanctions impositions, and under what circumstances we might do them.

Q273 **Neil Coyle:** But it is sanctions and preparedness with regard to British universities and student places. It is semiconductor resilience. What wider preparatory work is under way, Foreign Secretary?

James Cleverly: You are inviting me to speculate about a course of action that has not been taken. The work that we do at the Foreign Office, and as I said it is one of my priorities, is to look at our response to potential future courses of action. That is work that we do regularly within the Foreign Office. It is not always, however, either right or appropriate to discuss those plans in public, particularly when they are in sensitive or potentially contentious areas of international relations.

Q274 **Neil Coyle:** You touched on Xinjiang and other issues there. Obviously, in July 2021 the Committee reported on Xinjiang, and the Government have had an arms embargo of sorts. How effective has the embargo been, and how are you assessing that effectiveness?

James Cleverly: Sorry, the—?

Neil Coyle: The arms embargo, to try to prevent the Chinese authorities from violating human rights.

James Cleverly: I will need to come back to you on the details of that. I do not have the details to hand, but I am more than happy to come back with details on that. As I say, I do not have the specifics at my fingertips.

Q275 **Neil Coyle:** Okay. We know that exports to Taiwan are down, but you are unable to talk about whether China is still able to access UK products that could be used in suppression of Muslims in Xinjiang.

James Cleverly: Are you talking about export licences for dual use?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Neil Coyle: Yes, among other things.

James Cleverly: What other things?

Neil Coyle: In the interests of time, if you want to write that is fine.

James Cleverly: I am happy to take down what other things you specifically had in mind.

Q276 **Neil Coyle:** Sure. Well, let's expand this a little further. It is not just what is going out to China; it is what is coming in. The Committee was clear that sanctions should go further to try to prevent the importing of goods that have come from slave or forced labour in China. Where are the Government at on this? Is this part of the new China agenda?

James Cleverly: Help me with your question, because your question was quite broad. Specifically, what are you asking?

Neil Coyle: The Chair may have to help me out, but it is estimated that something like 80% or 85% of the cotton exported from China has, somewhere in its supply chain, slave labour, largely through the persecution of the Muslim population in Xinjiang. Is the UK Government's position still to ignore that?

James Cleverly: It has never been the Government's position to ignore—

Q277 **Neil Coyle:** So the Government do intend to move towards preventing that cotton from accessing the UK market.

James Cleverly: Sir Philip has the details, but I will make it absolutely clear that there has never been a Government position to ignore human rights situations. It is worth remembering, of course, that products that are produced either wholly or in part by China are heavily embedded in supply chains around the globe. We are conscious of that, and we are taking measures to diversify our supply chain. That was one of the things that we discussed—

Neil Coyle: I think Sir Philip wants to help you out here.

James Cleverly: Yes, and when I have finished, I will invite him to speak. One of the issues that we discussed at the G7 Foreign Ministers meeting was diversification of the supply chain for the exact reasons that you put forward. Sir Philip.

Sir Philip Barton: I will just go through the list of things that we have done to make sure that no British organisations, whether that is bits of the Government or the private sector, profit or contribute to human rights violations in Xinjiang.

We are giving guidance to UK businesses, making it really clear what our concerns are and highlighting the actions that they should take to ensure that they are not complicit in, or profiting from, human rights violations in Xinjiang. We have included measures in the Modern Slavery (Amendment) Bill that will require businesses and public sector bodies to report on



HOUSE OF COMMONS

specific areas in their modern slavery statement, including due diligence in relation to modern slavery.

In December last year, the then Secretary of State for International Trade announced enhanced export controls on China, including strengthening our ability to prevent UK exports that might be used, directly or indirectly, to facilitate human rights violations. We led calls in international organisations, such as the International Labour Organisation, to investigate forced labour in Xinjiang, securing a technical mission to see what further action could be taken. We funded research into the situation there by Nottingham University and Sheffield Hallam University. We are also consistently raising our concerns in our bilateral contacts with the Chinese. As the Foreign Secretary said, he had his first bilateral meeting with the Chinese Foreign Minister—

Q278 Neil Coyle: How does that prevent the imports? Guidance has not changed on imports.

Chair: To go a point further, the last time the Government were before us, they specifically said they would not impose import controls or ban imports to stop imports from Xinjiang. How has the situation changed?

Sir Philip Barton: As I say, the guidance we give—

Q279 Neil Coyle: Despite the apparent change to China policy, there is another level to this. Other countries and international organisations are taking more action than the UK, which leaves us in an anomalous position. If EU regulations take effect, we could have products banned in Northern Ireland that are not banned in Great Britain. How will the FCDO answer that challenge?

