

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: Future of UK aid, HC 148

Tuesday 20 June 2023

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 20 June 2023.

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Members present: Sarah Champion (Chair); Mr Richard Bacon; Theo Clarke; Mrs Pauline Latham; Chris Law; Nigel Mills; David Mundell; and Mr Virendra Sharma.

Questions 456 to 538

Witnesses

I: Rt Hon James Cleverly MP, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs; Sir Philip Barton KCMG OBE, Permanent Under Secretary, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office; and Nick Dyer, Director General, Humanitarian and Development, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rt Hon James Cleverly MP, Sir Philip Barton KCMG OBE and Nick Dyer.

Q456 **Chair:** Welcome to this one-off evidence session with the Foreign Secretary. Thank you for coming and making time for us today. I know that development is an interest and a priority for you, so it is good to get that passion on record. I wonder if you could introduce the two colleagues that have come with you, Foreign Secretary.

James Cleverly: I would like to take the opportunity to say thank you for having me in front of the Committee. I bring with me Sir Philip Barton, Permanent Under-Secretary of the Department, and Nick Dyer, the newly appointed second Permanent Under-Secretary for the Department. Nick's role is especially focused on the development function of the FCDO. While of course that is his expertise there will be other functions additional to that, but most relevant to the Committee is that part of his role.

Chair: I think, Nick, you are here as the DG in this session.

Nick Dyer: Indeed I am.

Q457 **Chair:** We are very excited for your new role, which is something that this Committee has campaigned for and that the sector is very pleased to hear about. Thank you, Foreign Secretary for making that happen.

Foreign Secretary, I wonder if I could start with your session last week at the FAC. We heard first-hand the impact of the significant amounts of aid budget being spent here in the UK on refugee costs in their first year. We have heard from both you and your colleagues about how you feel that this falls within the DAC rules, so we are not challenging on that. But we also know that the FCDO budget has taken a considerable hit, with this money coming out of your budget and going largely into the Home Office to be spent domestically.

You have travelled the world throughout your life, but particularly in this role, and you have seen at first hand the positive impact that development funding has on the communities that need it most. You also know that the world, particularly the low-income and fragile states, are facing unprecedented challenges that seem to keep on escalating but our domestic Government Departments are hoovering up your budget and therefore, to some extent, tying your hands because of that. Sorry, that was all the introduction.

Last week in the evidence session, in front of the Foreign Affairs Committee, you cited a figure of £1.7 billion for the Home Office spending on in-country refugee costs; I understand that that is correct. I wonder if you would like to correct the record on that.



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James Cleverly: I will be more than happy to make sure I double-check rather than running the risk—if that is not correct, I will make sure that I do get it correct.

Chair: I do have the correct figures and I wonder if—

Sir Philip Barton: I think the Foreign Secretary is referring to the reduction in the FCDO budget of £1.7 billion; I think that is the £1.7 billion figure the Foreign Secretary was citing. I have not checked the transcript, but that is the £1.7 billion figure. The Foreign Secretary was not, I think, trying to describe the overall cost to the Home Office.

Q458 **Chair:** The figures I have, the Home Office spend is—you have written it in millions rather than billions—£2.39 billion of ODA in 2022, which is—29% of ODA in 2022 went to the Home Office, is what I have written down here; so £2.3 billion.

James Cleverly: That feels in the right order of magnitude in terms of the level of domestic spend. I do think it is worth putting on record, though, that when it became clear that the hosting of refugees from Ukraine, from Afghanistan and other parts of the world was going to put a strain on our ODA expenditure, we made the case to Treasury. We were very pleased that Treasury listened to our concerns and gave us an additional £2.5 billion, which meant that—

Q459 **Chair:** Over two years?

James Cleverly: Yes. We know it is not full cost recovery but the expenditure on refugees in their first year in the UK is within the DAC definition. Of course there is no Secretary of State who would not like to have a larger budget but we recognise this is a responsibility, it is a duty, and it is one that we do not shy away from. The Treasury has recognised that this does put a unique set of pressures on us and has responded to that.

It may come out in further questioning, but I think it is important that I read into the record that recognising that the Department would be under pressure with regard to its overseas ODA expenditure because of the hosting of refugees, we have worked very creatively using the combined diplomatic efforts and development efforts of the merged Department to find other creative and effective ways to maximise the positive impact that we can have on the world stage. Perhaps that will come out through further questioning—the kinds of things we are doing to make sure that we are still very much a top-tier development player on the global stage.

Q460 **Chair:** The immediate impact of those costs last year was in the summer. You paused your spending because you did not know what your budget was. Do you know what your budget is for this financial year and is that something that you will be putting into the public domain or at least be able to share with this Committee in private, if you are not putting it into the public?



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James Cleverly: We are still going through the process of—

Chair: You still do not know what your budget is?

James Cleverly: —finalising budgets. The truth is of course that this is an unpredictable—this is unprecedented. We have not had to rebalance our ODA expenditure in this way, I think, previously. We have not had this scale. We recognise that we have duties to those refugees hosting here in the UK. As I say, we will not shy away from those at all.

We are negotiating with Treasury, as all Government Departments do. I am not able to give you a finalised figure as yet. But you will have noticed that we have lifted the pause so that we can allow our development professionals, our diplomacy professionals and our delivery partners around the world to move forward. But I am not yet in a position where I can share with you either privately or publicly the settlement that we get from Treasury.

Q461 **Chair:** That is concerning because the one thing that we keep on hearing the sector needs is predictability. If you do not have that predictability obviously you cannot cascade it down.

I would push back, Foreign Secretary. The other G7 countries have the same uncertainty about costs for refugees, and we have been here for over a year now, so one would hope that you would have a clearer strategy, particularly a financial one, in place. I wait expectantly for those figures for that clarity.

James Cleverly: I am reminded that we have shared headline figures. While I cannot give you finalised figures, we have given our professionals and the sector a strong steer. They do not have complete predictability—sadly, none of us does—but we have given them a strong steer to enable them to unlock the work that they are doing around the world.

When we have finalised details, it will put us in a position where we can share more information both internally and externally. We are not quite at that position yet. But we have not held back everything for want of that last bit of detail. We have unlocked as much information as we can to let our internal teams and our partners get on with delivering.

Q462 **Chair:** That is very reassuring, thank you. Within those constraints, which we all understand, what are your priorities for development?

James Cleverly: We set out the priorities in the IDS, which as you know I was heavily involved with drafting. I will run through them for completeness. There are seven initiatives—

Chair: Not all seven please. We do have them.

James Cleverly: I will do them very quickly. Importantly, the green reform of the international financial—

Q463 **Chair:** What is your one priority? What is the one thing that you are most



excited about achieving?

James Cleverly: This is why it is a philosophical position. As you know, I chaired the Trade out of Poverty APPG before I became a Minister. At the heart of everything we do is trying to reduce and ideally eradicate poverty. It is about unlocking the potential for developing countries to develop more quickly. In order to do that we have to drive political stability, conflict avoidance. All these things cascade down but ultimately, at the heart of all these things, is the ideal solution that no nations around the world have that millstone of poverty holding them back.

That is at its heart. But I do not want to come across as blasé because there is a huge amount of complexity around doing that and it is hard. That is what all this is about. It is what it has always ever been about.

Q464 **Chair:** I have learnt that if the vision is there, the rest becomes detail to support it, so it is good to hear what your vision is.

The Integrated Review Refresh states that security and prosperity of the Euro-Atlantic region is the core priority for the UK's international policy. Does that mean that the FCDO has deprioritised development in, say, Africa and the Middle East?

