

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: The UK's role in strengthening multilateral organisations, HC 513

Tuesday 2 February 2021

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

In the absence of the Chair, Royston Smith initially took the Chair.

Questions 293-349

Witnesses

I: Lord Ahmad, Minister for South Asia and the Commonwealth, Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office; Beth Arthy, Head of Global Funds Department, FCDO; Julian Braithwaite, Ambassador and Permanent Representative, UK Mission to the UN and other International Organisations (Geneva); Neil Briscoe, Head of UN and Multilateral Department, FCDO; Neil Bush, Head of the OSCE Delegation, FCDO; Chris Jones, Director for International Co-operation on Criminal Matters, Home Office; and James Kariuki, Multilateral Policy Director (outgoing), FCDO.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Lord Ahmad, Beth Arthy, Julian Braithwaite, Neil Briscoe, Neil Bush, Chris Jones, and James Kariuki.

Q293 **Chair:** Welcome to today's session, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, James Kariuki and team. Would you please give us a quick, 30-second biography of yourselves? Nothing too long, but so that, for the recording, we all know who you are and what you do.

Lord Ahmad: My name is Tariq Ahmad, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon. I am Minister of State at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Minister for the Commonwealth, including the United Nations, and Minister for South Asia and human rights.

James Kariuki: I am James Kariuki. I am the multilateral policy director at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. For the past two and a half years, I've been responsible for UN policy, sanctions policy, human rights policy and our overall approach to the multilateral system.

Chair: You do have some other people with you, Lord Ahmad.

Lord Ahmad: I will ask them to introduce themselves in turn.

Neil Briscoe: Good afternoon. My name is Neil Briscoe. I'm the head of the United Nations and multilateral department inside the FCDO.

Neil Bush: Good afternoon. I am Neil Bush, the ambassador to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe in Vienna, and the head of delegation there.

Chair: Is that all?

Julian Braithwaite: I will introduce myself, if I may. I am Julian Braithwaite, the UK's ambassador and permanent representative in Geneva, so I cover the World Health Organisation, the World Trade Organisation and the Human Rights Council, for the purposes of this hearing.

Chris Jones: My name is Chris Jones. I'm the director for international co-operation on criminal matters in the Home Office.

Beth Arthy: Hello. I'm Beth Arthy. I'm based in Geneva, and I head up the FCDO's global funds.

Chair: Lord Ahmad, is that everyone?

Lord Ahmad: Yes, I think that's everyone. My apologies for the bell going off. I have diligently just voted in the first Division, so over to you.

Q294 **Chair:** Perfect timing. You're ready to give us your undivided attention. We're here to talk about multilateral organisations, and you have brought



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a cast of people who are well qualified to talk about that. Could we go straight in, if you don't mind? How does the FCDO track the geopolitical impact of particular authoritarian states across multilateral organisations?

Lord Ahmad: If I may, I will begin by saying that we are represented, as you have rightly said, by many officials, across different lead Departments, on the international stage, where the United Kingdom is well represented.

On your specific question about countering other states that seek to influence organisations, that is done through direct engagement, the people-to-people engagement we have as Ministers, and, in addition to that, through our teams on the ground, be that in Geneva, New York or elsewhere. We seek to ensure that we work with like-minded partners to ensure our priorities are reflected in the multilateral system.

And particularly this year, as we take on the presidency of the G7, as we are currently—on 1 February we became—the UN Security Council president for the month of February and, equally, as we plan towards COP26, we are very much focused on the key issues across the globe, whether that is the issues of fighting the covid-19 pandemic, or meeting the challenges of climate change or, indeed, the many other challenges we face.

As the current situation in Myanmar has illustrated, we are very proactive in our engagement and working with key partners in this respect. If there is a narrative to be met head-on, we do that, and ensure that our view and that of our like-minded partners is also reflected in the discussions that take place.

Chair: Does anyone want to add anything to that?

Bob Seely: I am very happy to come in, Royston, but I have just jumped on the call, so apologies for being a few minutes late. I am very happy to do so, but I apologise in advance if any of the angles that I am looking at have been answered. Do you want me to continue?

Chair: Do come in, Bob.

Q295 **Bob Seely:** Thanks, Royston, and thank you, Lord Ahmad, for being on the call. Specifically looking at question 1, about tracking China and Russia, I hear what you say about how we have our narrative—we counter, push back and so on—and we have a consistent line. But do you think that we have dropped the ball and may not have understood some of the international dynamics that are playing out in how China specifically, but also Russia, engages with these organisations, and is there anything that you think that we could be doing better? The only reason I ask that is that when we lose votes in all these big international organisations, that sometimes strikes us as a bit of a surprise, when maybe it shouldn't.

Lord Ahmad: Thank you for that, Bob. It's good to see you. First, I think what we need to do is engage wholeheartedly in international



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organisations. I will give you a practical example, which is very live, in relation to the issue of China; it is around Xinjiang, and it reflects my responsibility as Human Rights Minister.

Just a couple of years ago, very little was being said in multilateral forums, and at the Human Rights Council in particular, on the issue of China and the situation in Xinjiang. It is actually UK leadership through which we have seen a real increment in the numbers we have had supporting the UK statements around Xinjiang and the continued suppression of the Uyghur community. That has led to, in practical terms, if you look at just the figures from last year, during the Human Rights Council in September, to the UN Third Committee, which took place in New York, we saw the increment of 27 supporting countries going to 38 countries. I think that shows a steady increase and how we are building international relations in this respect. The converse of that is that we saw the Chinese, while they are very influential—I fully accept that—had numbers that started receding, I believe, from 54 to 47 around those same statements.

We have big challenges. China is particularly influential in the Islamic world, which we need to, again, engage with directly and bilaterally as well, to ensure that we continue to build our support in relation to human rights violations, among other issues—I am just talking specifically on that matter—to ensure that we do counter the influence. I don't agree that we have dropped the ball or taken our eye off the ball. It is a challenge in multilateral organisations, but we continue to work with key partners, including the new Biden Administration in the US, but equally with our partners across Europe and elsewhere, to ensure that our shared values system, whether that is in areas of human rights or elsewhere, prevails.

If I may, Bob, I will bring in Julian Braithwaite, who is our ambassador and permanent representative in Geneva, as he has been fully involved with the engagement in Geneva.

Julian Braithwaite: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Chair. You are absolutely right. We have seen over the last few years, particularly since President Xi Jinping gave those speeches in Davos and in Geneva in January 2017, the Chinese implicit strategy becoming much more explicit. They had been building influence in the technical agencies within the multilateral system for some time, and that really became much more overt after January 2017. They started running to take over the leadership of many of these agencies.

The election of a Chinese national to the Food and Agriculture Organisation in Rome in the first round, defeating the French candidate, who had the whole of the EU backing her, was quite a wake-up call. The Americans had backed a different candidate. We managed to work very closely with the Trump Administration on this issue in Geneva in the run-up to the World Intellectual Property Organisation elections last year. China ran a candidate to take over the leadership of WIPO, which really was, in many ways, a step too far. We managed, with the US Administration, but also with others, including the Australians, the Europeans and a wider coalition,



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to get sufficient support for the Singaporean candidate to beat the heavily backed Chinese candidate.

It can work, but we have to work together, and it only works, really, if we can also all work with the Americans. The absence of American leadership over the last few years in the multilateral system has opened up a space, which China has filled—much more so than Russia, but we can talk about that separately.

Q296 Bob Seely: What you both said is very interesting. To put it into a binary question, there is now an assumption or recognition that there is a battle for control of multilateral organisations, and that those who wish not necessarily to wrestle control from us but to pursue their own agenda do not necessarily share our sense of liberal internationalism, as has been the founding assumption for the last 30 years—we have certainly assumed it is—but take a much more harsh and realist approach to international relations and see it as more of a zero-sum game. Is that a fair comment, or am I pushing it a bit far?

Lord Ahmad: May I come in first? We have seen, to endorse what Julian was saying, the growing influence of China. As I said, Bob, I have seen it quite specifically in places such as the OIC, with the growing influence of China—particularly in a very transactional way, in terms of economic support or other benefits in kind—to the extent that there are many, to take that specific example of the Uyghurs, that currently do not even comment in any shape or form on that particular issue, and therein lies the challenge.

That is why it is really evident that we should engage very early on, as we are doing with the Biden Administration. It is promising to hear the statements they have made about re-engaging with the multilateral system—with the Human Rights Council and elsewhere—because their voice is important as we build international alliances. However, it is not only about the US alliance. As we found on the UN Third Committee, the Germans led on the statement on the Uyghurs, which shows a much more broad-based alliance with key European partners on these important issues as well.

Bob Seely: Can I ask the same of Julian? Was my remark a fair comment, or do you think it was a bit harsh?

Julian Braithwaite: It is fair. China is much more of a serious threat, if you like, to the liberal basis of the multilateral system because it does actually engage through the multilateral system, and it is building alliances and building votes in a way that the Russian Federation really does not. Russia finds it very difficult to win any votes in the multilateral system, as you see in the Human Rights Council, where they are constantly defeated. China, on the other hand, had not run a resolution in the Human Rights Council until 2017, and now it is running more of them and is winning them. It is also running for election to multilateral organisations and winning those. It now heads more of the UN's technical agencies than any other country.



Q297 **Bob Seely:** Their strength is money, is it? It is political and economic power, and being seen to be the rising power? What is your answer to that? What ammunition do we and the western world have to counter that?

Julian Braithwaite: I think what happened after 2017—President Xi Jinping absolutely exploited this—was this sense that the Americans were withdrawing from the system they were instrumental in building. That is what the Trump Administration were doing, and there was this open space.

The rest of the world was looking at what was going to happen, and China was stepping up, very much talking about how it was going to defend the multilateral system, implicitly and explicitly, against the Trump Administration. Particularly across the developing world, countries were looking at that, thinking, “Maybe, actually, we need to work more closely with the Chinese. Maybe they will be the people who win the votes in this system, with the Americans now withdrawing from it.”

That was also built on the fact that China has been investing very heavily in bilateral relationships through belt and road, and has increasingly been linking its economic influence—particularly in places like Africa—with its expectation that that should be followed by political support for China in the multilateral system, in a much more strategic and comprehensive way than any other player in the multilateral system. It has been explicitly pursuing an agenda that countries like Russia are much more comfortable with, which is a sovereigntist agenda in which states’ rights and the inviolability of states are secured and supported through the multilateral system.