James Cleverly: Your question is predicated on an if—you are saying, “If these things are happening, there will be a difference.”

Q280 Neil Coyle: They are.

James Cleverly: Sir Philip has already outlined the guidance and the steps we have taken. As is often the case with our response to international issues, we will liaise closely with our partners in the G7, the EU and elsewhere.

Q281 Neil Coyle: Yes, but waiting for proverbial to hit the fan is, with respect, not going to answer the immediate dilemma that faces businesses and consumers across the UK as a result of those mixed regulations.

May I ask a quick final question about Huang Xueqin—Sophia Huang? She is a Hong Kong democracy activist who was previously arrested by the Chinese Government for picking quarrels and provoking trouble—most of us would be arrested were the same laws to be applied over here—but she has also been involved in the #MeToo movement. She is a Chevening scholar who was supposed to enter the UK to study, but she was arrested the day before her flight took place. She has won the Index on Censorship’s 2022 freedom of expression award for journalism. Is her case one of those that have been taken up with the Chinese



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Government?

James Cleverly: That is not a case I have spoken about directly in my interactions with the Chinese Government. I will check to see whether we have highlighted that case at official level, but it is not one that I have brought up in my direct interactions with the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

Q282 **Chair:** Perhaps you could write to us on that case.

James Cleverly: I will be happy to.

Chair: Perfect.

Q283 **Bob Seely:** May I follow up on China? I hear all the answers you have given, Foreign Secretary, and thank you, but there is a problem with increasing dependency on China.

The point that collectively we are trying to make is that Putin declared the new cold war back in 2007 in his Munich conference speech, and we deluded ourselves—like a frog in boiling water—for the best part of almost 15 years, until 2022. We have allowed the Russians a great deal of access and influence despite the Crimean war in 2014, despite the invasion of Georgia, despite the assassinations, some of which have taken place on British territory.

The point we are making is that you have an increasingly aggressive China increasingly threatening Taiwan, and at the same time we are increasing our economic and supply chain dependency on China. All the evidence suggests—I have produced reports to show this—that that is the case. If China ever acts against Taiwan, apart from the loss of human life and chaos that will cause, the global economy will be plunged into collapse because we have become overdependent on Chinese supply chains, and we have allowed the situation to get worse and worse, without even being aware of how dependent we have become. That is my concern, and it may be the concern of others as well.

James Cleverly: The integration of Chinese products into global supply chains is something we are very conscious of. It is something that was discussed at the G7 Foreign Ministers meeting in Germany a couple of weeks ago, so we are well aware of this. The UK is certainly not alone in having significant parts of our economy interwoven with products that come through Chinese supply chains; we are certainly not alone in that. But it is something we are aware of. It is something that will require international co-ordination and action. But I can assure the Committee this is something that we are aware of. As I say, I discussed it at the G7 Foreign Ministers meeting a few weeks ago.

Q284 **Bob Seely:** It is great that you are aware of it, but actually no action is being taken.

James Cleverly: What action would you recommend?

Q285 **Bob Seely:** A great question. I like the way you're throwing questions back, so I'll give you a straight answer. In the National Security and Investment Bill last year or the year before, we came up with a definition



HOUSE OF COMMONS

of national security. It was ignored by the Government. I said, "At least publish an annual statement on trade dependency." That was ignored by the Government. So would you like, as part of any future Bills or when you are thinking about our massive economic dependency, including in critical national infrastructure, on China—I have produced at least two reports with the Henry Jackson Society that I can send to you—to maybe consider making an annual statement to Parliament about our increased supply chain dependency on China? Could we have a definition of national security in future investment Bills? These were the concrete things that we were doing that Government ignored.

James Cleverly: When we talk about electronic componentry, battery componentry, these are things that are, yes, heavily embedded in UK products, but they are heavily embedded in products right the way around the world. So while I completely understand the desire to have an audit or assessment of how reliant international supply chains are on China, the idea that the UK could unilaterally unplug from Chinese products is unrealistic.

Q286 **Bob Seely:** Again, that is not what we are saying.

James Cleverly: Just as with every major and, indeed, developing economy in the world, we have Chinese-manufactured products and componentry embedded in all kinds of things. We are absolutely not alone in that—

Bob Seely: I know, but let me help you there.

James Cleverly: Which is why any response would need to be co-ordinated internationally.