James Cleverly: No. We have seen how inherently interconnected the globe is. I know it is a cliché that the world is a small place and getting smaller but let us take, for example, the impact on some of the poorest people in the world—people already suffering from hunger because of the inflationary pressure of food and fuel prices as a direct result of Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

I have had that presented to me by some world leaders as a European problem having a ripple effect right across the globe. When I was in Latin America, when I have been in Africa, when I have been in South-East Asia, talking to people representing some of the poorest people in the world, the impact on families' ability to feed themselves is directly linked to Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

I think it is completely right to say that as a Euro-Atlantic nation obviously our immediate neighbourhood should rightly remain a priority, but we must also recognise that that means stability in Africa, the Asia Pacific, the Indo-Pacific and Latin America. All these things are interconnected and we do not have the luxury of ignoring challenges or problems around the world just because they are not in our immediate backyard.

Q465 **Chair:** You are very important—

James Cleverly: It is very kind of you to say so!

Chair: —so do you get to talk to the poorest people? How do you make sure the voice of the poorest people is embedded within our policies?



James Cleverly: I try wherever possible. It is not possible on every trip, even trips to developing nations, to be able to talk directly to those people who have been hit hardest. I endeavour to do so wherever possible. There is a balance between security—you describe me as very important; I am not sure I completely agree, but I am visible and I am high profile. There has to be a balance between security and visibility but I do, wherever possible, try to speak to the people who have the hardest time.

On my fairly recent trip to Sierra Leone, for example, of course I met with representatives of Government and political parties but I also had the opportunity to talk to people whose lives were being revolutionised by a business that had been supported by UK funding—women who, for the first time in their lives, had a regular predictable income and who were supported; this particular forestry company also gave them, as part of their pay, a bag of rice. That has had a transformational impact.

I was reminded of the power of a pay cheque. One of the women—this was not a gender-specific programme, it was an economic development programme—but I spoke to one of the women and asked her about what it meant to her to have a regular pay cheque. She basically said being the main breadwinner in the family changed the family dynamic. She said something that struck me. She said, “My husband leaves me alone now.” I knew exactly what she meant. She meant, “If you touch me again I am taking the kids and I am taking this money and I am off.” It completely rebalanced the relationship.

I do always try to speak to the people who are on the front line of what we are trying to do because that informs the conversations I have with political leaders, my team of development experts and other officials in the Department.

Chair: That is why those conversations are so incredibly powerful and necessary. Thank you.

Q466 **Chris Law:** The Scottish Government play a key part in tackling global challenges, including poverty, injustice and inequality through their International Development Fund, the Climate Justice Fund and the Humanitarian Emergency Fund. However, your diktat to UK embassies worldwide advises UK heads of mission to take firm and strengthened approaches to Scottish Government visits; that the Scottish Government should not have direct relationships with foreign Governments; and that UK Government officials should be present at any of these meetings. Why are you putting these obstacles in place and why are you seeking to damage Scotland’s relationship with partner countries and undermine its international development work?

James Cleverly: If representatives of the Scottish Government stay within the very clearly defined parameters of what is devolved and what is—



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Chris Law: Which they have always done.

James Cleverly: —reserved, then there is no problem.

Q467 **Chris Law:** Why did you feel the need for a requirement at this point?

Chair: We are straying off development.

James Cleverly: Because I did feel representatives of the Scottish Government were drifting outside of the very clearly defined parameters of what is reserved and what is devolved.

Q468 **Chris Law:** Would you provide evidence of that to this Committee, please?

James Cleverly: In fact, I think at the Scottish Affairs Committee my good friend and colleague the Secretary of State for Scotland listed a number of recent examples where representatives of the Scottish Government have done that, and I refer this Committee to that evidence.

Chair: Thank you. It is appreciated.

Mrs Pauline Latham: I want to make the comment that this is not the Scottish Committee. This is the International Development Committee of the House of Commons, not the Scottish Parliament.

Chair: Thank you for making that point. It needed to be said. Pauline, over to you.

Q469 **Mrs Pauline Latham:** Secretary of State, could you tell us how the UK is making progress in tackling global poverty through its international development work?

James Cleverly: This is one of the areas—I know that members of this Committee were critical of it at the time—where I feel the merger has been vindicated not just in the UK but globally in the light of constrained resource. I have made this clear: that within the FCDO not everyone is a development professional, but I expect everyone to be passionate and vocal about development. That means that I have a much larger cadre of people who are thinking about, talking about and helping to deliver the development priorities set out in the IDS.

For example, I had a recent conversation with HMA Tokyo. That is not a post that would traditionally have development issues at the top of their talking points. I know that our ambassador in Tokyo is having conversations about our development priorities and co-ordination with Japan in a way that she or that post would not have done pre-merger.

I have always been passionate about development issues, but I do not pretend to be a development expert. I have one sitting to my right. In the conversations I had with Liz Truss when she was doing her leadership campaign, I pushed to have an FCDO Development Minister at Cabinet level, which was something that she put in place. We have subsequently



made the decision as a Department to have a second PUS as a lead for development.

I recognise that development expertise is important, but I do not want to leave development just to development experts. It is everybody's business. I demand it to be everybody's passion. It is everybody's conversation, and we are reinforced in delivery through our world class cadre of development experts.

Q470 Mrs Pauline Latham: Given that an awful lot of money that used to be spent on tackling poverty is now being spent in this country, and we have also reduced the spending from 0.7% to 0.5%, how can you say that these conversations are changing anything that is happening in Japan? How are they doing anything on the ground in Africa, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar—all over the place? How do you plan to measure the success in tackling global poverty? For instance, what do you expect to see different in five years' time?

James Cleverly: This is an important point. Necessity is the mother of invention. We have discussed it previously. I know the Committee has discussed at length the economic impact of Covid and the knock-on impact it had on our ODA expenditure. Rather than perhaps licking our wounds, shrugging our shoulders and saying that the world is tough, the Department has set about using the additional horsepower that we have through the merger to try to be creative and imaginative in other ways so that we can deliver on the decade-wide agenda that we set out in the International Development Strategy.

For example, in our G7 presidency we commissioned a review into the capital adequacy frameworks of the World Bank. Nudging that down from 20% to 19% has unlocked US\$40 billion across a 10-year period. If we can make the case to nudge it down another 1%, that will unlock a similar order of magnitude.

We are looking at ways to make sure that we use our diplomatic leverage in our relations with other potential donor countries, whether that be G7 partners, and I have already mentioned Japan, but also my old patch in the Middle East, where I have spoken at length with my Gulf partners about development work—particularly in the Horn of Africa and east Africa.

We are looking at ways of maximising our delivery in this era of constrained resource, and you will know the Prime Minister's priorities about growing the economy, getting ourselves back up to the point where we have a similar quantum for ODA that we had before. When that happens not only will we have that larger quantum, but we will be able to apply that to other ideas that we are putting forward to ensure that we are still able to deliver, even through a period of constrained resource.

Q471 Mrs Pauline Latham: It is great that doing that with the World Bank delivers so many millions and billions of dollars, but you do not have any



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control over that spend at all.

James Cleverly: I do not agree with that. We have a seat at the board of these international financial institutions. We do have a say.

Mrs Pauline Latham: One of 25, though—one seat.

James Cleverly: Yes, and we only have one seat at the United Nations Security Council, but we are massively influential there.