Bob Seely: Thank you, both. Thanks, Royston.

Q298 **Chair:** Thanks for that, Bob. Will you expand a bit on Russia? What China is trying to achieve is perhaps more obvious, and it is being more successful. What is Russia trying to achieve through the same organisations?

Lord Ahmad: If I may start on that, what we have seen is, for example, Russia, in the context of the United Nations, moving the debate into the UN Security Council. The influence of Russia, as a P5 member with a veto power, continues to be something that it will exercise on key issues, such as in debates about Syria—as you will have seen, Royston, in the last year or so.

Certainly, with that challenging situation in Syria, various votes and the combination of support that Russia has had have resulted in humanitarian corridors into Syria being reduced, for example. We look to ensure that we can continue to work with key partners at the UN Security Council to counter Russia’s influence there. Its blocking power—if I may put it that way—with its veto at the UNSC is still an instrument that it uses.

Russia, I would argue, is not as influential in what we have just discussed about China, but equally, we have been more successful in countering its



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influence. To take the example of the OPCW, there is the issue of the budget of the OPCW and the issue that we continue to see, through the use of Novichok on our roads, with the Salisbury incident and subsequently, that the Russians have sought to build alliances within bodies such as the OPCW. On a positive note, however, we have been successful not only in countering that attempt but in building alliances to counter the Russian influence elsewhere.

While the Russians, I would argue, have exerted, and continue to exert, influence in certain key bodies, they still have a key role to play, as we saw recently in the dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Russians can be a constructive partner in bringing parties together, as in their support of the Minsk process through the OSCE, which Russia is also heavily involved with. There are places where it has a constructive role to play.

But what we have seen, I would argue, has been Russia's influence receding—compared with what we have seen from China in recent years. In that regard, I will bring in James Kariuki, who heads up our multilateral policy, if I may, Royston.

James Kariuki: Thank you, Minister. I would echo that. There is a difference. We have seen in respect of China an expansionism, but also a model that other countries look at and say, "Look, this is working. There is an economic success behind China," which, if you go back to the financial crisis, is hard to compete with. That is part of its attraction. With Russia, it is very much a defensive agenda, a security agenda, and one based on its insistence on sovereignty and protecting its interests in what it considers to be its sphere of influence. They are quite different.

To the Minister's point, just as we need Russia for certain areas of co-operation, we also need China, whether we are talking about climate change or global health. It is not a zero-sum battle of wills between the west and the rest. It is about trying to manage them, trying to contain where they threaten our interests, but also to collaborate where there is a prospect of working together.

Chair: Bob wanted to quickly come back in on that.

Q299 **Bob Seely:** This is a question to either James or Lord Ahmad. You have said that Russia is largely destructive; it is very hostile, and it is going through a hostile phase in its relationship with the west. It is obsessed by its own sovereignty and yet, we understand, wants the right to interfere in its former neighbours in the former Soviet Union. It has been very hostile in the R2I—the right to intervene—on human rights agenda. Two questions: have we aligned with Russia on any issue or any specific initiative in the last five years, and how would you define the China-Russia dynamic, given the new relationship and this new alliance between them?

Lord Ahmad: If I could begin with Russia, as I said and I gave a practical example recently, the most live issue on both sides is the Nagorno-



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Karabakh situation. That was also something that was important, though clearly, they level and continue to have influence, along with other key partners in Europe, such as Turkey in that situation.

We also have to recognise that they continue to play an influential role in other conflicts around the world. Situations continue to prevail in places such as Syria, where the Russians again continue to have an important role in ensuring that we can get humanitarian access. Whilst it has been challenging, I would argue, and not what we would ultimately desire, there are conflict situations around the world where we continue to collaborate and will work with Russia to ensure those vital links, particularly on the humanitarian corridors and on situations of conflict, can be met.

We have had a challenging situation in our relationship with Russia over the last few years, in particular because of the events around Salisbury. As someone who has worked through the UN machinery for a little while now, I would say that the UN system—although it is not without challenge and needs reform—provides that even in the most testing and challenging of situations, you continue to communicate. That is important, whether it is done in a formal way within the context of formal meetings, or importantly—although regrettably we missed out on this in 2020 because of covid—through the things that happen in the margins, when you are able to discuss things once a meeting has finished, to ensure that you can unblock and unlock situations. Those are vital relationships that we will continue to invest in.

On the China theme, I agree with what James says completely. We have a clear policy with China that we will call out where we believe there is an issue, as we have done on Xinjiang and on Hong Kong. Equally, when we look at the major challenges, particularly on climate or covid, there are important roles that the Chinese will continue to play. We have to recognise that. Where we can work constructively with Russia or China to unlock a situation or global challenge, be it conflict or a particular challenge around climate change, we will continue to engage with them.

Q300 Bob Seely: Thank you. Julian, just briefly, on the second question about the China-Russia dynamic, how would you define it? Are they the new besties or is the relationship overblown?

Julian Braithwaite: I don't think there is a sense that they are working in strategic alliance across the multilateral system. China is much more active, and Russia often supports what China is doing in terms of reducing western influence in this sense that the multilateral system is a progressive system. Russia, as the Minister and as James have said, is much more of a hard power player. It doesn't want to be constrained by the multilateral system.

In Geneva it is rather invisible; it hasn't adopted the China strategy of working through the technical agencies to increase its influence, often without the great powers noticing, because these technical agencies are less political. It has been rather underwhelming here in Geneva. The only place I have seen them active is on Syria, where some years ago, back in



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2016, they were essential partners in trying to get humanitarian aid through in Syria. That was really some time ago. They have become much less helpful in recent years. That was probably our closest partnership with Russia, I would say, here in Geneva.

James Kariuki: May I add a word about the Security Council? I agree with Julian's characterisation that they do not collude or work as best friends, but there is a certain amount of covering for each other. If one wants to veto a resolution, the other might go along with it.

A huge amount of business gets done. If you think about the whole continent of Africa, most of the decisions that we take in Council are taken by consensus on which Russia and China come along. There are areas of work on counter-terrorism, South Asia, disarmament in DPRK where we do work quite closely with those countries. There are huge areas of difference, certainly in their respective neighbourhoods, but beyond that there is still a working relationship that we need to make work.

Bob Seely: Thank you.

Q301 **Chair:** Can I ask who is responsible at the Foreign Office for tracking China's influence?

Lord Ahmad: Obviously, we have a wide range of areas that we cover off in terms of China's influence. While the Foreign Secretary has full oversight and will give the lead and direction how we can work through particular issues depends on, from a ministerial standpoint, our responsibilities.

To give a live situation, we were talking earlier on the issue around Myanmar. Clearly the situation of China and its influence on the Myanmar military is important. As Minister for South Asia I will work very closely in ensuring that our expertise and Nigel Adams's expertise as Minister for Asia, where he covers off Myanmar, agree a strategy on monitoring the situation in-country, across borders on a particular situation such as the Rohingya crisis, at the same time being very clear about China's influence in that respect.

It really depends on the issue. The lead Minister on China is, of course, Minister Adams, but we have a range of responsibilities and that is why I was keen to bring in some of our officials. Whether in New York, Geneva or elsewhere, we will work to ensure that where there is a need to build solid alliances, as Julian said about the WIPO election, we build alliances to ensure that we can counter China's growing influence over international institutions.

Q302 **Chair:** There is not just one responsibility for keeping track of what China is up to, it is on a case-by-case basis?

Lord Ahmad: Without delving into details—

Chair: Delve into details—we want to know about the details.



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Lord Ahmad: We can talk in broader terms about the security considerations, issues around cyber—all these areas are looked at in a strategic way. In terms of policy decisions that are taken, depending on the institution and the issue, we will take a very focused view. This is all very much joined up, I assure you.

Chair: Graham Stringer, you wanted to come in. I know you have to leave shortly.

Q303 **Graham Stringer:** My apologies for having to leave quickly. Minister, I was slightly surprised at the two areas you chose where communications and co-operation with China were good or satisfactory. There is credible evidence via the World Health Organisation that China did not provide the information that was required at the start of the covid pandemic. In fact, it used the World Health Organisation to stop some information coming out. In terms of climate change, it is treated in COP26 and the other international meetings as a developing country, whereas it increases the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere every year by the amount that the UK puts into the atmosphere, so I was surprised at those two points.

On a fundamental question, if China and the countries it is buying up have such a fundamental difference about the international rules that we believe in, is there a medium or long-term future for these organisations?

Lord Ahmad: First of all, thank you for these questions. The issue that I raised has required co-operation. I fully accept what we have said around the issues that we have had with the World Health Organisation and China's influence there. What I was focusing on is that there are areas, including the group that is visiting Wuhan in China at the moment, that without Chinese co-operation, as challenging as that situation may be, we will not see progress. That was a point that I was trying to emphasise about engaging.

Similarly, on climate change and China's recent announcement, once again what was said is very much fact based. Their contribution is not just through what they do but through the support that they extend to other countries. In my patch in south Asia, China has a major influence over a number of countries where coal is still being exploited as an energy source. We need to engage to ensure that are putting forward the medical basis in evidence, not just to China but to the countries it influences. I am not in any way showering China with great credit; I was merely saying that we need to engage with China on the important issues that confront us, to ensure that we can get our point across to them and to other countries on which they have an influence.

Right at the start of the meeting, the first question Royston asked was about the multilateral system, and as Julian Braithwaite, the UK ambassador in Geneva, was explaining, there are ways that China is gradually seeking to influence institutions, and that is why it is vital that we counter that, together with our key partners. Are we seeing successes in certain respects? Yes, we are, as the WIPO election demonstrated, but



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there is a lot more still to be done, and that is where we need to build our strength and strategic alliances with like-minded partners such as the United States, key European countries, and those within Australia.

In a wider context, since the early stages, we have been trying to exercise our influence over other institutions and other groupings where we can have influence. With the Commonwealth, for example, we have been doing more regular briefings within the UN context, both in New York and Geneva. We have been trying to consolidate statements and reports, to leverage other areas and institutions where we, as the UK, have an influence and can work with partners to counter China's obvious influence among those countries. It is a challenging situation—I fully accept that—and it needs even more strength and co-operation with like-minded partners to counter that.

Q304 Graham Stringer: That was a very general question. I have a very specific question in view of the persistent challenges to the principles of the Vienna documents by different member states. What are the Government's plans for future strengthening of the OSCE?