Q287 **Chair:** We are going to move on, but just to reassure you, Foreign Secretary, we will be launching in the new year an inquiry into what we are calling the great minerals rush, and we will be putting forward active recommendations, so should you find there is a policy deficit in the Foreign Office, you will find very many willing and able people to provide—

James Cleverly: Chair, I can assure you the funnelling of key minerals to be processed in China is something that I raised, as I say, last week at the G7 Foreign Ministers meeting. So I think we are in violent agreement that this is something we need to be conscious of.

Chair: I think we are. The challenge, Foreign Secretary, is that some of us have been talking about this since before we came to this place. The frustration is that we have not seen meaningful movement from the Government in terms of how we counter it. We will come to that.

Bob Seely: Can I just add to that?

Chair: We have to get to Liam.

Q288 **Bob Seely:** Okay, just very briefly. Before you solve a problem, you have to understand it, and once you understand it, you can do things to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

encourage diversity in your supply chain. It's not black and white; it's about understanding the problem and then thinking, "Okay, how can we create diversity and redundancy in supply chains," and we are categorically not doing that at the moment.

James Cleverly: Diversity in our supply chains is one of the key priority topics the Prime Minister is raising at G20 as we speak—

Bob Seely: Fantastic.

James Cleverly: As I say, we are very, very aware of the implications of that supply chain pinch point through China, and it's one of the things the Prime Minister is raising in Indonesia at the G20.

Q289 **Liam Byrne:** Just to round this off, the head of MI6 warned on 30 November last year that there were countries around the world that were now falling into data traps with China. Are we one of them?

James Cleverly: I don't believe that we are, but ultimately the situation is we have to recognise that there are a number of countries around the world that find themselves very exposed to Chinese influence. One of the points that I was making in my introduction about the long-term foreign policy goals of the FCDO is to make sure that those countries have a credible alternative, in terms of working with the UK and working with like-minded countries so that they don't have to be reliant on any one source, whether it be investment, technology or whatever.

Q290 **Liam Byrne:** We have talked about the shift from awareness to action. What data is being exfiltrated from the UK to China now through apps that might sit on all our phones or, indeed, all our children's phones?

James Cleverly: You raise a very, very important issue.

Q291 **Liam Byrne:** Well, I'm asking you what you're doing about it, really.

James Cleverly: The point is that ultimately individuals also have to take responsibility. I know no one likes doing it, but it is important to read what you are signing up to contractually when you download an app. We are always conscious of the nature of supply chain pinch points, but also with regard to the rules and norms of the use of the internet. This is incredibly important, which is why we worked so hard—successfully—to make sure the UK had a seat on the International Telecommunication Union, or the ITU, which sets the rules of the road when it comes to telecommunications and digital. This is why we are taking action and why our work to ensure we get British representation on those international bodies is so important.

Q292 **Liam Byrne:** I asked your predecessor which of the nine different controls the Americans have in place bite on UK companies. I put down parliamentary questions to every Government Department to ask how many Chinese companies are subject to any one of those kinds of controls. Do you know how many Chinese companies were subject to UK controls?

James Cleverly: One?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Liam Byrne: One. Is that the right number?

James Cleverly: Without looking specifically, I can't—

Q293 **Liam Byrne:** The Americans have controls on about 2,000 companies. We have controls on one. So the question is: is that the right number? Is one the right number?

James Cleverly: Again, it is one of these things. With a significant differentiation like that, there may well be a reason that is not immediately obvious in the framing of your question, but I will look at that. I will see whether there is anything that the US is doing that we could learn from or, indeed, whether there are things that we are doing that the US is doing differently, so—

Q294 **Liam Byrne:** Let me summarise the question like this, then: do you think the UK's current controls on Chinese companies are strong enough?

James Cleverly: These things are always evolving. This is why we ensure that we regularly assess our exposure to any kind of vulnerabilities. We always need to address that. This is why it is also really important that we get British representation on those international bodies: to make sure that the rules that affect the use of the internet and the future rules for the digital space that we all now inhabit are set in a way that accord with our laws, rules and norms. I will look at that specific point. I am not familiar with the criteria for the American controls, but I will look at it to see whether we are approaching the same problem in a different way, which is entirely feasible—

Liam Byrne: That is theoretically possible.

James Cleverly: Which is why I would want to look at before I answer that in any more detail.

Liam Byrne: Chair, that sounds a bit like waffle, but that is all I had.

Q295 **Bob Seely:** To follow up that point, Hikvision is used by a third of police forces in the UK—

Chair: And by schools, prisons, Government Departments.