One of my frustrations is that I think we massively underplay how much diplomatic heft we have. In underplaying our diplomatic heft, we underplay the impact of having career diplomats banging the table about development issues. Our diplomacy is a force multiplier. To give an example—I cannot remember the exact figures off the top of my head, so I apologise for that—when I was at COP27, I had a panel discussion the Africa Adaptation Acceleration Program. We moved early on that, and through our early intervention and our diplomatic work we leveraged significantly more money than our direct contribution. That is the point.

Money matters, and no one in the Department pretends that money is not important. We will always fight to ensure that we are able to apply as much financial power as we can, but that is not the only thing that we have at our disposal. Linking our diplomacy with our development expertise is genuinely a force multiplier. Underestimating that is an error.

Q472 **Chair:** Foreign Secretary, can I pick you up on some of the things that you have said to Mrs Latham?

First, you said you felt vindicated—a very strong word—about the merger. In some cases, massive amounts of development money went out of the sector at a day's notice. I am thinking of the UNFPA, which was giving 40 million women around the world contraception. We were the main funder, and we cut their funding with less than a week's notice. The merger was brutal.

James Cleverly: That was not about the merger. That was—

Chair: I am just coming on to it, if I may, Foreign Secretary. The merger was brutal. It could have been done in a managed way, and the good things that we are seeing now, so for example the second PUS, could have been put in place before the merger was forced through with such speed and brutality during a pandemic.

I find it somewhat challenging that you are saying you are vindicated. In the answers that you have given to Mrs Latham, the World Bank was your example of how we are going to alleviate poverty, and that is something, as Mrs Latham said, that we do not have complete control over—indeed, we have limited control. Also, the examples you have given are diplomatic answers. I would say that we had both diplomatic and development ambassadors around the world showing the UK's strengths and that you have dramatically curtailed them.



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I will give one example. Can you confirm what representation the UK has sent to the Paris Summit this week? This is specifically about climate change.

James Cleverly: I think Mr Mitchell is going.

Chair: We have taken players off.

James Cleverly: I think Mr Mitchell is going to be our representative at that. It is Cabinet-level representation.

Q473 **Chair:** That is brilliant, but what I am asking is whether you can see that by taking 50% of our heft off the table you have weakened our international standing.

James Cleverly: I fundamentally disagree with your assessment. The point you made about the reduction in funding was not a byproduct of the merger. It was a byproduct of the economic impact of Covid. It was unfortunate that we had those kinds of economic headwinds, but the funding reductions were not a byproduct of the merger.

Q474 **Chair:** Had you not had the merger going on you might have been able to make more sensitive, long-term cuts, rather than cutting low hanging fruit and not having that strategic oversight.

James Cleverly: Again, I am going to fundamentally disagree on your definition. I was heavily involved with the rebalancing of our finances. Prior to formally announcing a Minister for Development, I was the de facto Minister for Development largely under both Dominic Raab and Liz Truss when they were Secretaries of State.

I went through a huge number of meetings with our teams, both in London and in Abercrombie House, line-by-line looking at the formal commitments that we had made, multiyear commitments that were made, what things we would be able to change with ideally least impact, what things would be disproportionately affected through the changes.

I can assure you it was not an exercise in low hanging fruit. I made it very clear when I was doing this that we do not just salami slice. We do not just go for the low hanging fruit, and we certainly do not go for just the simple narrative wins, but that we focus very much on protecting our ability to deliver in the future, to protect our reputation.

I feel very strongly that it is easy to make financial commitments at pledging conferences and things like that, and then fail to deliver against those commitments. Sadly, it happens more regularly than we would like. I did not want the UK to be in that situation because promises without delivery are good for generating headlines, but they are not good for helping poor people around the world. I made it very clear that my priority was to protect our ability to deliver in the future.

It was a very difficult exercise. I think we did it very professionally and we did it in a way to protect our ability to deliver. The challenges we



faced were not a byproduct of the merger; they were a byproduct of Covid.

Q475 **Chair:** Do you believe that the merger has had no impact on our international standing, our soft power or how we are regarded as a nation that does right by the poorest in the world?

James Cleverly: I absolutely believe it has not limited our ability to support the poorest people around the world.

Chair: That is a different question; I am talking about our reputation.

James Cleverly: Reputations can be repaired, and my focus is on our ability to help the poor.

Q476 **David Mundell:** Can I follow up on something the Foreign Secretary has just said in relation to pledging conferences? As Mr Dyer knows, your predecessor, the former Prime Minister, at the 2020 Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit, or subsequent to it, made a pledge of £1.5 billion from the UK to be spent on global nutrition programming over the subsequent eight years. I would be grateful if you could confirm that that pledge still stands, and give us some detail on how it is going to be delivered.

James Cleverly: I would have to look at the deal; that is a level of granularity that I am not able to carry in my head. I am more than happy to look at that.

Our priority was to maintain multi-year promises. Sometimes that means reprogramming. Obviously, we are all working towards getting growth back into the UK economy to unlock the figures that we have committed to internationally. I do not know where we are on the glide path to delivery on that commitment or what changes we might have to make on that, but I am happy to look in more detail and get back to you.

Chair: We would appreciate that. Thank you.

David Mundell: It would be helpful, following on from your earlier comments about the importance of discussing development issues with Japan: that is one of the issues the Japanese are very interested in.

Q477 **Mrs Pauline Latham:** The International Development Strategy shifted the focus of UK development towards aid for trade. How can you make sure that alleviating poverty is at the heart of ODA spending, not simply serving the UK's interests?

James Cleverly: It is important that what I am about to say is unambiguous. Our development priorities are to help the world's poor. That is the first SDG, it is unambiguous, we are completely subscribed to it.

SDG17 is partnerships for goals, which is about the diplomacy work, and about building partnerships to deliver against those SDGs. I refer back to the comments I made earlier about my former role as Chair of the Trade



out of Poverty APPG. Using trade to help countries and individuals lift themselves out of poverty is incredibly important because you can put more money into a till than you can into a charity box. If we are going to unlock the kind of money that we need we need to help develop those economies.

Again, to make it unambiguous, there is no tied aid. We do these things not for our own self-interest but in the interests of the developing countries with which we partner. If we help unlock their ability to trade with us and with others, we help drive down poverty. I am very pleased to say—and I think it was just yesterday—that we have implemented our Developing Countries Trading Scheme supporting, I think, 65 countries around the world, making it cheaper and easier for them to trade with us. That will have a positive effect on their internal ability to fight poverty and will amplify our work with those countries in their fight against poverty.

Q478 Mrs Pauline Latham: ICAI recently gave the Government an Amber/Red score for their work on aid for trade. What steps since are you taking to ensure that the poorest countries, not just those that represent bigger trading opportunities, benefit from the UK's work on aid for trade?

James Cleverly: We have spent over £800 million since 2015 specifically on reducing poverty through trade. That is a very explicit commitment. The trading scheme that I mentioned being implemented yesterday represents what is currently in the region of £22 billion of exports from those countries to the UK. If we can make those exports to the UK easier, which this scheme does, we should see that trade volume increase. Exports to the UK, of course, are good for those countries' balance of payments. It pumps UK commercial money into those countries and that has an amplifying effect.

We recognise the liberating impact that trade has on developing nations. We are still committed to it but as we have discussed, with much of what we do we are in a temporarily constrained resource environment. However, it is still very much at the heart of what we are trying to achieve, as set out in the International Development Strategy.

Q479 Mrs Pauline Latham: How are you going to ensure that the UK's development work supports the poorest and most vulnerable—for instance the disabled, minorities and marginalised groups that you find in some countries?

James Cleverly: Through constant watchfulness. Within the development submissions that come up to ministerial level, we have explicit sections that cover the impact on marginalised groups.