Lord Ahmad: In this case—I am not sure if you missed the introduction—I have asked Neil Bush, our permanent representative to the OSCE, to come in specifically, so with your permission Graham, I will bring him in at this point.

Graham Stringer: That's great.

Neil Bush: Thank you very much for the question and your interest in the OSCE. The UK is one of a handful of leading participating states within the organisation. Our overall strategy and approach to the OSCE really has four legs to it.

The first follows on from the question about Russia. First and foremost, we see the OSCE as an important forum to hold Russia to account for its actions and violations with regard to Ukraine in terms of sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as in the case of Georgia, and on elements such as human rights abuses, which we are seeing at the moment around the freedom of peaceful assembly. Our ability to do that here in Vienna has increased since we have left the EU, so we are giving more national statements in the fora here.

The second element I would point towards is that we are looking at instruments within the OSCE to help deliver on UK priority areas. The most notable of that in the last 12 months has been the Moscow mechanism, which we invoked on Belarus alongside 16 other participating states. That has been an important mechanism to come up with an independent investigation with regards to human rights abuses and electoral fraud following the presidential elections there in 2020. The UK's role in leadership there has been recognised by leading NGOs, including Human Rights Watch.

The third thing we are doing is chairing key committees. I chair the security committee, which focuses on transnational threats. That is one of



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the three leading committees in the OSCE. That gives us an opportunity to set the agenda on those aspects, and we achieved some success last year on serious organised crime.

Finally, to push for UK priority areas, including on gender and women, peace and security, we use the OSCE to be able to deliver on those mechanisms.

Graham Stringer: Thank you very much.

Chair: Bob, did you want to come in and expand on that?

Q305 **Bob Seely:** Thank you. On the OSCE question, can I ask the ambassador three questions? I will start with a couple of them now. Very briefly, this is not about Brexit, but I was curious that you said that not being part of the European Union has given us an advantage. Can you briefly suggest what that might be, so that we can understand? Secondly, how important is the OSCE's work in terms of international organisations, especially with relevance to the former Soviet states? I have seen the work that the OSCE does in eastern Ukraine, but also in Georgia.

Neil Bush: On the first of those questions, with regard to exit from the European Union, we were previously covered a lot by EU umbrella statements on all the issues on Euro-Atlantic security. On issues such as Ukraine and human rights, we used to be part of the group of the EU. We have now had an opportunity to increase our visibility since then, and to have UK national statements on areas that matter to us, including human rights abuses and territorial integrity and sovereignty on Ukraine and Georgia, as you mentioned. They are opportunities that have been presented there.

Russia takes the OSCE seriously. The OSCE is the main organisation that deals with all conflicts in the former Soviet space: Nagorno-Karabakh, the Transnistria region in Moldova, Georgia and the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and Ukraine. We believe that the OSCE is important to those elements.

On the issue of Ukraine, which you mentioned, there are two elements that we use the OSCE for. One is to be able to support Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, so we make regular statements calling out Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and destabilising actions in eastern Ukraine. We also provide direct support to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission, both in terms of personnel and budget. On Georgia, we are part of the Group of Friends of Georgia, and we make regular statements supporting their territorial integrity and their sovereignty.

Q306 **Bob Seely:** Can I ask one follow-up question, Neil? On a slight side issue, are you worried about the Minsk process? My understanding is that Moscow wants a federalised Ukraine as its political ambition, because then it can effectively co-opt individual areas within Ukraine to act as Russian tools within the Ukrainian state. I am worried about some French statements about wanting to see Minsk progress very assertively and accepting the Russian position. I take it that we have a nuanced



understanding of the dangers of federalisation, especially in eastern Ukraine, and what it means as regards Russian influence.

Neil Bush: This is why we need to continue to support the structures that are in place to help resolve the conflict in Ukraine: the trilateral contact group and the Normandy Four elements, which the UK is supportive of. It is down to political will—there is a limit to what any mediation format can achieve without political will—but there have been some tangible results. Agreements that have been reached in the trilateral contact group have had an impact on people’s lives where there has been political will. One example is that OSCE involvement was vital to secure the rebuilding of a critical bridge used by civilians for passing over the contact line in the Luhansk region.

Q307 **Bob Seely:** Just on that, we are not part of the tripartite relationship—the Minsk process—are we? Is that a bit of a failure, considering that we were one of the original signatories to Ukraine’s denuclearisation back in the 1990s? What aren’t we part of that? Why are the French and Germans doing it with the Ukrainians and Russians, but not us?

Neil Bush: That may be a question more directed to the geographical Department responsible for that. The grouping of the Normandy Four, which—you are right—consists of France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine, is something that we continue to support. I am not aware of the background behind that.

Q308 **Bob Seely:** Would James or the Minister be able to comment on that? Why weren’t we part of the Normandy Four, considering that we were an original signatory to the denuclearisation? It seems to me that we missed a trick there.

Lord Ahmad: Just to reiterate what the ambassador said, we are supportive of that. As to the reasons, I hear what you are saying, Bob, about being original signatories to it, but, obviously, equities are considered as to where we can best support particular countries or, indeed, our own leadership. I am sure that a decision was taken at that time to balance what our priorities were. That does not mean that we are not supportive of the role that they are playing.

Q309 **Bob Seely:** The question is not whether you are supportive of it; I am sure you are. It is interesting, considering that we have talked about the importance of Ukraine. An independent Ukraine is arguably one of the most significant geostrategic events in Europe since world war two because of what it means for Russia and east Slavic civilisation. I just find it surprising that, for a nation that considers itself to be multilateral but also a global nation, we effectively didn’t want to get involved in that. It seems to have been quite short-sighted. I am also wary of other people’s willingness to push Ukraine into a federalised process that might result in its long-term destruction, which apart from being a bad thing in itself will potentially result in greater conflict and bloodshed there.

Neil Bush: Can I just come back in on that question? We continue to support a secure, stable and prosperous Ukraine without being part of the



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Normandy Four format. That is what we are doing. By being committed to support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine—we use the OSCE fora to do that—and through support to the Ukrainian Government making permanent progress on essential reforms, we are able to achieve key objectives for the UK, in terms of the Ukrainian support there.

Q310 **Bob Seely:** That's great, ambassador, but that wasn't the question.

Lord Ahmad: I accept the premise of your question. The only thing I can say is that the decision was taken at that time to support those other countries. What I can say, Bob—I have been involved in this element of it—is that within the context of Ukraine's situation, and particularly on Crimea and elsewhere, we have been very supportive. We have not only come in behind Ukraine but are making very strong statements of support about the territorial sovereignty and integrity of Ukraine in all multilateral fora, and we will continue to do so, but your point is taken.

Q311 **Chair:** Wonderful. We have a number of other questions. We could talk about on the OSCE, as well as engagement on election monitoring and other things. Before I bring in Stewart, who has been waiting patiently to ask some questions about cyber, what is the policy plan for engaging in election monitoring, from the Foreign Office's point of view? For example, for the election in the US a couple of months ago, I think we were the only ones that weren't represented from the OSCE for election monitoring. How important is that to the Foreign Office? Lord Ahmad.

Lord Ahmad: It is very important. We continue to send election monitors, not just through the OSCE. We are supportive of election monitors across various institutions, including part of the areas I look after, which includes the Commonwealth.

We have a pool of people we identify who are experienced and will be able to fill that mandate. Within the context of the OSCE—the point that was made when the ambassador was talking—the issue of monitors is a key part of the work that they do. If I can, I will bring in Neil on this point.

Neil Bush: Thank you, Minister. As the Minister said, supporting elections is an important part of the UK commitment to open societies and to safeguarding and enhancing democracy. We are a strong supporter of the OSCE election monitoring missions. In turn, we are considered by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, which is the part of the OSCE that deals with election monitoring, to be a credible provider of highly qualified and experienced election monitors.

We provided election monitors in the past six months in five locations: Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and, in January this year, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Those decisions are made on a case-by-case basis. That decision is taken within the FCDO at the geographical directorate level, which we judge to be the best place to assess the value of sending observers to certain locations, taking into account country specifics and advice with regard to wellbeing and safety. That is the process we undertake.



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There was a decision taken with the north America department not to send monitors in the case of the US, but we have sent them to other locations in the past six months. We continue to be supportive of the OSCE's work in this area.

Chair: Thank you. Can I bring in Stewart McDonald now? Sorry to keep you, Stewart.

Q312 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** I want to ask about a specific area of policy when it comes to multilateralism, which is to do with cyber and technology more broadly. This might be for Mr Braithwaite and yourself, Minister.

The United Kingdom is going to have the UN Security Council presidency and the presidency of the G7. How does the Government intend to advance the discussion around international norms and protocols, when it comes to state cyber capabilities and how they use those against other states or actors?

Lord Ahmad: That is a very pertinent and important question for the world we are in today. The fact that we are meeting in the manner in which we are meeting reflects the importance of cyber.

First and foremost, we regard ourselves as very well placed. We have, as you will know, a world-beating cyber centre that works, both in terms of open source information and also with our different agencies to ensure that the threats to cyber—be it at Government, industry or sector level—and the challenges we face are identified early on. We can identify those actors and then seek both to counter and mitigate aspects.

There are two elements, in my own experience as someone who was in the City for 20 years. One of the biggest vulnerabilities to different sectors at the moment is within the private sector. There are simple steps—for all of us—that we are able to take to ensure that the mechanism is put in place to safeguard and mitigate the risks of a cyber-attack.

Increasingly, cyber is becoming weaponised in a way that it was not 10 to 15 years ago, and increasingly more sophisticated in its ability to overcome checks and balances and mitigations that may be put in place. We will all recall very distinctly the day we had the tragic terror attack on Parliament. On the same day, from what I recall, there was also a cyber-attack on parliamentary emails. Yet one made the headlines and one did not. In very practical terms, I think the knowledge base that exists both within public life and in all sectors is very low. There needs to be a real information blitz on how we can increase the awareness of how different sectors are extremely vulnerable. If there is a requirement to destabilise and disrupt by state or non-state actors, cyber provides the avenue, currently, and the challenge we face. Therefore, it is important we invest as we are doing in technologies, it is important we invest in intelligence and it is important we invest in infrastructure to ensure we can counter that. The national centre just up the road from here in Westminster is a good example of what we can do in this respect.