Bob Seely: It is used by schools, prisons—lots of people. Hikvision is allegedly heavily integrated in the repugnant big-data artificial-intelligence oppression of the Uyghurs. The US has sanctioned Hikvision; we have not. It is obviously one of the 2,000 Chinese companies that we haven't sanctioned. There was an exclusive report on Channel 4 last week about this. Do you have an opinion on Hikvision? Should we be sanctioning some of these companies? First, because information can go back to China. These are not just cameras, but smart cameras: they have kit and computers in them and they can do more than take pictures. They can send information back to China, so there is a security element to this. Secondly, there is the ethical element that Hikvision is used intimately in the suppression of the Uyghur people. Do you have an opinion on Hikvision in this country?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

James Cleverly: I saw that report and I saw how widely integrated Hikvision technology is, not just in the UK but in a number of countries. I know I have said this a number of times, but we don't comment on future sanctions designations. But, obviously, I have seen that report and I think it is an issue of great significance. We will look at what actions international partners have taken and what action we can take to make sure that the security of personal and commercial data in the UK is protected.

Q296 **Chair:** Forgive me, but while you might not comment on sanctions, the Procurement Bill is coming forward, which would be the perfect place for your colleague to bring forward measures. Will the Foreign Office be making strong representations around Hikvision and other technologies to the Cabinet Office as the Bill comes forward?

James Cleverly: The Foreign Office will be making representations. We worked in close conjunction on the Bill that got taken through by BEIS with the national security implications, which Bob raised earlier. We will absolutely be feeding into the production of future legislation as it affects the area that we have been discussing.

Chair: Okay. We are going to move to quickfire questions, so forgive me if we move around the world at great speed.

Q297 **Royston Smith:** Foreign Secretary, we have something of a responsibility to Iraq and Libya. In recent history, we have been there; we have disrupted those countries, maybe for good, maybe for ill. We have probably alienated the populations; we might not care so much about the Governments. Where do they fit on your list of priorities and what are the Foreign Office doing to either improve our relations or make sure that those countries can stand on their own two feet?

James Cleverly: With regard to Iraq, I had a bilateral meeting with the new Iraqi President while I was in Egypt. I enjoyed a very good relationship with the former Iraqi Government and I had a very good conversation with the Iraqi President, and I know the Iraqi Foreign Minister well. They value our partnership in helping them to defend themselves against Daesh and against Iranian actions in their country. I can assure you that we will continue working closely with Iraq, both in Baghdad and with the Kurdish Regional Government in Irbil, to keep that country safe and try to get them on the road to stability and prosperity.

With regard to Libya, when I was Minister for Middle East and North Africa, I had regular engagement with the interim Libyan Government. It is frustrating for us and I am sure that it is frustrating for the Libyans themselves that the elections that were meant to have taken place in December last year still have not yet taken place. We continue to engage directly with the Libyans and also with the international community through what was the Berlin process to try and bring stability and a Government that represents both the east and west of Libya, and is legitimately elected. That still remains our aim.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

It is frustratingly slow when it comes to Libya. While we haven't seen the resumption of violence that we have seen in previous years, it is one of those areas that, sadly, could still topple into violence. We will continue to work to try to prevent the violence and try to encourage the elections to take place.

Q298 Royston Smith: What does that work look like? What is our involvement? What is it that this country and the Foreign Office are trying to do?

James Cleverly: We are the penholder on Libya at the UN. I have had extensive engagement, not so much since being appointed as Foreign Secretary, but when I was the regional Minister. I had regular and extensive engagements with the Libyans. This is very much an area of work that is done at international level. Countries are encouraging representatives in both east and west Libya to come to a meaningful arrangement so that they can have those elections. Those elections will unlock the next stage of Libya's prosperity. That will allow commercial activity to resume. Ultimately, that is in our interest. Having a destabilised Libya or a country that isn't able to properly secure its own borders and is sadly still a route for illegal migration is not what anybody wants.

Q299 Royston Smith: As we expect you to have a long and happy tenure in the Foreign Office, we will have the opportunity to question you again. How optimistic are you that the next time you are sat in front of us and I ask you a similar question, things will have improved?

James Cleverly: That is a really difficult question. It felt very close to elections this time last year, yet the elections didn't happen. The international community through the Berlin process has put a huge amount of effort into trying to get a sustainable resolution for the situation in Libya, but we don't have one yet. We will have to keep working, though, because they are geographically close. They are an important country. The last thing we want is further instability in North Africa, so we will keep working on it. Unfortunately, my recent experience has not led me to be overly optimistic that we are going to unlock some resolution very soon.