I want to make it clear that I recognise that women are not a minority group. I understand that, but our International Women and Girls Strategy makes an explicit commitment that by 2030, 80% of our bilateral programming will have a positive gender impact. That is locked into our



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International Women and Girls Strategy, because while not a minority group, women are, as I know this Committee has discussed and I have regularly discussed, a very marginalised group in many parts of the world.

Q480 Chair: Foreign Secretary, can I just say for those watching on television that although all the women seem to be leaving the room, that has nothing to do with what you are saying? It is not a good look.

James Cleverly: I genuinely hope I have not upset over half of the world's population, and if I have, I apologise profusely.

The issue is baked into the decision making that we do. Again, referring back to that forestry project that I saw in Sierra Leone, that was designed not as a women's empowerment project but as an economic empowerment project. It just so happened that the employees were disproportionately women and it had almost by accident—a wonderful accident—this incredibly empowering effect on Sierra Leone women. I want to make sure that we look for opportunities through our programming to do that. Of course, if you aim for a target of 80%, you must think about it 100% of the time. That is what the plan is.

Q481 Mrs Pauline Latham: It would be 80% of what?

James Cleverly: So 80% of our bilateral programming needs to demonstrate a gender positive impact by 2030. It is part of our International Women and Girls Strategy that I launched in Sierra Leone, which is why it is so very much in my head at the moment. That is across all our bilateral programming. It has a positive impact on everything that we do, because as a Department, if we have any chance of hitting the 80% target for bilateral programming, we basically must weave this thinking into 100% of the submissions that are coming up to ministerial level.

Q482 Mrs Pauline Latham: Going back to what the Chair said, if we have just told women, "We are not giving you any contraception", we have cut women and girls' opportunity to restrict the number of children they have and when they have them, and that is going to have a major impact on 52% of the world's population.

James Cleverly: The reductions on expenditure were created by Covid and amplified by Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine.

Q483 Chair: The decision about where the cuts landed was made by your office.

James Cleverly: I had extensive conversations with Liz Truss when she was Foreign Secretary and she gave me a very clear instruction to as far as we were able protect the work that we were doing in support of women and girls, and of course as I have said over and over again, money matters. If I had more I could do more, but until that day we must work imaginatively and creatively.



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Since 2018, we have helped 25 million women and girls get access to family planning advice, and 9.5 million women and girls access to modern methods of contraception. We recognise the very strong link between delaying the age where women have their first child and a massive positive impact on economies. We do that directly through our programming. We would like to do more, and we intend to do more. We also ensure that we have those conversations.

Again, I have been to places other than Sierra Leone, but I went to a maternity hospital in Sierra Leone—my mother was a midwife—and at a school that I went to, I discussed family planning with the young women and girls there—sometimes difficult and sensitive subjects, but really important ones. I discussed the education programmes with the Government of Sierra Leone, which explain to families—not just women because typically it is not the women who are the problem: explaining to men, too—why it is in their interest to unlock the economic potential of the women in their countries. While I did that directly in Sierra Leone, those conversations are happening both at ministerial level and at senior official level across the world by people who, prior to the merger, would not necessarily have had development as the focus of their thinking.

Q484 Chair: You made a point about trade and the number of deals that you have done. Do you try to make sure any trade negotiation with low-income countries is done free-trade and tariff-free, so that they are able to work their way out of low income?

James Cleverly: Trade policy is an area that we discuss, but it is not the policy I own.

I understand that the Developing Countries Trading Scheme that is put forward is a more generous scheme than either of the US or EU equivalents. I am very pleased about that. This is me parading my Conservative credentials. The Conservative party is philosophically a low-tariff, free-trade party at our heart. I think those things are particularly important for developing countries and of course will always be one of the tools in our arsenal to help unlock the economic development of those developing countries.

Q485 Chair: Is that a yes, or will you write to us?

James Cleverly: Yes, sorry, that is a long way of saying we will always look to have tariff reduction and the opening up of markets, which is what we have implemented with the scheme that Nigel Huddleston announced yesterday.

Q486 Theo Clarke: Andrew Mitchell has described development and tackling climate change as two sides of the same coin. Do you agree?

James Cleverly: Yes.

Q487 Theo Clarke: In that case, what priorities are you going to advocate at COP28 later this year, and what outcomes are you aiming to achieve for



the UK Government?

James Cleverly: We recognise that there are several drivers of poverty around the world—conflict, political instability and so on—and that all of those are made worse by the negative impacts of climate change.

We see the terrible situation in Sudan. On my recent visit to northern Ethiopia, I saw a part of that country that had been ravaged by conflict, but also how all the problems were amplified their having had five, now coming on six, seasons of failed rains. We recognise that these things are interwoven. You cannot credibly address poverty unless you credibly address one of the main drivers of poverty, food insecurity and habitat loss. I had that conversation when I was in the rainforests in Latin America, and when I was with the coastal communities in Papua New Guinea. We recognise that.

Reinforcing the symbiotic relationship between development and diplomacy, His Majesty's Coronation weekend was a classic diplomacy event. The first event we hosted that weekend was a Small Island Developing States meeting where we discussed habitat loss, fisheries protection, rising sea levels. We used a diplomatic event to have a development conversation about the impacts of climate change, which we looped around.

As for what we are hoping for at COP28, we want to see the Emirati continue the push on making sure that countries that have signed up to net zero, but are in the delivery phase, are not just talking about it but are doing it. We have to keep 1.5 alive, making sure that we find a way of funding it, which generally means unlocking private sector money, finding the green energy transition.

I am very pleased with the work we have done in countries such as Indonesia and Vietnam on their energy transition, but that must be funded. That is going to require trillions—not millions, not billions and it must come from the private sector. We have a role in unlocking those international trillions and we do so both through our advocacy on the world stage, such as at COP, but also through our membership of international financial institutions, doing that pump-priming, derisking, unlocking work. Again, freeing up that money is going to be a diplomacy function as much as a development function.

Q488 **Chair:** Foreign Secretary, you spoke very passionately earlier about not making a pledge unless you met it. Have we met our pledges for COP27?

James Cleverly: I think the pledges we are making are not short-term pledges.

Q489 **Chair:** How much progress has been made on them, or were they just words?

James Cleverly: What pledges are you specifically thinking about?



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Chair: I have come up with seven—no, I am being sarcastic.

James Cleverly: These are all enduring pieces of work.

Chair: So they are all ongoing at a pace you would expect?

James Cleverly: Yes. A big important thing is that we demonstrate to our international partners, both ODA-recipient countries and donor countries, that we do not drop things just because other things are happening. I am still pushing on things such as climate adaptation funding, even though this week I am also going to discuss how we support Ukraine in its self-defence. I am going to be doing that here in London and Andrew Mitchell is going to Paris to push.

The message that we put out is that we are not distracted by immediate events, we are not distracted from our work, and that we must deal with enduring challenges and pressures such as climate change. We must do both at the same time. That is why I am comfortable that we are still pushing on our agenda, we are still pushing for more countries to come up with NDCs and to deliver against those NDCs. It is not just about grabbing headlines; it is about changing behaviours.

We are doing it; we are leading by example. I would remind you that we have the fastest reduction in greenhouse emissions of any of the G7. We are pushing this, and it is part of the regular conversations that I have with other Ministers.

Q490 **Theo Clarke:** You gave the example of the Coronation, but what conversations are you having across government to make sure that tackling climate change is within every Government Department on policy?