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The other thing is about strengthening partnerships. How do we work with our key partners on looking at common challenges when it comes to cyber? You would have seen, I am sure, Stewart, over recent years that where it was previously not Government policy, what we have started doing is calling it out, recognising it and making very clear the issues of cyber challenges, using institutions and multilateral institutions. You will recall that a couple of years back, specific attempts were made to target the OPCW. How we reacted to that, in terms of consolidating a response, was to work with key partners, including the Netherlands, to ensure that we called it out and called it out quite publicly. That is an important element of what we do.

Just as an aside, I think it is how we counter disinformation as well and where cyber-channels are used for disinformation—perhaps more relevant to the covid-19 pandemic crisis, which demonstrates the importance of disinformation. Our priority is ensuring the right information is—*[Inaudible.]* If cyber provides a challenge, it also provides an opportunity that we use more communication channels in that respect. If I may, I will also bring in Julian at this point, as you rightly said. I think he may have some thoughts on that, particularly with the institutions in Geneva.

Julian Braithwaite: Thank you, Minister. Geneva, in many ways, is the hub of the multilateral digital world, because of a number of things that are not explicitly to do with cyber-security, but it is obviously where e-commerce negotiations are going on within the World Trade Organisation and it is also the home of the International Telecommunication Union. We have been very much focused there on preventing China, Russia and others from bringing cyber-security into the multilateral system and into the mandate of the ITU, precisely because we want to avoid an agenda on the internet that China, Russia and others are promoting to try and bring it into an intergovernmental framework, and to bring the governance of the internet much more under direct intergovernmental control in ways that we think would undermine the very nature of the internet and its multi-stakeholder model. That has been a long-term objective, and we and the Americans and others have been defending that.

The Chinese managed to elect a Chinese national to lead the ITU some years ago. While we were fighting that explicit battle to stop Russia and China bringing things such as cyber-security and internet governance into the purview of the ITU, there was another process going on, which was what China was doing very much upstream in the technical working groups of the ITU to help shape international norms around things that actually do have to do with cyber-security but, of course, did not seem like that at the time. For example, the 5G framework, which was very much shaped in these working groups—very much upstream and very much technical in the ITU. That was one of the reasons—obviously, industrial strategy and many others contributed to it—why China got a march on us on 5G, arguably.

There are other areas in these working groups that are of concern, where we have, in recent years, stepped up our own engagement: for example,



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discussions on facial recognition technologies, where there can be very different interpretations of what those norms should be, between ones that protect privacy and individual freedoms and ones that go in the opposite direction. We have become much more conscious of that risk and the need to be much more engaged in what seem to be very technical working groups, but have very profound implications for human rights, individual liberties and cyber-security.

Q313 Stewart Malcolm McDonald: If I can go back to Lord Ahmad, how does the UK intend to use its presidency of the G7 and the UN Security Council to advance that discussion around norms in cyber in—if it is not entirely terrible of me to use this phrase—a coalition of the willing, or of like-minded, democratic, open societies, to ensure that when it comes to writing the rules, it is open societies doing it? Taking that to the bigger idea, do we need a cyber equivalent to the chemical weapons convention and, following on from that, a cyber equivalent to the OPCW, for example?

Lord Ahmad: It is interesting how our discussions have gone; earlier we were talking about Russian influences within the multilateral system, and I am sure you will be aware, Stewart, that within the UN context there were two separate tracks when it came to exactly what you are talking about—the international framework of how the cyber area developed. I will bring in either Neil or James in a moment on this. There, we have not only to show engagement in the processes, but to ensure that the preferred framework, exactly as you articulate, which understands the common values and open societies and protects liberties, freedoms and security considerations, is the one that prevails.

Coming back to some of our earlier discussions, that is about building and influencing alliances and bilateral relations to ensure that the preferred system can prevail. To your specific question, within the G7 context we have been working with G7 partners, for example, on a rapid response mechanism on the issue of countering disinformation and how active efforts undermine our shared values and democratic principles. That includes things such as sharing analytical assessments and best practices, and developing and sharing countermeasures. We will continue to take that work forward specifically under our G7 presidency. I hope that gives you a specific flavour of both the work that is happening within the UN dimension and how we are using our opportunity of the G7 presidency to focus on those specific matters. If I may, Stewart, James or Neil may wish to come in as well.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Sure.

James Kariuki: Thank you, Minister. I would not add much more, but I would note that cyber, digital and tech cut across pretty much every aspect of multilateral work that we do, whether it is with New York, the Geneva institutions or the OSCE, and it is an agenda that has hard security implications.



Cyber-security, and a lot of the things we do on cyber-security, would be outside the formal multilateral system; they would be about strengthening the resilience of allies and partners in the eastern European neighbourhood, for example, right through to the prosperity and opportunity agenda of open societies and digital opportunities. This business is everywhere. We think our G7 is an opportunity to win the argument that open societies are the right kind of societies—the societies that thrive—so there was an open society strand to the G7, but I think you will see that we are pursuing it as a values agenda, a prosperity agenda and a security agenda in different places.

One thing I would just add that is slightly different from OPCW and the disarmament agenda is that it is rich in terms of the involvement of industry stakeholders. You cannot do cyber-security and tech without the proper involvement of industry, platforms and so on. That makes it a particularly sophisticated version of 21st-century multilateralism.

Q314 Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I will be honest: I looked at the list of all the witnesses, and I cannot decide whether James or Julian has the best job of all of them—no offence to the Minister; I hope he will understand—but the Committee got a letter from the Foreign Secretary on 30 January that talked about the appointment of Mr Joe White as the first UK technology envoy to the US, so I think he might have the best job, I am sorry to say, of all of you. It is a good sign. I like the appointment. When you read the fullness of the letter, it refers to working closely with the FCO, DIT, DCMS, Cabinet Office and MOD. All of that looks good. It all looks great. It signals that the thinking is where I think it should go. Perhaps we can all, when covid allows us, sit and talk about this, to get to the big idea.

Quite often I see eyes rolling whenever I repeat this: Brad Smith, the Microsoft president, talks about a digital Geneva convention, and I ask, do we need a digital, cyber or tech equivalent to the OPCW and the chemical weapons convention? When it comes to attribution and responding the next time a country attacks the UK Parliament's email system—which, if I remember that story, Lord Ahmad, included getting into the then Prime Minister's parliamentary email account—is that the direction we need to go, and how does FCDO policy work towards that? Because it looks to me like you are, with the appointment of the tech envoy—unless you are going to tell me I am wrong.

Lord Ahmad: I think first and foremost, to be very upfront with you, I think it is evolving—what you have suggested, Stewart. That is why I alluded to the two tracks within New York as well. There is a lot of debate raging around this, and yet 15 years from now—it may be much shorter than that; it may be 10 years or five years from now. You are suggesting a kind of framework mechanism. I think the debate is very alive at the moment on how we see the digital platforms being leveraged and how we see the discussions raging around social media and its growing influence. Where does responsibility and accountability lie? Where does it finish? How do you protect data? I think data will be a massive discussion point in all of this, both in terms of protection and use of data.



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I am forever, in very practical, simple terms, getting information, even on your own social media, about how you need to enhance protection. Those that are looking at exploiting but also availing themselves of opportunities that cyber offers will look at ever-increasing and sophisticated methods in terms of algorithms. There is a debate under way in that. It may well be that what you are suggesting—*[Inaudible.]* As I said, there are already discussions under way as to the structure of that framework. I would suggest that if there was that kind of Russian-led initiative, while you want to engage, that might have had a different perspective to that which is run by or promoted by the US. So that is a very live discussion now.

What we are seeking to do is—you are quite right—the appointments. That is why I started my comments with the cyber centre. I have seen it. It is dynamic. It provides important information, both open source and others. I think that basis, having data that is validated, valued and correct, is an important attribute to have as you engage on this important agenda. Where this will end and what we will end up with is open to speculation, but I agree with you that ultimately we might well see evolving a structure. As to how that is agreed, I think there will be many obstacles and challenges before we can agree a multilateral, international framework for that, but those discussions are under way.

[Tom Tugendhat took the Chair]

Chair: Thank you. I am going to take back the Chair. I am back from the Myanmar statement. My apologies, Minister, for my delay. I am grateful for the answers you have given so far. Claudia, you wanted to come in.

Q315 **Claudia Webbe:** Thank you, Chair, and welcome back. It is great to see you, Lord Ahmad. I want to follow up on what you just touched on in terms of UK influence and being able to secure positions. On lessons learnt, you were talking about our recent failings to hold key posts within multilateral organisations. I wonder whether there has been a waning of UK influence in these organisations, and whether that has been a product of Britain's handling of international relations to date. What are your thoughts on that?

Lord Ahmad: Thank you, Claudia; it is good to see you. First of all, I do not agree on the premise of the question. I remember the interactions, including with the Chair, going back to 2017. At that time, the FAC, the FCO and HMG were rightly disappointed about the loss of the ICJ election. Were there lessons learned from it? Absolutely. There were issues on prioritisation, issues of ensuring that resourcing goes behind priority elections, and issues of ensuring that there is a one-Government approach.

Picking up, if I may, on the immediate aftermath in 2018, Ambassador Braithwaite touched on the role of the International Telecommunications Union in Geneva and the role of the SG there, who is Chinese. Well, the DSG is a Brit: Malcom Johnson. The reason—I say this very, very clearly—we won that election is because it was a strategic campaign. It was organised in a way—it was cross-departmental at that time between the



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FCO and DCMS. It was strategic, and we were highlighting where our key challenges would be—not least, Malcom won that against a candidate from Burkina Faso. So it was not a small victory; it was actually quite a major victory, if you look at the influence of the African Union.

Most recently—I was very much involved with that campaign, along with officials across the piece—was the election of Judge Joanna Korner as a judge at the International Criminal Court, which took place in December. This was a very structured campaign. It was a priority campaign. It was done in a manner that ensured we focused in on the strengths of the candidate. I think this is very important. As someone who is appointed to Parliament, I am telling people who are elected that you know far better about regular campaigns. Well, I assure you that, as peers, we get involved as well. But in all seriousness, it is all about how you run a campaign and understanding the candidate's strengths—in this case, those of Joanna Korner. What did she bring? Her experience at the ICTY. How could that be leveraged, in terms of her competition with 18 others for only six places in what was a competitive election? But I believe—fast forward—we ran this campaign over a year. It was done in a structured way. It was ensuring we leveraged bilateral relationships. It ensured we learned and built on why we were not successful in 2017, which resulted in Joanna Korner's election—I would add, in the first round.