Q300 Henry Smith: The Abraham accords are just over two years old—since they were signed. The Negev forums have been taking place in recent months. What is the UK's involvement in the whole Abraham accords process as they work towards various streams of policy development and co-operation? Obviously, Britain has a long history and heritage with all the signatories to the Abraham accords—the Gulf states, Egypt and Israel as well. Do you agree that there would be a much greater benefit if the UK took a much more active role in that process, which really does seem to be producing results?

James Cleverly: I was the Minister for the region when the Abraham accords were signed. I had meetings with a number of the countries that were signatories to the Abraham accords around that time, both before and afterwards. It is an incredibly positive step. There is still a whole lot of good news and benefit that can be derived from those accords. I spoke to my Moroccan opposite number in Paris on Friday last week about what more we can do to make the Abraham accords meaningful for the future. I



HOUSE OF COMMONS

was in Bahrain when the first ever Bahraini ambassador to Israel was announced. I was in the room when he got the phone call.

There is definitely a role for the UK to play. We enjoy good relations with all the signatories of the Abraham accords. A greater social and economic exchange between the Arab nations and Israel is a very positive thing. We will continue to work both bilaterally and with the signatories of the Abraham accords to make sure that they are not just an historic moment but a vehicle for greater economic growth and greater social exchange.

Tourism between the countries in the Abraham accords has increased. When I was recently in Sharm el-Sheikh, I was fascinated to hear that Israeli visitors to Sharm el-Sheikh had increased enormously. That is an incredibly positive thing. Those commercial and social ties are good foundation stones for a strengthening relationship at every level. It is in the UK's interest to help facilitate and encourage that, so I certainly will be.

- Q301 **Chair:** Taking you to our overseas territory family, there was quite a serious diplomatic misstep a few weeks ago. The Joint Ministerial Council was meant to take place and was cancelled with less than a week's notice. Obviously, if you were visiting from St Helena or many other places around the world, you would have started travelling perhaps 10 days in advance. Who took that decision? Why were no Ministers available, given that when you become a Minister, I assume your diary clears and you know that your job is to do as your Department requires? Why was that cancelled when there were already people who had arrived in country and who were on their way?

James Cleverly: I had the opportunity to go to the Speaker's House and meet those representatives from the overseas territories who had come. It was unfortunate that we were not able to make that JMC happen and I apologised to the representatives who were there. Obviously, we had gone through an incredibly turbulent time in terms of Government formation immediately prior to that. Unfortunately, it was not clear until after the travel process for many of the attendees had started that I was unable to have certainty as to where the ministerial portfolios were. Unfortunately, because the Minister with responsibility for the OTs was also the Minister who had responsibility for a number of the issues raised at COP27, he was not physically able to be in both places at the same time.

I made the point of joining the Speaker and representatives from the OTs myself. We were not able to have the full agenda, which is unfortunate. We are seeking new dates as soon as is convenient. I absolutely recognise that this was a deep inconvenience to the people who had been travelling, in some instances literally from the other side of the world, and we are very conscious of that.

- Q302 **Chair:** Forgive me, but it was not an inconvenience; it was a point of offence. The feelings are incredibly rooted. I believe the advice then went to you that it would be inappropriate for the Foreign Secretary to meet with those who had come to the country because they were of too junior



HOUSE OF COMMONS

a standing to warrant Foreign Office advice—that is what they believe to be the advice that was given.

The fact that it is now being arranged for Q1, which is far too late for financial requests to go into the Foreign Office system for OTs to get meaningful support in the upcoming year, has really caused great offence at a time when we have great sensitivities with those relationships. Then we got to the point that we were refusing to refund their travel costs, despite the fact that we had required them to spend sometimes £3,000 to get here—which for them is a significant travel budget. Would you at least look at refunding the costs of those who had travelled, or who were on their way and could not cancel and get the refund?

James Cleverly: The point you make about me being unwilling to meet them because they were too junior—

Q303 **Chair:** Not you. The advice that was given to you by officials. You chose not to take it, and to meet with them at Speaker's House, for which I give great credit to you. But that to me is concerning, in the same way as it was a junior official who emailed to say that it had been cancelled, and not senior representation or, quite frankly, a phone call.

James Cleverly: I will absolutely look at what we can do to ensure that the importance that I give to our relationship with the OTs is reflected and felt by them. I will look at the arrangements. Obviously, we do not want to delay this any more. I recognise there is a balance to strike with getting it back in the diary too soon for partners to be able to make travel arrangements, but I do not want to delay it any more than is necessary. I will absolutely look at what we can do to ensure that we demonstrate the importance of the overseas territories to us as a Government—and to me personally.

Q304 **Chair:** I think that refunds would be a slight courtesy to make that point land.