James Cleverly: We are not the lead Department on tackling climate change. I do not have to do much pushing. It is properly baked-in across Government Departments now, and whether it is the grants Department which has in its job title the explicit commitment to work our drive towards net zero, or the work that is done through our Department for Business and Trade, which is making sure that we support countries in the work that they do. This really is right at the heart of government thinking across all Government Departments. I do not need to do much pushing on this, because it is baked in.

Q491 **Mr Richard Bacon:** Foreign Secretary, you said earlier that reputations can be repaired. I have no doubt, having heard from a lot of different witnesses and at a lot of meetings here and overseas, that the speed with which the cut from 0.7% to 0.5% was made did damage our reputation. We were in the IMF World Bank in the USA last week in Washington, and we met a wide range of interlocutors and, without saying who specifically, it was very clear that there was a sense of regret that both the deep and broad expertise of DfID and the knowledge base in one place had, in a way, been lightened or diminished.



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I have always been an agnostic about the merger, but I was much more prepared to see it work than some who I know were deeply opposed to it. There is no question but that damage has been done. My question is prior to the business of getting it back to 0.7%, which I know we are committed to doing when the fiscal situation allows it: what are you doing to improve our reputation and repair the damage?

James Cleverly: Some of it is about appointments and the visibility of commitment. I pushed to have a Cabinet Development Minister prior to becoming Foreign Secretary. I am very pleased that Nick Dyer is now in the role that he is in. I should be generous. We can have shared parentage of his appointment because I thought it was important and the conversations I had with Andrew Mitchell about his experience—having Andrew Mitchell is a real benefit. He knows his stuff. He has been immersed in this, prior to becoming a Minister, and even when he was no longer Secretary of State for DfID he immersed himself in these issues. He knows his stuff. He knows the sector; the sector knows him. They know how passionate he is, and they know that he is not going to drop these issues. I think that goes a significant way to reassuring the wider sector of our commitment. The rest of that reassurance must be through delivery.

Q492 **Mr Richard Bacon:** Is Mr Dyer going to be an accounting officer for that proportion of the budget? Is he about to be equipped with his own copy of “Managing Public Money” by the Treasury?

James Cleverly: That is exactly what is going to happen.

Q493 **Mr Richard Bacon:** So in future if there is a development angle that the National Audit Office for example does a report on, you will be the witness rather than Sir Philip Barton?

Nick Dyer: That is my expectation.

Q494 **Mr Richard Bacon:** That is very encouraging. I am sure they will want to see you as well, Sir Philip.

Sir Philip Barton: Just to be clear, we will still have a single set of accounts and in the end, we are both individually and jointly responsible. You are right: Nick Dyer will be the accounting officer on the development side.

Q495 **Mr Richard Bacon:** Good, so he is basically delegated by you. Great. Foreign Secretary, could you say what the impact is you expect on the FCDO’s ODA in this current financial year because of the continuing refugee problems we are having? What is your planning assumption?

James Cleverly: One of the things that we did do through negotiation with the Treasury is to manage the unpredictability of these changes. There is an unprecedented level of change. What we have done through negotiation with Treasury is get that 2.5 below—

Mr Richard Bacon: I know. We were discussing that earlier.



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James Cleverly: Also we have agreed with Treasury that Andrew Mitchell and the CST will co-chair a star chamber, to make sure that ODA-eligible expenditure is pre-scrutinised to give us both visibility and a significant degree of control, to make sure that all ODA expenditure, whether domestic or overseas, is spent well and effectively and to give us as much predictability as we can in what is an inherently unpredictable space.

Q496 **Mr Richard Bacon:** I understand it is inherently unpredictable but nonetheless you must make working assumptions. We are now nearly three months into the current financial year. What have we spent so far?

James Cleverly: Thus far I think it is about £1.5 billion.

Nick Dyer: If you look at the written ministerial statement that we gave last year, you can see that the expected cut from our budget previous to what we were expecting is £1.5 billion, so we are working on around a 16% reduction.

Q497 **Mr Richard Bacon:** For the current financial year?

Nick Dyer: For the current financial year.

Q498 **Mr Richard Bacon:** What does that translate to in billions of pounds?

Nick Dyer: It is £1.5 billion.

Q499 **Mr Richard Bacon:** We do not have an end date for the situation in Ukraine either, but that is going to have a further financial impact, isn't it?

James Cleverly: Yes, but we must recognise the inherent unpredictability of a major armed conflict, which we had all hoped we would consign to the history books. A lot of those refugee costs, as you know, were in our first year, so there is more predictability than we had when the full-scale invasion happened.

A big part of what we are doing is to try to bring this conflict to a right and speedy conclusion. That is good for the Ukrainian people. It will also be good for the poor and dispossessed in other parts of the world, because that will enable us to rebalance our ODA expenditure internationally once again as those Ukrainians feel more comfortable going back to their home country.

Q500 **Mr Richard Bacon:** One quick question about capital adequacy. You mentioned the shift from 20% to 19%, which we heard about in Washington last week; plainly, one could go further, and it would have more impact. It is also true that of the 75 poorest countries in the world, we heard last week in Washington, half of them are quite near debt distress, at which point they are not eligible for debt anyway.

What you have been talking about, the reason there is an extra \$40 billion, is mainly because of the leverage that is created through extra capital that could be shoehorned in from the private sector or from



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multilateral development banks, but it is debt. In many cases, the last thing these countries need is debt. In those circumstances a change in the capital adequacy is not going to make a huge amount of difference.

James Cleverly: I completely understand the point you make about debt distress. This is something that I have discussed directly with Mia Mottley of Barbados, and we are very supportive of her agenda to have widespread reform not just of the IFIs, but the international financial structure or framework. We recognise that crippling debt is a benefit to nobody. Again, this is one of the areas where diplomacy plays as important a part as development expertise and making sure that the holders of existing debt think about the implications of that debt is incredibly important.

Debt is still going to play an important part of development. When I was in Kenya at Railway City at the UK-funded project in Nairobi, I announced the first debt vehicle with an explicit climate resilience clause, which meant that in the event of a climate emergency affecting Kenya both the interest payments and the capital repayments are suspended to give Kenya the opportunity to spend the money they would otherwise spend on servicing the debt on recovering from the climate shock.

Q501 **Chair:** Foreign Secretary, the UK has been good on debt relief, as in we have led the world, with the US following behind us. I am sure you have read this Committee's most recent report on debt relief and our main recommendations are the UK and the US together, because of our legislation, are in a prime position to start renegotiating with the private sector. Also, we heard on our trip last week that I think it is 42% of the world's debt to low-income countries is coming from China.

Are you having any negotiations with either the private sector or China on this? It seems somewhat perverse that the UK is doing all the right things, then we are stepping in with taxpayers' money, when there are healthcare systems failing, education systems failing, when we could be using our diplomatic heft in a perfect way to relieve that debt internationally?

James Cleverly: I would commend you for what you have just said, and I think that—

Q502 **Chair:** Would you also look into it?

James Cleverly: I will, but when I last sat in this room or the room next door, I was being berated by one of the members of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee for engaging with China. If we are going to address debt relief to the most debt-distressed countries in the world we are not going to do it without China's actions, and we are not going to do any influencing with China unless we engage with China.

This reinforces my broader point about why engagement matters, even with governments that we have deep disagreements with. Whether it is addressing the climate impact on the world's poor, the debt impact on



the world's poor, we are not going to fix any of these things, as I said in my Mansion House speech, unless we engage directly and robustly with China and other countries around the world.

Q503 **Chair:** Are we doing that and are they listening?

James Cleverly: We are engaging. I do raise these difficult and sensitive issues, to use the diplomatic term, directly with the Chinese and I will be doing so in future engagements I have with the representatives to the Chinese Government.