However, that does not mean we just stop there and say, "Hurrah! We've now won and there's nothing more to be done." I think we need to ensure that we continue to be focused on priority elections. There is a broader point here as well. It is not just about elections; it is about influencing appointments as well. Looking between 2017 and 2018, we have a whole raft of appointments that we have been successful in securing for UK candidates. Although it may not have been a formal election, it is because of structured lobbying, both in post and at ministerial level, that we have been able to secure a range of positions, such as Steve Kavanagh as a senior official at Interpol in 2019. Other bodies that we can talk about include the various UN agencies. I would be happy, in the interests of time, to write to the Committee about some of the—

Q316 Claudia Webbe: Let me be absolutely clear. Obviously, we did not get the 2017 WHO director general and we did not get the 2020 WTO director general. At the ICC, we failed to make the initial shortlist. I wonder whether there was any politics at play. When I say "politics", I mean anything to do with our international relations rather than our campaigning efforts. I think that there were some issues with regard to our ability to hold key seats that we had actively gone for.

Lord Ahmad: First, on the ICJ, I totally accepted that there were lessons learnt about prioritisation. At that time, we were running a World Health Organisation candidate alongside an ICJ candidate. That was back in 2017; obviously we are in 2021 now. Suddenly, the equities— As I said, it is all about strategy and ensuring that, once we prioritise—as we do now, in a very structured way—the key priority elections or nominations that we are going for, we then follow through in a very structured, co-ordinated and effective way. I, as a Minister, my colleagues, other Ministers, the



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Foreign Secretary and, indeed, our key ambassadors in post, as well as our team at the centre, all work to ensure that prioritisation, and the lobbying takes place at all levels.

Picking up on your point on the World Health Organisation, I think it is particularly notable that the importance of the candidate was also recognised. The fact that David was subsequently appointed as a special envoy on covid-19 demonstrates that many countries recognised his strengths as a candidate in that election, although that appointment took place at the time of the pandemic unravelling last year.

On the shortlist point that you made, our priority was the election of the judge, Joanna Korner. I think you are referring to the prosecutors shortlist. That is not a determination that we would make; a central body within the assembly of states parties within the ICC makes that determination. The state parties themselves concluded that that shortlist was not of a satisfactory calibre, which is why it was opened up into a longlist. I just add that there are three candidates, and while it is not an election, three suitable candidates have been identified and we are live in this, currently in the running for the prosecutor's role, of which one is a Brit, Karim Khan. We are certainly supportive of Karim's bid to become the prosecutor.

There will be a challenge, because we have the registrar's position and we have just had a judge elected to the ICC, but nevertheless, the fact is that when the list was opened up, it was not owing to a lack of lobbying, but because the core group within the ICC made that decision. Everyone—all member states—felt that the shortlist did not have the calibre of candidates. Indeed, when it was opened up as a longlist, and through representations that we made, Karim Khan was recognised as one of the top three candidates to be put forward and be considered, as he currently is, for that role at the ICC.

However, I take on board, and am in no way complacent, and—*[Inaudible.]*—come in also on the Liam Fox election. Liam is someone I know well personally. He was a very able candidate. He went through the first round and on to the second round. Of course, these are closed votes, so we will never know how close he got to the final round. Nevertheless, with all these, judgment calls are made at particular times. My view is very clear. We need to identify, as we do now, in a very structured way, what our priority elections are and nominations to other bodies, and then to focus the full force of not only the FCDO but other Departments that are part of that where required. We must ensure that there is a strategic approach.

I agree that it is about our influence among countries. That is why we work across our different briefs to ensure that we make representations at the highest level to capitals. When we have international elections, such as the ICC, one has to understand the dynamic of the permanent representatives in New York—especially from the small states, which from my own experience carry a lot of influence, because they cannot refer back to capital in the same way. Last year was not an example of what we



have done there. However, as Minister for the UN, I have engaged extensively, and we have ensured that, on every visit to New York, we are engaging with roundtables, and that, whether it is with the United States or Vanuatu, we treat the countries of the United Nations in a manner that reflects the importance of relationship building. I cannot stress enough that if there is one learning from my role as a Minister, particularly in FCDO, it is the value of investing in relationships, and I assure you that we do that. With that, if I may just briefly bring in Julian—

Q317 Claudia Webbe: Before you bring in Julian, I have a question that I think is more for you than for Julian. Was the scale of the defeat that the UK faced in the UN General Assembly over the Chagos Islands an indication of the UK's waning influence? What has been the impact of this loss on the UK's standing internationally?

Lord Ahmad: First of all, on the Chagossian issue and BIOT, the British Indian Ocean Territory, there was an ICJ opinion, which is not legally binding on any member state. As you know, with the ICJ, both parties to a dispute need to agree to an ICJ adjudication. In that case, it was an advisory opinion based on Mauritius's view that the original settlement that was given to the Chagossians was not fair, and that the issue of a British Indian Ocean overseas territory was something that the Mauritians disputed, and that we continue to retain our control over BIOT in a manner that they feel is unmerited.

We feel very strongly that the continued role of British sovereignty over BIOT is something that is—*[Inaudible.]*—and we believe that BIOT provides an important strategic position. We argue that. You referred to the General Assembly vote and, of course, it was disappointing to see the numbers, but I think it was presented in a way that was Britain with the old colonial inference of the United Kingdom. However, that is not the case. This is a strategic post. We stand by the fact that the ICJ opinion was an advisory one, and we continue to put our case to international partners in that respect.

Q318 Claudia Webbe: Chair, I think that finishes my questions for now. I know you indicated that Julian should come in. It is up to the Chair—if it is quick, there might be room—but I think the question has been answered.

Chair: Very briefly, Julian.

Julian Braithwaite: Only to add that we have learned the lesson of the ICJ. We have also had to do a lot of thinking from first principles about how we mobilise international support having left the EU, which is a powerful regional group and a multiplier in the multilateral system. We have been learning those lessons and implementing them with some success, but it is true with any election, including international elections, that they are by definition uncertain things. If you don't run for them, you definitely will not win, and if you do run, sometimes you win and sometimes you lose.

The Minister is absolutely right that we need to get, and have got, better at prioritisation, but it is also true that those who are perhaps most



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successful at this are also prepared to run and to accept that they will lose. The French also ran for WHO, with a former Minister, and lost; they also ran for the FAO, which was more of a shock for them. They have also been learning lessons. Together, with the French, the Americans and others, we can work more collectively and strategically together to ensure that like-minded countries retain important and influential positions in this system, as part of this wider discussion that we have been having about how to ensure that we retain the overall influence in the multilateral system that we wish to.

Chair: Thank you very much. I know, Minister, that you are keen to give long and detailed answers, because it is a skill that you have perfected, but I will ask you to go as quickly to brevity as you can. Forgive me, Royston: who is coming in with the next question?

Royston Smith: That is me, Chair.

Chair: Excellent.

Q319 **Royston Smith:** I will try to give you, Minister, two or three questions together, to save time and so that we can crack on. You have been extraordinarily generous with your time already.

Given the increase in politicisation of global health and the increasing need of co-ordination across Whitehall in the wake of the pandemic, how is the newly merged FCDO engaged with the global health oversight group? In addition, how has the role of the group changed in the past 12 months, because of the pandemic? Should the FCDO chair the group going forward?

Lord Ahmad: First of all, I will make a quick point, conscious of what the Chair has said. The FCDO, for the equities it brings, is the right way forward. It will give us a much more structured approach to how we tackle many of the challenges that we face. On the role of UK leadership in that respect, I agree, there is a role. We should continue to strengthen our voice in that respect, and I believe that through the merger of the FCDO we will be able to do just that.

Q320 **Royston Smith:** Will you expand on the question itself, about the global health oversight group? Has the FCDO engaged with that group? Does it intend to? How has the role of the group changed over the last 12 months? They are quite important specifics.

Lord Ahmad: If I could bring in Julian at this point, I will come back on this.

Julian Braithwaite: I also attend the global health oversight group, which is chaired jointly by the director generals of the FCDO, DHSC and the Cabinet Office. It is a very important forum. The balance on it has changed with the merger, because DFID was a key player on that group, precisely because of the amount of money that we put into the global health system.



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It is the essential high-level, at least official-level, co-ordination group on global health. It has played an important part in the considerable leadership that the UK has been showing on that, particularly around the COVAX facility with the World Health Organisation. But the balance has changed, and the FCDO's collective weight on it has increased.

Q321 **Royston Smith:** Do you think the FCDO should chair that?

Lord Ahmad: At the moment, the relationship works very well between the two Departments. I think it can be more issues-led as to whether, going forward, the FCDO chair it or not. I can't offer a specific view on that, but I think our relationship has worked very well.

Just to show you how we are working together specifically on the covid-19 crisis, we are working on this issue with Matt Hancock and Wendy Morton, who leads on this at the FCDO, and the co-chairing of various meetings in that respect has proven to be highly successful. We have the diplomatic network when it comes to international issues, be it health or otherwise. Leveraging those relationships when it comes to a world pandemic, as we are currently facing, is also important.

The point I would make is one of co-ordination. It should be issues-led. It may well be the case in certain instances that the FCDO leads on a particular agenda, because the equities suggest it is better sitting with the FCDO, but there is no long-term decision in that respect.

Royston Smith: Thank you, Chairman.

Q322 **Chair:** May I briefly ask a question directly to Julian? It is your call, of course, Minister. It is about the co-ordination of activities in missions. Clearly, Geneva is an important mission for co-ordination; it brings together so many different UN bodies and different aspects of our foreign policy in one. We are quite used to seeing autocratic states being rather good at this—China is a classic example. Are we getting better at it?

Lord Ahmad: I think we are. I will hand over to Julian; all I will say on the merger of the FCDO is that I often joke that it is my third reincarnation. I was an FCO Minister, a joint Minister and now a merged Minister.

Importantly, in post, we see a high commissioner and an ambassador now fully empowered with the diplomacy and development priorities in-country. In my own patch, across south Asia, I see it as extremely important in joint working. It also reflects the working that—*[Inaudible]*—of the resident co-ordinator focus that the UN brings, that they are trying to route through the different agencies working in-country through a single entity, which I think is sensible. But over to Julian, with your permission.