The next point I want to raise is about Turks and Caicos, where the murder rate is now the highest in the world. I am aware we have finally put in place measures to support Turks and Caicos as it deals with a mass migration problem, mass violence and gang violence taking place. I am very concerned by a DipTel that I saw where the British Governor, a member of the civil service, said that he was happy to press the nuclear button and remove Turks and Caicos as a British overseas territory because of the failure, over the last few years, to provide any form of meaningful support to that territory as it sought to deal with the crisis it was facing at home. What are we doing to reassure the Premier, and to work with the Government of Turks and Caicos, so that the Governor does not send back DipTels such as that to KCS saying that he needs to remove them from the OT family?

James Cleverly: I do not agree with his assessment that they have not had the support. I spoke with him in the lead up to Her late Majesty's funeral—within three or four days of being appointed as Foreign Secretary. We spoke at length about his concerns about the murder rate on the island. Prior to that conversation there had been about support given to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the island, but we recognised that the situation had escalated. I had a number of cross-Whitehall senior ministerial-level meetings—this was something that I dealt with directly at Foreign Office level, and I was typically dealing with the Secretary of State or the Minister in other Government Departments. Right across Whitehall we were taking this very seriously. We deployed a package of support to try to give reassurance to the island, but we also need to recognise the wider geographical environment, the criminal activity in both Jamaica and Haiti, and the supply of guns and ammunition coming across through the United States of America—both on the island itself and in the wider region.

Q305 **Chair:** All of which we have a duty to support.

James Cleverly: It was an issue that I discussed with my Canadian counterpart with regard to Haiti as well. We do recognise the unique set of challenges that Turks and Caicos has. We will continue to provide support to try to address these issues, both in the immediate term and in the longer term.

Q306 **Henry Smith:** Briefly, with regard to Turks and Caicos immigration, I appreciate that His Majesty's Government has difficulty in preventing illegal migration to Great Britain, let alone to the Turks and Caicos Islands, but what specific action will the FCDO undertake to ensure that illegal migration routes to the Turks and Caicos Islands are prevented and that there is repatriation of those who are illegally on the islands?

James Cleverly: We have deployed Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships, Wildcat helicopters and officials from the National Crime Agency. As you say, it is a real challenge because of the geography of the islands, and part of it is about helping Turks and Caicos secure their own borders. Part of it is also about helping to deal with the instability on neighbouring islands, and that is very much an international response and will need to be done in conjunction with our international partners. We will continue to do so.

The level of violence is unacceptable. Again, I was reminded that, for an island with a population about the size of a British parliamentary constituency, having tens of murders a year—if there was someone being murdered each week in any of our constituencies, we would understandably be as concerned as the Governor is, and we absolutely reflect that concern. We will continue to support them to try to drive that murder rate down.

Q307 **Chair:** And the point is they are family, so we should feel as strongly about that.

James Cleverly: Absolutely. They are totally family.

Chair: I would like really quick questions and really quick answers.

Q308 **Liam Byrne:** You kicked off by talking about the need to renew our offer to the global south. Those countries face a crisis of food, fragility and finance at the moment. The G20 set a target of on-lending \$100 billion of special drawing rights that were issued to the world last year from advanced nations. Can I just check that you have a handle on this? Do



HOUSE OF COMMONS

you know how much the UK has been given in special drawing rights from that allocation?

James Cleverly: I do not have the figure off the top of my head, unfortunately.

Q309 **Liam Byrne:** It is £19 billion. It is bigger than your aid budget at the moment, so it is quite a large sum of money. Do you know how much we are sharing from that at the moment?

James Cleverly: I don't have those figures at my fingertips.

Q310 **Liam Byrne:** It is 20%. It is lower than France and China. It sounds like you do not yet have a target for what the UK should be on-lending from our share of that £19 billion. Is that accurate?

James Cleverly: As I say, I do not have the figures around this at my fingertips, but I had a meeting with David Beasley of the World Food Programme very recently about the need to ensure that the global south and those hungry peoples around the world are not forgotten about and are not overlooked, and I can assure you that this will remain a priority for me.

Q311 **Liam Byrne:** Can you give me an undertaking that you will look again at how much we are sharing and whether that number is in the right place?

James Cleverly: Absolutely. I am happy to give that assurance.

Q312 **Chris Bryant:** To tidy up two bits from earlier, the body I was referring to, which you might want the Abramovich money to go to, is the Disasters Emergency Committee. That seems a fairly straightforward system, but you may want to write to me. You will not want to comment, I know, but the one person I would add to your list of people who should be sanctioned—and who is already sanctioned by the United States of America—is Carrie Lam. I just do not understand why the UK has not taken action in relation to her, but I know you do not want to speculate about sanctions that you may make in the future.