Q504 **Mr Virendra Sharma:** How does the FCDO co-ordinate all actors in the British investment partnership such as British International Investment and UK Export Finance, to ensure its initiatives deliver maximum development impact overseas?

James Cleverly: We are the single shareholder of BII, the old Commonwealth Development Bank, and we set out a strategic level vision. Obviously, their individual investment decisions are not done by government. That is done by the organisation itself, but it is done within the strategic framework that we set as the single shareholder of that organisation.

Ultimately of course it is designed, as with all our actions, to help alleviate poverty, but their decision making is designed to ensure that they can recycle funds. They have a complementary but different set of priorities from pure development work.

Q505 **Mr Virendra Sharma:** What is your view on the FCDO working closely with BII to collaborate its investment with FCDO's development work?

James Cleverly: It depends on what you mean by "co-ordinate". As I say I think it is important that they can make their own investment decisions and that we do not dictate the individual investment decisions that they make, but it is also the case that they make those investment decisions—

Q506 **Mr Virendra Sharma:** Is that your view?

James Cleverly: This is the relationship we have with them. They make those decisions within the strategic framework that we set. The co-ordination is done through the framework that we set for them, but they are independent when it comes to the individual investment decisions they make. I think that is the right balance.

Q507 **Mr Virendra Sharma:** What are the potential merits of the FCDO having direct representation on BII's board?

James Cleverly: The challenge there is that they are marking their own homework. I think this has been a longstanding position of the Committee. I am not sure that is the right way forward. I think that we hold BII to account for our shareholdership of it. I think if we were both shareholder and decision maker then that would unbalance the nature of



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the relationship. I understand the calls for it; I happen to disagree with it. I think the current relationship where we set the strategic direction, but they make the individual investment decisions, is the right one.

Q508 Chair: Foreign Secretary, I am interested in this because with the US International Development Finance Corporation the state does sit as a board member, and in most situations a shareholder or shareholder representative would be afforded a seat on the board. Is this an ideological position that the Government have taken, or is there a reason that we are not aware of? I ask because we are doing our inquiry into BII right now, and for us it is about transparency, scrutiny and accountability.

James Cleverly: It is not ideological. This relationship predates this Government, I think.

Nick Dyer: It has never had a non-exec.

James Cleverly: Yes. This is not political or ideological. There are several models. We find ourselves in alignment with the US and others on some issues, but we do not follow them blindly or religiously, and we do things differently.

I think it is the model that works. I think it changes the relationship, if we were decision maker as well as funder and shareholder. I am sure there are always, as with any governance structure, advantages and disadvantages, but I think it works. I think it has proven to be effective and for me I am not sure there is a problem that needs fixing that would be fixed by that structure.

Q509 Chris Law: I am curious, because this model is a bit of an outlier internationally. To give you some specific examples that I can think of being a problem, we signed up to the Paris Climate Agreement 2015, yet we went on subsequently under BII to heavily invest in Mozambique in gas exploration, which has led to a 10% annual increase in the CO₂ emissions, which puts them in difficulty on net zero. There is a consequence for not being on the board. Can you think of any other countries that have an investment arm where governments do not sit on the board?

James Cleverly: Not from the top of my head. To directly address the point about the nature of their investments, we should recognise that in several instances a transition through gas to a greener energy mix is appropriate. The implication that all hydrocarbon investment is bad or wrong I think is erroneous. The point being that if we could jump straight from the most polluting versions of coal, which sadly we still see as a significant part of the energy mix in many developing countries, straight to renewables that would be fantastic, and of course we would want to do that, but—

Q510 Chris Law: I get your point about transition, but our investment was solely in gas and gas exploration, not on the transition to renewables or



at least not even in part. Is it not in the UK Government's interest to be on that board table, to have oversight to say, "This may not comply"?

James Cleverly: Implicit in your question is me conceding that that investment was in error, and I do not agree that it was.

Q511 **Chair:** I think the thing that is coming up is that there are political judgments that are made or not made by not having a member of government on the board. What we end up with is dealing retrospectively with the investments that might not politically be seen as sound or running against the flow of this place, for example.

James Cleverly: I get the point. The big question is do we want to politicise development investment? I would suggest that for everyone who says yes, I could probably find three or four people who would say no.

Q512 **Theo Clarke:** I am interested to develop this point about Small Island Developing States. What is the rationale behind the FCDO's decision to publish a strategy addressing Small Island Developing States as a single group?

James Cleverly: It is because they are so very vulnerable. They are I think emblematic of why it is so very important that we address a number of climate-related issues and do so quickly. Their specific vulnerability I think makes it a legitimate area of specific focus. Also, I think it is emblematic of a broader challenge.

I had the opportunity to speak with the Indonesian High Commissioner recently when I was in Papua New Guinea. Those countries are literally becoming smaller because some of their smaller islands, which we should remember define their exclusive economic zone, are disappearing below the waves. When you are an island nation your maritime environment as you know is incredibly important to you, and they are literally losing significant amounts of their country and exclusive economic zones because they are disappearing below the waves.

There is a real imperative. For those countries, this is an existential question and also I think that emblematically it is important that we take every opportunity to force this into the minds more widely and applying it to the small island states is a good, easily understandable example of why this is so important.

Q513 **Theo Clarke:** I understand why you put them in a single group, so where does that particular strategy then fit into the wider foreign policy and development goals?

James Cleverly: It is all the things that we would do anyway, so looking at climate transition, I mentioned about Indonesia. Indonesia is not a Small Island Developing State, but the kind of challenges that we would need to do anyway, so energy transition, protection of maritime environments, plastics in the sea, all those things that are just the right



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things to do anyway, are particularly acute for Small Island Developing States.

Because small island nations typically have smaller economies, things such as the economic shocks that we see as a direct result of climate change or climate change amplified by the war in Ukraine or other regional conflicts, can sometimes have disastrous effects. For example, I was over in Caricom recently talking to our friends in the Caribbean. I was reminded that one bad hurricane season can wipe 200% of GDP overnight, because of the respective scales of the economies of some of these small countries.

It does not distort what we do. I believe we are doing the right mix of interventions and priorities, but I do think the Small Island Developing States are particularly vulnerable and because of their particular vulnerability they are a good example to demonstrate.

Q514 **Chair:** This Committee agrees, and we have just launched an inquiry into them, both looking at your strategy and looking at what more could be done, because they are like a microcosm of everything that is going on.

James Cleverly: They are the canary in the mine.

Q515 **Chair:** Exactly. We met with several of their ambassadors last week, and one of the things that they raised as their three pillars was the ocean and not enough is being done to protect the ocean, because as well as being their foe it is also their main source of income for many of these places with their fishing. Are you also embedding the health of the oceans within our development strategy?

James Cleverly: Yes. Lord Goldsmith has said regularly and repeatedly and with great passion that you cannot address climate change without habitat protection. They are absolutely interwoven.

We have the Blue Planet Fund, which is supporting ODA-eligible countries through a joint DEFRA-FCDO £0.5 billion sum. We have £36 million for sustainable blue economies, which is a SIDS-specific fund. We are putting money where our mouth is, but we are also shouting about this on the world stage.

When I was at the UN General Assembly last year, we were at a side event specifically to do with Pacific Island nations and the protection thereof. *[Interruption.]* Sorry, the bell is distracting me, and I cannot remember the detail of the question. The point is, we are putting money where our mouth is, and we are also being very vocal in our advocacy for these countries on the world stage.

Q516 **Chair:** That is very encouraging. Foreign Secretary, we will pause now and come back. We do know that you have a hard stop at 4.30 pm so we absolutely respect that.