Julian Braithwaite: The new operating model for FCDO will definitely help. It will mean that the organogram of mission will enhance the co-ordination and the fact that it all heads up through to the head of mission, the ambassador. It worked very well before, but that was more through



personalities working well together rather than the actual organogram bringing us together.

Geneva is probably the most “DFID” of the major multilateral posts. The DFID role and funding in Geneva was a huge part of the UK’s overall influence. We are now bringing that much more closely together with our political engagement, both through how, as we discussed earlier, we get the right people into leadership positions in these organisations and how we engage diplomatically through their governance structure.

So it was happening before, but this new structure will allow us to make it work much more in line with the mission’s organogram. I don’t think we are getting as good as the Chinese on this, but that is probably for good reasons.

Q323 **Chair:** There’s a natural bar to our success, is there?

Lord Ahmad: I would say no to that. We are forever learning and evolving. Through that learning and evolution, I would hope we are getting better.

Chair: Okay.

James Kariuki: Can I jump in on this one to give a perspective from London? Julian is being quite modest, but I think that DIT, DHSC and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, would all see him as their man, their person, in Geneva, just as Barbara Woodward is our person in New York for the whole of Government. I think we have been pretty good at doing that.

The join-up between posts is the other thing that’s really important—ensuring that your human rights policy in Geneva and New York work together and that your humanitarian and conflict policies work together. Again, I think that is something that we are pretty good at compared to most of our competitors.

Q324 **Chair:** Thank you. That goes straight into questions about China’s influence in the WHO. I don’t want to go over some of the ground that you have already covered. Given the constraints on the secretariat in criticising the actions of its member states, particularly those who contribute so much, what is the role of the UK in speaking out against states who are not acting in the spirit of the organisation? I say those who are contributing so much, but China actually contributes proportionately very little—about 2%—in the WHO, yet it seems to have a very strong influence.

Lord Ahmad: I will start, Chair, and then ask Julian to come in from Geneva, with your permission. First, we believe the World Health Organisation plays a crucial role, as has been demonstrated through covid-19. We have seen Chinese influence extended. The disengagement of the previous US Administration was not helpful. Therefore, we welcome the fact that the US has re-engaged with the World Health Organisation. That is an important step forward.

You talked about money. Money does help in setting a system and structure. Our support and leadership on the COVAX arrangement and structure within the World Health Organisation has been instrumental in identifying the UK as not only being in a leadership role but influencing others also to support the COVAX facility. Those demonstrate our commitment to the World Health Organisation.

In terms of positions, that is also important. We of course have people. You will remember a former colleague of ours in Parliament, Jane Ellison, who has a senior role in the World Health Organisation. Dr David Nabarro is also leading on the covid-19 issue for the World Health Organisation. There is also more, important work to be done on getting the right people into governance structures. With that, with your permission, I will hand over to Julian.

Julian Braithwaite: The key issue is the fact that the WHO is not an executive organisation and it cannot force any of its members to co-operate, so it has to get their agreement. One reason why China has had so much influence in this pandemic is that the virus was first detected in China. In order to declare this a public health emergency of international concern, which is, if you like, the WHO ringing the global alarm bell, they really had to get China on board. Director general Tedros engaged very politically with the Chinese to try and reassure them that this was the right thing to do. In the process, he was supportive of what China was doing. There are questions to be answered about the initial co-operation and sharing of data, which we have raised as the UK, and other states have done likewise.

We also played an instrumental role with others in agreeing a mandate for both an investigation into the origins of the virus and a review of the international response—the WHO’s response—which will be the mechanism that allows us really to reform the system, as it will need to be reformed, to make it more effective next time. The investigation into the origin of the virus is something that China is taking a very close interest in. Of course, we have the WHO team in China at the moment, which is good, but we will want to reserve judgment on just what they have managed to find when they report back and how much real access they were given.

Chair: Thank you. Bob, you wanted to come in.

Q325 **Bob Seely:** Just to follow up what you were saying, Tom, with a very quick point about New York, do our witnesses think that we have enough clout in New York to be as effective as we could be within the UN system? I’m talking not only about the amount of people we’ve got, but how they work together and also whether we have the right building to be getting as much out of the UN system as we can.

Lord Ahmad: If I may start on that, the UN, and our influence at the UN, is extremely important. It’s about sending the right people there. In the new appointee of Barbara Woodward we have someone who is a very distinguished diplomat. We were talking earlier, Bob, about the influence of China. Arguably, there is no one who knows better the challenges of the



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relationship with China, because she was formerly our ambassador to Beijing.

People are very important. I am also delighted that James Kariuki, who has joined us today, will shortly be leaving our shores to join the team in New York as Barbara's deputy. Again, he is someone who brings a lot of multilateral understanding and experience. The people within the team are important.

You talk specifically about infrastructure. I think it is how we engage. We are penholders on a raft of priority issues at the UN, where we do lead. They include issues such as Sudan and the Rohingya. They provide opportunities for building alliances. We certainly have invested in becoming more strategic in building support for our position, and that comes from direct engagement. We certainly need to invest more time in that.

In terms of influence, those who have been to the UN General Assembly—I have certainly seen the intensity of a UN General Assembly on a number of occasions—will know that we retain influence by having offices and places within the UN building, which I think is welcome. It gives us leverage because it means that people aren't travelling as much.

Our UN mission is situated very close by, and we have recently invested in upgrading the floors we have in the building to ensure that we can hold more events within the UK mission itself. Of course, we continue to be one of the large funders overall to the United Nations. I think we are third behind the US and Germany. That also allows us to extend influence.

The final point, which was recognised recently, is on our origins behind the UN75. Last month, we would have entertained the Secretary-General and his senior team during a visit at the end of the UN75, but we had a very successful virtual visit from António Guterres, where there were various meetings, including with the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Prince of Wales. Recognition within the UN hierarchy of the important role the UK plays is still very much paramount, and that role is highly regarded and respected.

Chair: Bob, did you want to follow up?

Bob Seely: That's it, thank you.

Q326 **Chair:** I want to come on to the voluntary funding model that applies to so many aspects within our multilateral relationships. What are the advantages and disadvantages of that?

Lord Ahmad: I will start and then bring in James. First and foremost, yes, with many areas we have our core funding. It is important that we fulfil our mandate. On voluntary contributions, that allows us to illustrate and demonstrate UK leadership on the priorities that matter to us in terms of investment on key areas, whether that is issues of climate change, as currently, or issues of girls' education.



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It allows us to bring focused and convening power behind initiatives that we want a multilateral response and support for. In a nutshell, it allows us to demonstrate our priorities and to work those through the multilateral system. If I may, I will bring in James.

James Kariuki: Thank you, Minister. Neil Briscoe, who heads our UN department, is also with me and can add to this if necessary.

The model is essentially that you have your assessed contributions, and voluntary funding is on top of that. We fund organisations in line with our objectives to achieve those goals, whether it is the additional funding that we put into the health organisations in Geneva or the money that we put on top of our assessed contributions to the UN agencies and the development system in New York. Those decisions are taken by the thematic policyholders, whether they are dealing with girls' education or humanitarian assistance. We are leaders and major donors in all those issues.

In the model, there is a multilateral element—an assessed element—a voluntary element and a performance element so that we can top up our voluntary funding to incentivise performance from the UN system to recognise reform when it is made. That model has meant that we are not just a big donor but a really influential donor in the UN system. Does Neil want to add anything extra?

Neil Briscoe: Just to underscore that the voluntary funding gives us a range of options. We go very firmly through the negotiations in the Fifth Committee around things like assessed budgets. We hold our own on that on key priorities, and we work very hard with others.

To come back to the earlier question about expertise, we have a phenomenal team that delivers success through those very tough negotiations, usually running up to and through Christmas each year. On top of that, the voluntary funding allows us to resource things that are priorities for us, either the catalytic funding that then becomes mainstreamed, or other issues where we know that we would face a particularly tough ride going through the consensus process and the Fifth Committee.

To add to what James said, in terms of the funding that we give to the New York development agencies, we have what is known in the FCDO as a single business case, which is essentially a core fund of money that resources four different agencies and has a performance tranche on top of it. We have the latitude to decide to use it as an incentive to improve co-operation, both at headquarters and in the field. That has proven a very powerful tool. It is quite innovative, in terms of how we fund that group of agencies, and again it gives us leverage to make sure they are living up to the commitments that they have already made around co-operation.

Q327 **Chair:** Thank you very much indeed. I am very grateful for that. There is clearly going to be a cut to some aspects of this support in the coming years, either because of the drop in GDP or because of the drop from



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0.7% to 0.5%, which the Government has announced. How does the Government intend to ensure that the UK maintains influence and constructive engagement with these organisations? Although the UK's contribution will proportionately still be high, it is of course still true that other countries will be donating or contributing more to many of these organisations than we will.

Lord Ahmad: First and foremost, we are in the process of determining the final priorities around the reduced ODA spend. The Foreign Secretary laid a WMS last week on the other Departments as well as the FCDO, but you will have also seen that the FCDO will have the majority of the ODA spend. We have been engaging very regularly since the public announcement of this with key partners, including the various UN agencies, to get an early understanding of their priorities as related and translated towards our priorities on particular issues. Whatever agency it may have been, there has been quite an extensive and early engagement programme with UN agencies and various key NGO partners to understand their challenges but also to set expectations. We haven't made the final decisions on the ODA spend for 2021. That is a live process that we are currently going through with the Foreign Secretary.

Equally, I would add that, through the investments we are making in direct engagement—this comes back to a point I made earlier, before you joined us—the people-to-people engagement that we are having through the UN structures and other multilateral organisations, and the influence that we can bring in terms of ensuring that we get the right people into the right roles within multilateral organisations, is also part and parcel of the ongoing strategy. It shouldn't just be about the ODA spend. There is also a lot of work still to be done in further strengthening our influence within international organisations.

My final point is that while it is a reduction, it is still a substantial spend, as you rightly acknowledged in the introduction, and we will spend £10 million on this. It is about how we can leverage that spend much more effectively with the partners, and we will continue to avail ourselves of opportunities to do that.

Q328 **Chair:** If I may, I will move on to a separate question to do with the Human Rights Council. This question raises many concerns because, like many multinational organisations, it accepts, quite understandably, individuals from many different countries. How does the Government deal with the frankly absurd position of the North Korean delegation commenting on the human rights of Australia? Does Her Majesty's Government have any views on how many Australians have sought asylum or refugee status in North Korea, and how many boats are currently leaving the shores of the Gold Coast to find refuge in the gulags of Pyongyang?