As I understand it—this may be more for Sir Philip than for you, Foreign Secretary—the Foreign Office takes part in the Government's people survey on an annual basis. It asks members of staff and civil servants all sorts of different things. In the past, it has been very useful for tracking down bullying in post overseas, and when an individual post has come up with a lot of people reporting bullying through that anonymous survey, the Foreign Office has been able to take action. I gather that in the 2019 people survey for the Foreign Office, the standard level of people reporting bullying in their area—either having been bullied or harassed themselves, or having seen it happen to others—was about 10%. I understand that in the Foreign Secretary's private office in 2019, the survey showed that 40% of people working there reported that they had been bullied or harassed, and that 75% had seen others being bullied or harassed. Is that right?

Sir Philip Barton: You are right; there is a people survey across the whole of the civil service and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

time period you are referencing. Obviously, the FCDO now takes part in that. It has a series of questions and it takes about 20 minutes for individuals to answer them. People have just finished answering this year's survey, and you are also right that one part of that survey covers bullying, harassment and discrimination. What that does is basically give the organisation's leadership—both at the top of it and in individual areas—a sense of what the working environment is like across the whole organisation.

I do not think I am going to comment on what appears to be a leak of a document. For any scores in any area, you need to get under the bonnet and look at what lies behind them, rather than inferring any particular thing in any particular direction.

Q313 Chris Bryant: I am sorry, but that does not wash. I remember permanent under-secretaries from the Foreign Office coming in the past and saying, "We are worried about bullying in various posts around the country", and when asked they would say that, if you had 20% reporting that they had been bullied or harassed, that was not good enough, that action was going to be taken and that people would be speaking to the senior people in post. How can you possibly have a situation where, within the Foreign Secretary's own private office, which is a relatively small office, 40% are reporting that they have been bullied or harassed? Was any action taken?

Sir Philip Barton: Let me set out the approach I have taken. When I was in the Foreign Office, I was, at board level, our champion for our efforts to tackle bullying, harassment and discrimination. As I said, when I was appointed to this job, as the new Department was created, I have absolutely put at the heart of the way I am trying to lead personally and the way in which I want others to lead the organisation treating everybody with kindness and respect and making sure that they are in an environment that enables them to do their jobs without being bullied, harassed or discriminated against. I recognise that the world is not perfect and there are always going to be areas and problems. As I say, what you need to do in those situations is get underneath the reasons behind particular problems in particular areas, find out what the drivers are and then—

Q314 Chair: Forgive me, but we only have three minutes. Did you get behind this specific issue that we are talking about?

Sir Philip Barton: I am not going to comment on individual circumstances. I am just not going to comment on the basis of a leaked document.

Q315 Chris Bryant: But your predecessor was asked today, "Do you think that the characterisation of Dominic Raab as somebody who could bully and around whom bullying happened is a plausible one?" And he said yes.

Sir Philip Barton: As I say, I have set out the approach I have taken, both when I was in the Foreign Office on the leadership board and as permanent under-secretary of the Department. I have worked very closely



HOUSE OF COMMONS

with successive Foreign Secretaries to build a culture of respect and kindness across the whole Department. That is when people flourish and give their best.

Q316 **Neil Coyle:** The 2021 human rights and democracy report is the most delayed in that annual report's 18-year history. When will it be out and what is the delay?

James Cleverly: It normally comes out in the summer. Obviously, some of this year we were going through a leadership election and then, after that leadership election, we had the joy of going through another leadership election. Having been appointed as Foreign Secretary, that is one of those important documents that I want to ensure I have a look at before it is published. It should be published soon.

Q317 **Neil Coyle:** Soon? This month?

James Cleverly: Soon.

Q318 **Neil Coyle:** This year? May I ask about Sierra Leone? As you know, there is a significant population of people from Sierra Leone in my constituency. There are concerns about the suppression of democratic activities, including the targeting of people who have campaigned in the UK on what is happening in Sierra Leone and who, on returning to see family, are themselves arrested and prevented from leaving. Where is the UK Government on the Sierra Leone issue?

James Cleverly: The situation with Sierra Leone and indeed the situation right across the border is that we want to encourage free and fair elections. We want to see democratic voices being able to speak out. That is universally true and it's as true in Sierra Leone as it is anywhere else. We want to make sure that democracy is working well, and activists and campaigners should be able to speak out.