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.



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On resuming—

Chair: I restart this session with the Foreign Secretary, and hand back to Theo Clarke.

Q517 **Theo Clarke:** I want to pick up on the FCDO's response to disasters. First, with Sudan, does the Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation, do you believe, prepare strategies on how best to respond to conflict situations for all at-risk countries?

James Cleverly: We have generic response, and then we will have elements that are country specific. The definition of at-risk countries can cover quite a wide range. We do have certain elements, which will be largely universal, and of course, the country knowledge of our teams at posts will always inform any specific additional measures that we need to take in those particular countries.

Q518 **Theo Clarke:** In a recent oral evidence session, the Committee heard that the British embassy in Sudan had been underfunded. Do you believe that this underfunding has undermined the work of the UK on conflict prevention in Sudan?

James Cleverly: How do you define "underfunded"?

Theo Clarke: They do not have much in their budget.

Chair: The CSSF fund was cut two years ago, and we had evidence that that was having a direct impact on civil society engagement. It was down to—I do not have the figure in front of me; I think that it has been cut by a third most recently.

James Cleverly: I think that the drivers for the most recent escalation in violence around Khartoum and in Sudan had factors much more significant than the CSSF/CSM funding reductions. We are not and have not been, I think for some while—sorry, I am not sure we were ever the largest funder putting into Sudan, and I know—

Chair: It is like the work of the devil. With hindsight, would you have rather kept the figures where they were?

James Cleverly: If I had hindsight as one of the tools at my disposal, the world would be a healthier, wealthier, happier place.

Chair: Indeed, but you can learn from lessons.

James Cleverly: Yes, but as I say, I think the team that we had in Sudan responded very effectively to the sudden escalation in violence. I am very proud that the experience that they had enabled us to deliver—as you will have heard me say in the Foreign Affairs Select Committee—the largest, longest air evacuation of any of the nations present in Sudan.

Q519 **Theo Clarke:** You have just said that the team responded effectively in Sudan, but we also heard that the ambassador, the deputy ambassador,



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and the overseas security manager were all not there when fighting broke out in Khartoum. They were away.

Can you answer why it is that three key members of embassy staff were not present, and do you believe that this affected the UK's response to the crisis?

James Cleverly: In every post, we have a chain of command, a leadership hierarchy. The number two at the Khartoum embassy was at the embassy. He was in post and took command of the situation when that violence escalated. It is not unusual for the head of mission to be out of the country for one of a number of reasons. Indeed, just at the tail end of last week, almost all the heads of missions around the world were all in London for a professional development conference that we had hosted.

Q520 **Chair:** We were told it was the ambassador, the deputy ambassador, and the overseas security manager.

James Cleverly: I know that this is going to sound really funny, but the deputy ambassador is not actually the number two at the embassy. The development director, showing the same seniority, was number two in terms of the leadership. The number two was in command when this kicked off, and actually, the ambassador was able to plug into the crisis response centre in London. We had senior relevant experience both in Khartoum and in London when that situation escalated.

Q521 **Theo Clarke:** How do you make sure that the UK's work in areas like this does not duplicate the work of other actors who are also responding?

James Cleverly: This is where I am going to sound like a broken record. This is where our diplomatic relationships, working closely with our development relationships, really matter.

As it is, the nature of the international community or the diplomatic community in a place like Khartoum is necessarily very close. There is a lot of co-operation and interaction in the delivery of our development work. Whilst I was in the Pacific, and whilst flying back from the Pacific, I made a number of telephone calls to my American, French, German, Saudi, Emirati and AU counterparts. I was doing my diplomatic work—as was Andrew Mitchell—but whilst I was travelling.

Andrew Mitchell took lead role here in London whilst I was traveling back, and then we did a tag team once I was back in the UK. It demonstrated the value of having a senior experienced Cabinet level minister, who was able to attend the most secure and sensitive meetings that we had around that time in COBRA. Meanwhile, I was doing the traditional diplomacy, ringing around, trying to build that coalition support, and coordinating the evacuation.

Chair: Are you still hard stopping at 4.30 pm?

James Cleverly: I can overrun by about five minutes.



Chair: In that case, could we reach a compromise and give moderately brief answers?

James Cleverly: I will endeavour to curtail my natural enthusiasm.

Q522 **Theo Clarke:** Finally, the Chair mentioned the reduction budget for the CSSF fund. Will you be looking to increase funding for the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund to better engage with civil society?

James Cleverly: The answer is that I would endeavour to do so. In order to do so, we need to get the UK economy back into growth. That is a prime ministerial priority. He has already made the commitment that when the domestic economic situation allows, he will bring our ODA expenditure back up to the 0.7. Of course, an increased economy means departmental budgets will be heading back in the right direction.

Q523 **Chris Law:** The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine has warned that the pledges announced at a conference earlier this month are, I quote, "...below the funds that the Agency needs to keep over 700 UNWRA schools and 140 clinics open from the September onwards".

Do you have concerns about this impact of such funding shortfalls, and are you taking action to help UNWRA develop a more sustainable funding model? Perhaps you could tell us what the key hurdles to achieving a more sustainable funding model are at UNWRA.

James Cleverly: When I was first a Minister in the Department, I had the Middle East and North Africa as my portfolio. I was having discussions with Director-General Lazzarini at the time about reform to UNWRA—making sure it was on a sustainable funding model, expanding its pool of funders and demonstrating the robust financial controls that the funders would need. That remains a piece of work that that we do.

This question is predicated on a reduction of funding; the explanation for that, as I say, I have discussed a number of times already.

Q524 **Chair:** We have been given quite a stark choice, off the record, by a number of people in the region, who basically said you have to choose—you either have a black flag above the schools or a blue flag. Which do you want? Do you think that this is realistic?

James Cleverly: I am not able to credibly assess that. I speak regularly with the leadership of the Palestinian authority about making sure that that the OPTs do not descend into violence and that there is a democratic leadership. The votes in the Palestinian authorities are being very heavily delayed. Of course, we want democracy rather than dictatorship. We want that for the Palestinian people as much as anywhere else in the world.

Q525 **Nigel Mills:** I am sorry for being late; I was in the Chamber. Your predecessor, Liz Truss—I think she was your predecessor—seemed to understand and be committed to atrocity prevention, but those words



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seem to have disappeared from the strategy recently. Is that something that you are still committed to?

James Cleverly: We formally launched the Mass Atrocity Prevention Hub in September of last year. That forms a part of our broader work at conflict avoidance, conflict resolution.

Chair: It is not only in conflict, though, is it?

James Cleverly: It is not only in conflict; but it is predominantly in conflict. There is a natural synergy between the work, but of course we want to work with our international partners and with fragile countries to avoid atrocities, and we have that hub that is up and running.

Q526 **Nigel Mills:** There has been no diminution in focus on it?

James Cleverly: No.

Q527 **Mr Richard Bacon:** Last week in the US State Department, we met Jeffrey Sizemore, a retired US naval officer who is now working on atrocity prevention. Could you ensure, if your Department is not already working with him—although I did see Mr Dyer nod—that you do? If you are already working with him, could you ensure that you do so even more? Of the many impressive people we met last week, he was one of the most impressive. The more interaction we have, I think, the better it would be.

James Cleverly: I take that completely on board.

Nick Dyer: The team were out in Washington in April, where they had regular dialogue. They have a sustained dialogue with their US counterparts. I am not entirely sure whether he specifically was—

Mr Richard Bacon: He led a seminar in Denmark, which I believe the UK sent people to. More would great; he was very impressive.