Lord Ahmad: First of all, Chair, far be it from me as a Minister to give you a specific answer without the figures, but in answer to your direct question, I think the answer is zero. If that is not the case, we will of course correct that as a matter of record.



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In all seriousness, you are quite right: there are many countries in the Human Rights Council. I have experienced it directly in delivering key statements on key issues—issues that I know are of paramount importance to your good self—relating to the Xinjiang situation, particularly with the Uyghur Muslims, as well as to other situations in other countries. South Asia is my portfolio. We have drawn attention to the lack of freedom of religion or belief, to have thrown back at us challenges on Islamophobia in Britain, which we recognise, but at least it is not state supported in any shape of form.

Those things are live. As you know, the Human Rights Council continues to lead that reform. In an earlier point, I said that the US disengaging was not helpful, but the fact that they are now re-engaging with the HRC is also valuable. In a broader sense, we were the first to make quite specific statements at the Human Rights Council on the situation of the Uyghurs, and through our support and representation, both at ministerial level and through diplomats, we have built support—incremental support—for our statements within the—*[Inaudible.]*—in New York.

What has been noticeable, and long may it continue, is the number supporting the alternative position of China declining, although there is still work to be done. We have to leverage greater levels of support, particularly with the OIC, and I welcome future discussions with you on how we influence countries that clearly have an interest with the likes of China and other such member states, and have a much more economic and transactional approach to those countries.

When it comes to supporting international statements, those countries are less willing, or indeed do not support the position of the UK and like-minded partners. You mentioned Australia, and we are working very closely with the Australians, as well as with a number of other countries. We were obviously pleased to become formal members of the Human Rights Council again for the 2021 to 2023 period. We look forward to strengthening our statements in that respect, as well as to building alliances and support. Again, if I may, with your permission, I will bring in Julian Braithwaite.

Julian Braithwaite: Every single UN member is able to speak at the Human Rights Council, but only the 47 elected members are actually members of the council. North Korea can ask questions. They can ask questions in the UPRs—the universal periodic reviews of all countries—and they can engage in debates in the Human Rights Council.

In the Human Rights Council, the 47 members include China, have included Saudi Arabia in the past, and include other countries, such as Venezuela, whose human rights records deserve scrutiny. We do press very hard so that only countries in good standing in the UN system on human rights are elected to the Human Rights Council. That doesn't mean they are all going to be like-minded. That's the nature of this body. It is a representative universal body that is going to represent different perspectives on human rights, but we believe that every elected member of the council should be in good standing in terms of their co-operation



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with the UN human rights processes, the special rapporteurs and the like. That is not always the case, but we point it out when it isn't. It is then a matter for the UN General Assembly, as to who gets elected.

The flip side of having a body that has countries like Venezuela and China on it is that we can engage them directly in the Human Rights Council on their records, and engage in that debate within the global forum on human rights, over the battle of ideas over human rights. We have seen progress over the years in terms of winning those battles and building coalitions. If the US re-joins and re-engages with the Human Rights Council, we will be in a much stronger position still, because we have missed it over the last four years.

Q329 **Chair:** Thank you very much. So, there is an advantage despite the bizarre scenes that we see. I suppose that is worth noting. Does the Government plan to take greater action on Xinjiang at the UN level? I ask that because, although the statements we have had are welcome, one does feel that, frankly, we could go further.

Lord Ahmad: If I could start with that, first and foremost we have seen an increase in the number of countries supporting our position. Just to look back on what we have seen, in the UN Third Committee, in October 2019, we had 23 countries supporting us at the UN HRC. In June 2020, we had 28 countries. At the UN Third Committee in October 2020, we had 39 countries. That is testament to the fact that we are raising this issue consistently and regularly.

The debate in both Houses is increasingly keeping the spotlight on this issue. From my perspective, as the Minister for human rights, that is particularly welcome.

I know this has been talked about, but the introduction of our human rights sanctions regime has been a key area of focus for colleagues across Parliament. You would expect me to say this, but while I cannot speculate on future issues, the whole reason why that regime was introduced was that the egregious abuses of human rights that we see across the world can be tackled directly, against individuals and organisations, limiting both their operational accounts as well as their ability to travel.

If I may, I will hand over to Julian. I have the joys of a Division in the Lords. I momentarily need to make sure that I diligently cast my vote.

Chair: Thank you. Julian, while the Minister votes, do you want to pick it up?

Julian Braithwaite: Is there any particular angle you would like me to develop from the Minister's comments?

Q330 **Chair:** The angle I would be keen to hear is—maybe it is more for James. I don't know how you would split this, but given that the human rights settlement sits in Geneva, I thought it might be you. The way that we develop this and operationalise a UN body in this is clearly a matter of concern to us, when we see that China very often exerts vetoes on many



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of the actions we try to take. How can the UK Government promote human rights equalities when, as in this case, the country concerned has the ability to block all action?

Julian Braithwaite: In the Human Rights Council, the country-specific resolutions are the most hard-hitting way of raising these concerns. You then need to get at least half of the voting members of the council to vote for it, in order for it to pass. Countries don't run resolutions against the superpowers, is the general rule of thumb. That is true for the United States and it has been true for China.

We have started with these joint statements and the next question would be, "Okay, so are you moving towards something like a resolution in the Human Rights Council?" At the moment, China has the numbers to block that, but these are the questions that we need to be looking at, as you say. With the forced labour camps in Xinjiang and with what is going on there, these are very serious human rights issues of global concern.

There are other bodies within Geneva as well, within the multilateral system, where we can look to be raising these issues. We have been stepping up in the last couple of years on this. We would like to see the High Commissioner for Human Rights visit Xinjiang, but if she can't, we would also like to see her be more visible on the issue of Xinjiang. There is more that can be done; there is more that we will need to do. We're not there yet, but if we ever got to the issue of thinking of a resolution, we would want to win it. That's one of the reasons that we haven't yet offered to run one: because we're not there yet.

Q331 **Chair:** Can I ask as a follow up to that—James, you're going to want to come in in a second, I can see that, so perhaps this is for you—we've seen the UK get defeated every now and again, including, for example, on the Mauritius sovereignty claim over the Chagos islands. Why are we losing, and why is China winning?

James Kariuki: I wasn't going to come in on that point specifically, but if I could build on that it may be connected. I think that sometimes it's portrayed as a west v. China game, but in fact there's a huge middle ground. There are countries in Africa and Latin America that don't like China's behaviour but are scared of speaking up. Islamic countries are not comfortable about Xinjiang.

I think that the game we're in is essentially to build support out from the Europeans and Americans, to broaden the coalition of those who are prepared to speak up. I think that the change in the US is an opportunity. If the US is giving people an excuse not to follow the west, it becomes harder for us to build that coalition, but it helps when the US is in the game.

Some of those same counties are uncomfortable about the BIOT issue for historical reasons, and we have to live with that too. Maybe the point is that we need to be winning most of the arguments with the Africans, the Latins and the Asians if we're to thrive in the human rights business.

Lord Ahmad: If I may make a quick point to add to that, about how we can strengthen that support and move forward, there's historic precedent on a slightly different but live issue, which is on Myanmar. What we have seen over the last three years—and this is where the UK has exerted its influence at the UN Security Council—you will recall back in 2016-17 there was not even a word uttered after a UN meeting on the issue of Myanmar. What we saw was an incremental, gradual and structured support that fell short of a resolution, which I fully accept. But what we got to eventually was a presidential statement which even the Chinese accepted and did not block. This meant that we saw both progress and discussion taking place quite publicly that would then allow for subsequent reporting of that discussion through the UN Security Council.

There is still more to be done, but I was live to that. Indeed, our Prime Minister, who was then Foreign Secretary, through his engagement directly in Myanmar, came back and the directives that were subsequently issued resulted in a real changing of a position which was, to my mind, unacceptable. We weren't even commenting on what happened at the UN Security Council but ended up at a point where we were not just briefing out, but we had a presidential statement.

There are, of course, limitations, like referrals to the ICC etc., but those are dependent on countries being state parties and, of course, can be made at the UNSC. We can only play that hand once, because if it's blocked it will then be difficult to bring that back. It's a judgment call about building up numbers and support. While there is still so much to be done, on the Rohingya issue we have certainly seen a level of support building that has changed the dial somewhat at the Security Council. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you. We will move on to Interpol. Royston, you may want to pick up some of this—there are many questions about the nature in which the work going on at Interpol has challenged some democracies.

Q332 **Royston Smith:** Thank you, Chairman. Will the UK lobby against any attempt by the UAE to see its delegate become president at the next meeting?

Lord Ahmad: If I may, Chair, Interpol is a Home Office lead and we are joined by Chris Jones, who is the director of international co-operation. I will bring him in at this point, with your and Royston's permission.

Chris Jones: Thank you, Minister. For the presidential elections coming up at the end of this year, it is too soon to say who the candidates will be. Obviously, the UK will look to support candidates who have a history of observing high standards in a rules-based international system, and we will look at that later in the year once the full field of candidates comes forward. At the moment, we are not in a position to make any particular statement on who we will and will not support for that election.

Q333 **Royston Smith:** What is the FCDO doing to work with other like-minded democracies to effect change at Interpol?



Chris Jones: For the elections, in 2018 the FCO and Home Office both worked closely together with like-minded partners to push back on the nomination of a candidate from Russia. We were successful in that and in securing the current president of Interpol from the Republic of Korea. We will do the same, and are doing the same already, in engaging with like-minded countries to try to ensure that we have a suitable candidate elected to the presidency at the end of the year.

Q334 **Royston Smith:** And that suitable candidate might be the candidate from the UAE?

Chris Jones: As I say, it is too soon for us to say who we will be supporting on an individual basis, and we will look at the range of candidates who are standing for that role.

Q335 **Royston Smith:** Are you surprised that Interpol's secretariat has not suspended any of the states that repeatedly attempt to misuse the red notice and diffusion systems?

Chris Jones: First of all, red notices are an important part of our work with Interpol, but Interpol is crucial for more general global co-operation on law enforcement and has a wide range of capabilities that we use. Specifically in relation to Interpol red notices, we take all allegations of abuse very seriously; I will not comment on individual cases, but I know the Committee has had evidence in previous sessions on that. In terms of the steps Interpol itself has taken, it has moved on quite a bit in the past few years.