Q319 **Neil Coyle:** Rather than taking more time here, may I ask for a meeting on this specific issue with you or the Minister with responsibility for Africa, along with Sierra Leone representatives here in the UK? Would that be a quick way of trying to cover that issue—to meet either you or the Minister with responsibility for Africa, and with Sierra Leone representatives in the UK?

James Cleverly: I do not want to commit other people's diary time. It would be the easiest thing in the world for me, as Foreign Secretary, to say, "Yeah, I'll get one of my Ministers to have a meeting—"

Neil Coyle: Yes, so do it.

James Cleverly: We engage with campaigners in countries all over the world. Obviously, I have a personal relationship with Sierra Leone, being half-Sierra Leonian myself, so of course I want to see democracy in Sierra Leone flourish, but then again I want to see democracy flourish all over the world.

Q320 **Chair:** We will have one final question, which is about happy people, which you raised at the start. Just before we do, Sir Philip, normally it is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

quite standard for the permanent secretary to come before the Committee on his own to discuss the more administrative side and audit things. We would love to invite you in Q1—that would be fabulous.

Sir Philip Barton: I look forward to it.

Q321 **Chair:** Brilliant. We will do that.

On the subject of happy people and happy workplaces, I want to ask about the DFID merger. Ambassadors across the world have reached out to me, saying how good the idea was. Having worked at the Foreign Office, I saw how often DFID staff did not report to the ambassador and all the problems that that created. You had diplomatic staff negotiating aid access, but then aid people coming in later—two separate processes, which did not really work.

The problem seems to be that the merger itself has not had the focus and attention it needed. We have a transformation board and director who should make themselves redundant and yet still seem to be very much happily in place. And, quite frankly, there are rumours that should future administrations or Governments desire to reverse the policy, there is essentially no point in trying to work to put it in place now.

That, to me, is gravely concerning, because the merger should make the system more effective. What are you doing as Foreign Secretary to make sure that there is real grip on making this merger work, and establishing its terms and conditions, all the way through to ways of working, so that it becomes as effective as possible and we can stop talking about the merger because it truly is one happy people working together.

James Cleverly: When I was first appointed as a Minister, I was a joint Minister across two Departments, answering to two Secretaries of State, and being servant of two masters is never an easy place to be. So, I think that the merger was an important and good idea.

Just after the merger—or, basically, concurrent with the merger—we had the situation with covid, where immediately we went into the response for that, followed by a whole load of events, including the drawdown from Afghanistan and the situation in Ukraine. So, the backdrop for this merger could not—if we had orchestrated a more disruptive set of global events, I struggle to believe that we could have come up with one.

Nevertheless, I think that some real positives have come out of the merger. It means that all our ambassadorial posts are thinking about development. Whether they are in donor countries or recipient countries, they are all thinking about development, which is incredibly important. Obviously, the fact that our ODA budget was reduced as a by-product of the economic hit that we received from covid made it harder, again, and has had a negative impact on morale.

But the merger is here to stay. Change is always disruptive, and change and then change again—was it Napoleon who said, “Order, counter-order, disorder”?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chris Bryant: That's the Government this year, isn't it?

James Cleverly: That's the Labour party this year.

We have made the decision about the merger. That is now happening. While the full implementation of the merger has not been as quick as any of us would have wanted, for the reasons I have just given, I want to make sure that we harness and harvest the positives from it, and make sure that when we do get back up to 0.7—I hope we will be able to do so soon, when the UK economy recovers appropriately—we are firing on all cylinders as a highly effective organisation.

I love this Department, I genuinely do. I think it is a privilege beyond measure to be the Foreign Secretary of the UK. This is an outstanding organisation that has still managed to deliver excellence through really, really difficult times both domestically and internationally. When some of the albatrosses that global events have hung around our neck are lifted, I have no doubt at all that we will be able to continue delivering excellence on behalf of the British people.

Q322 **Chair:** So you will be personally leading on making sure the merger works, rather than giving it a particular ministerial focus elsewhere?

James Cleverly: Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the Foreign Secretary to make sure the Department operates at full capacity. Some of the functionality and some of the elements of this will be done at ministerial level, and others, inevitably, will be done at senior official level, but my priority is to make sure that this organisation is the most effective organisation, and ultimately that is not a function that can be delegated.

Q323 **Chair:** An effective and happy organisation? That is what we are looking for over the next year or so?

James Cleverly: A happy ship is an effective ship, as you know.

Chair: Thank you both ever so much for your time this evening. It really is appreciated. We look forward to many more engagements in the years to come, inshallah, as you said. That brings to an end our session today.