Nick Dyer: Thank you for that.

Chair: I think the key is embedding it across all Departments.

James Cleverly: Yes. Look, that is a really good point. I discover as Foreign Secretary that my job is not just to influence foreign Governments but also to influence other bits of my own Government.

Chair: Good luck with it.

Q528 **Chris Law:** The Central Crisis Reserve has been cut from £500 million at its creation in 2015 to only £30 million this year. How has cutting the reserve impacted FCDO's ability to respond to humanitarian crisis?

James Cleverly: It is not so much cutting the reserve; it is spending the reserve. Reserves are there to give you the ability to respond to unpredicted or unprecedented events, and that is exactly what we have



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been doing. Of course, once we are through this current period of challenge, we would look to build those reserves back up again.

Q529 Chris Law: I just wondered: it was in the news at the weekend that Chelsea Football Club was sold last year in May for a total of £2.34 billion, which was supposed to be for humanitarian assistance. It was sold in the UK, under UK jurisdiction. How much of that money has been spent on humanitarian assistance?

James Cleverly: That money is currently frozen. The foundation is set up to distribute that money, but I want to make sure that that money is distributed appropriately to the people who deserve it—those Ukrainians who have suffered. In my view, it is better that we do this properly and ensure that happens, rather than do it quickly and run the risk that it does not.

Q530 Chris Law: It has been over a year, Mr Cleverly. The UNICEF Chief Executive said, "It's a tremendous shame we are not over the line yet". Just on that point, my understanding from various NGOs is that the UK Treasury could issue its own humanitarian licence for this money to be released. Why has that not been done until now?

James Cleverly: It is not exclusively in our gift to do this. We need to make sure that when the money is released, it goes to those recipients that it is meant to go to.

Q531 Chris Law: If it is not exclusively in your gift, in whose is it?

James Cleverly: Distribution is done through the Foundation. The money is frozen and it is the Office for Sanctions Implementation that signs off the release of the funds. It is right that it only does so when we are collectively confident that the money will go to the people it is meant to go to.

Chris Law: I think all of this Committee share that point of view, but it has been 13 months. People cannot wait—

James Cleverly: Well, as I say—

Chair: Thank you. The Foreign Secretary has answered.

James Cleverly: The point is that as soon as there is collective reassurance that it will go exclusively to the people it should do, the funds can be released, but until that point we would not want to rush it. It is a very significant amount of money and I think all of us would regret it if it did not go to the people who it is meant to go to.

Q532 Chair: Thank you very much, Foreign Secretary. How satisfied are you with the World Health Organization's handling of allegations and indeed confirmed cases of sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by its employees and partners during the 2018 to 2020 Ebola crisis in the DRC?



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James Cleverly: I spoke at Westminster Hall when I was a Minister, prior to becoming Secretary of State, on the issue of exploitation in the aid sector. I know the Committee has been, rightly, very focused on this and you know the UK Government has taken action in the past.

I am aware of those reports. Of course we will continue to work with international partners—both delivery partners and others—to make sure that allegations of that type are investigated fully, that action is taken if accusations or allegations are upheld, and also that cultures exist in all our partners—whether they are delivery partners, funding partners or whatever—that make it clear that from the UK's point of view this is totally unacceptable and must never be regarded as an inevitable by-product of dealing with vulnerable people. We feel very strongly about that.

Chair: That is the right answer, but in the WHO, no senior officials who have been accused have been dismissed. We have seen a number of whistleblowers leave. Do you actually believe that it is acting on their investigations? There have been two reports and both are internal; should those reports be published?

James Cleverly: Our expectations of the WHO is that we expect this to be taken seriously. We expect this to be properly and transparently investigated, and if anything inappropriate comes to light, we expect punitive action to be taken. My understanding is that Andrew Mitchell will be writing to you in more detail on this. I want to make it clear from the UK's point of view—as I think this reflects the tone of the Committee—we take all accusations or allegations of this incredibly seriously, and we expect our partners to take those things equally seriously.

Q533 **Chair:** Home Secretary, you are a former soldier. Are you former or are you still on the books?

James Cleverly: I am as close to former as it is possible to be, whilst still having a smelly pile of kit in the attic.

Q534 **Chair:** You will be very aware that many UN peacekeepers have been accused and indeed charged with sexual offences and abuses of their positions. They tend to hide behind international immunity and/or using the legislation of the war-torn country, which, of course, is not going to be able to act on that. Do you think that the UK could be doing more to challenge this injustice?

James Cleverly: I think that the UK's position is explicit and well understood. We take action in line with the posture that I have just outlined. I think that it would be ridiculous for us to imply that there is no way that that we could do more, and where there are opportunities to do so, we take them. I think that we are in a good place; we are never complacent on this.

Q535 **Chair:** One of the ways—I have not fact checked, but it was told to me by the highest person—was that it is actually a UK barrister who is



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employed to make the decision whether to uphold appeals or not. There may well be some more that we could do on that. If I can get more research and put it to you, Foreign Secretary, I would be very grateful.

James Cleverly: I do not know the details of that. As I say, this is one of these things where you can never get complacent because, sadly, this is unfortunately much more prevalent than any of us would want.

Chair: Sadly, I agree.

Q536 **David Mundell:** On Afghanistan—and for time you might want to write to us—following the discussions we have had with the World Food Programme, will FCDO provide additional funding to support the World Food Programme's work in Afghanistan to pre-position supplies before roads become inaccessible in October?

James Cleverly: I cannot make a detailed commitment on that yet, of course. We take our relationship with the World Food Programme very seriously, and value it highly. I had a very good relationship with David Beasley, the previous Secretary-General, and I had the chance to meet the new head of the World Food Programme shortly before she was appointed. Whilst I cannot give you a cast iron guarantee on that, of course, we do value the work we do with them very highly. We would always look to prioritise that humanitarian food aid in the decisions that we make.

Q537 **David Mundell:** Would you be an advocate for further funding to be released through the World Bank administered Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund?

James Cleverly: Again, all decisions like that I try always to take in the round. It is always very tempting when you see a need as acute as there is, to say that it must be prioritised. Everything has an opportunity cost. Sadly, there are more problems in the world than any of us would want. I would need to balance any decision like that against other decisions, but we do know that the situation in Afghanistan is particularly dire, particularly since the Taliban have taken over. Of course, for obvious reasons, the UK retains a very close interest in the plight of the Afghans.

Q538 **Chair:** A final question from me. Only about a third of the world's population are under a democracy now. We are looking at 75% of the world media coming out of states, and not always that factually. The BBC World Service is a phenomenal tool. It is neutral and it is one of our greatest soft powers along with the British Council, for example. Are you an advocate and are you looking to protect the proportion of money that comes out of the ODA budget?

James Cleverly: I am a big fan of the BBC World Service. I think that having impartial, honest, factual broadcasting in the world is incredibly important, particularly with the prevalence of disinformation. I came to an agreement with the BBC World Service that they had an increase in their funding, which I negotiated with them at the most senior level. In



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return, they made a commitment that they would not cut any language services over that funding period. It is incredibly important, and we recognise that organisations have to evolve; but we also recognise that there are many people in the world who do not have access to online content and who still rely on radios.

Whilst a move towards digital content is inevitable, it must not be done at the expense of the people who would then be excluded from that content. That is going to be an ongoing conversation, but as I say, I am a big fan of the BBC World Service.

Chair: Foreign Secretary, you have highlighted a concern of this Committee that not everybody can afford digital, so thank you very much. Thank you all for coming to this session and for all that you are doing.