Clearly, Interpol's constitution prohibits activities of a political nature. It has very clear data processing rules and in the past few years it has established a new taskforce, which is multidisciplinary and looks specifically at the Interpol notices and diffusions. Indeed, the UK has a senior lawyer who is seconded into that taskforce to work with it. That is in addition to the UK's having the executive director of police services post in Interpol, which is the second most senior position in Interpol, with Stephen Kavanagh, an ex-chief constable who is now playing a major role in Interpol itself.

Beyond the internal checks that Interpol has on diffusions and notices, it also has an independent body, which controls the use of personal data within Interpol. That independent commission is in effect a data protection supervisory body, which takes complaints and can seek redress in specific areas. The Interpol systems in place are significantly stronger than they were a few years ago; they have our confidence and they are in place, and we will continue to work closely with Interpol at all levels to ensure that those mechanisms are employed effectively. We are not complacent in that, but we are confident that Interpol has those mechanisms in place.

Q336 **Royston Smith:** Do you have confidence that they are sufficiently independent?

Chris Jones: As I say, there are systems within Interpol itself, its multidisciplinary taskforce, and then there is an independent commission,



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which has representatives from a number of Interpol countries on it, which is independent of Interpol itself and deals with the specific complaints on personal data.

Q337 Royston Smith: How do you ensure that the information on red notices and diffusions relating to British citizens is shared between the Home Office and the FCDO?

Chris Jones: Individual Interpol red notices are operational matters. The National Crime Agency hosts the UK Interpol bureau, so the Home Office itself would not see those individual cases. They would be operational matters for the NCA and Interpol.

In relation to British citizens, in addition to the safeguards in place at Interpol itself, we have safeguards within the UK for an Interpol red notice in relation to other countries. First, on the European Union, we have a new trade agreement in place between the UK and the EU which governs extradition, and an Interpol red notice gives the police the power of arrest. Similarly, with EFTA countries and our Five Eyes partners, the Extradition (Provisional Arrest) Act 2020, recently passed by Parliament, provides a power for arrest, but only once that Interpol red notice is certified by the NCA. For all other countries, the Interpol red notice does not give a power of arrest. The NCA would obviously be supervising that information, but the police would have to go to a court to get an arrest warrant. That was an issue that was debated at some length in the passage of the Bill.

Q338 Royston Smith: Do you think that UK citizens subject to abusive red notices should be informed of those attempts and receive advice on the implications of the attempts?

Chris Jones: Obviously, individual red notices are operational matters for the NCA. Clearly, Interpol red notices that the UK issues, or that other countries issue, are confidential, unless they are published—pretty much by exception—on the Interpol website. The UK would not want its Interpol red notices published, or the individuals notified that there is an Interpol red notice in relation to them. That is the way in which operational co-operation happens between police forces under the Interpol system.

In relation to specific cases, if an individual British citizen is adversely affected by an Interpol red notice, consular support can be provided. Indeed, it is being provided by the FCDO in some cases. Moreover, if there is a serious concern about a specific Interpol red notice that the UK—the NCA—believed to be inappropriate and in breach of Interpol's rules and safeguards, we would of course raise that very seriously with Interpol itself. There are mechanisms for us to be able to do that.

Q339 Royston Smith: Is the individual notified of those notices against them?

Chris Jones: The individual would be notified at the point of arrest, obviously, that they are wanted—if an arrest takes place—but, as I say, there are safeguards within the UK before we get to that point with the certification process that the NCA has. There is also a need to go to a court with countries that are not in the EU, EFTA or Five Eyes.



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Q340 **Royston Smith:** So they will not know unless and until they are arrested. Is that what you are saying?

Chris Jones: Interpol diffusions and notices are confidential, as I said, unless at the request of the issuing country or if they are published on the Interpol website—which, as I said, is by exception.

Royston Smith: Thank you.

Chair: Thank you. Bob, you wanted to come in on this.

Q341 **Bob Seely:** Specifically, one of the most well-known red notice cases in recent years has been that of Bill Browder. He was almost arrested—he was held in Spain, before being released—and that was the Russian Federation Government using the red notices. Does that specific incident concern anybody who would like to take on the question? Does it show a weakness in how the red notice system is being used? That is a specific question on that specific example, please.

Chris Jones: I don't know whether the Minister wants to come in as well, but obviously I am very much aware of that particular case. At a personal level, I obviously understand the impact it has had on that individual. I think the key point is that Interpol have been strengthening their internal systems and their independent oversight mechanisms.

We continue to be very alert to any misuse of the Interpol system. As I have said, if there is a situation where we become aware that an Interpol red notice has been issued in relation to an individual but we do not think it complies with the Interpol rules—both the constitution of Interpol, which says that Interpol red notices must not be used for political purposes, and the other criteria that Interpol has, on which I think you have heard evidence from Interpol itself—that is something that we would of course take up very seriously with Interpol itself and with the country that is issuing that particular notice.

Q342 **Bob Seely:** Yes, but is there any evidence that Interpol red notices are being abused? Are there any other cases that we know about, or is that the only significant case? Are there any other eastern European countries or former Soviet states that have used Interpol red notices to hound political opponents?

Chris Jones: There have clearly been individual cases that Interpol does not make public—situations where an Interpol member has put forward an Interpol red notice and it has been refused by Interpol itself. They keep that as a matter between Interpol and the issuing Interpol state.

Q343 **Bob Seely:** I have a couple more questions, if I may. Could it have been a realistic possibility for Browder to have been extradited to Russia, or would the system have kicked in at some point? He was in Spain, and there was nothing to stop the Spanish sending him back to Russia—if not Spain, then maybe a country with a closer relationship with Russia, or a former Soviet territory. Could they have got Browder back using a red notice?



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Chris Jones: As I say, I am not going to comment on individual cases, but in general terms, beyond the Interpol red notice, which is not in itself an arrest warrant—it is important to be clear that it has that effect only where it is provided by domestic law, and I have explained the situation in the UK, but there are similar provisions in place in other European countries and elsewhere. It would be a matter for the individual country concerned as to what its domestic legislation requires and the safeguards it has in place. But obviously, extradition is a much more formal process—involving courts, a judiciary and so on—than simply a red notice. Certainly, I would have confidence that the extradition system itself is quite distinct from the red notice, and there are of course lots of other safeguards in place within that wider extradition system.

Q344 **Bob Seely:** So the red notice is the first stage in the process, but not the process itself. Therefore, you think that even if a Government wanted to use a red notice to abuse the freedoms of a British citizen or to extradite them, it is very unlikely that they would succeed. Or would it be impossible for them to succeed?

Chris Jones: I think it is not possible to comment on likelihood or individual cases, as I say. Generically, in individual countries that both issue and, more importantly, respond to Interpol red notices, there should be appropriate safeguards in place in their extradition relationships with other countries, to ensure that those requests are appropriate and justified, that there is evidence behind them, and that they are not motivated by political purposes.

Bob Seely: Thank you.

Q345 **Chair:** You have been very generous with your time, so I will begin wrapping up with a few final questions. The first is about the UN external audit system. I know this is what you live for, Julian, so we may well come to you, but the Minister may decide that it is his *bête noire* first. Does capture through the UN external audit selection process represent a problem—for example, over the Russian bid to audit the OPCW?

Lord Ahmad: If I may just open, Chair, I think while there is some degree of transparency, we have to be aware—it is interesting as this follows on from the previous question—of the motivation behind a particular process that may be initiated, including in terms of the audit process. I think we have had quite challenging discussions at the OPCW with the Russians in particular around the budgetary process. But again, in this respect, it comes back to relationships, and our lobbying and our position when it has come to budget and auditing purposes within the context of the OPCW has prevailed. With that, perhaps rather than Julian at this point, if I could also bring in James who may wish to comment.

James Kariuki: Thank you, Minister. There is not a huge amount to add. Obviously, we support the principle of audit of the UN system and agencies have external auditors and internal audit processes. In principle, that is a good thing because they have organisations that we give money to and we want to function well. It is not impossible to imagine that



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system being abused for various reasons, but on the whole we think it is a process that works well. In some cases, we have UK auditors as part of that process, and it is the right way for organisations to run themselves.

Q346 **Chair:** I understand that it is clearly important to have audit and audit is a powerful function in organisations like this. We have been successful in securing some audits. Where have we failed?

James Kariuki: I don't know whether Neil Briscoe has individual cases, but there were some examples of things like WIPO where the National Audit Office is the current external auditor. That is a good thing because it is an organisation that we have big stakes in and, as we were discussing earlier, it is contested ground for future intellectual property. I don't have any cases where we are particularly concerned, but maybe Neil or Julian have an example.

Neil Briscoe: Thanks, James. I don't have an example. The NAO will often keep an eye on what openings are coming up in agency audit roles and will generally try to occupy one or two. For example, in my lifetime, it has included the World Food Programme. But there are contenders as well, so France will regularly get one of those slots and India has a very strong audit capacity. It would not be possible for us to have an auditor on every agency. The central board of auditors—there are three supreme institutions on that, and they are elected for six years, and currently it is Germany, Chile and China. Germany is due to come off next year and our understanding is that the only contender to take that over is France. But this is an ongoing issue and we speak pretty regularly with the NAO.

Just to underscore this, audits are not purely about finance either. Julian can probably speak from the Geneva angle too. It is very much about management, but also policy coherence. So, an auditor that is useful will point out where policies could be implemented more effectively or where an agency could collaborate more effectively with another. That is a very valuable function that boards, including the UK representative on boards, will then take up to try to improve wider agency performance. Thank you.

Chair: Julian, did you want to come in on that? Don't feel you have to.

Julian Braithwaite: Just to say that the UN system has many different audit functions and actually the different agencies have their own audit processes as well. Where we have been involved in designing new multilateral institutions like the Global Fund, we have put straightforward, standardised good auditing practice right at the heart of those organisations. Whether it is Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance or the Global Fund, we have put billions of pounds of UK public money through those organisations. As part of that, we have insisted on straightforward proper auditing where you get in a proper accounting firm to do the books properly and there isn't this political selection process that goes on the traditional UN system. That gives us more confidence that this will be done in a professional way without any political process involved.

Q347 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Now clearly we would support some of the



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auditors that you mentioned there; this isn't simply a case of getting UK auditors on the case. How do we work together with countries like France, Germany and others around the world to ensure that we support each other? So, that even if it isn't a UK auditor, it is at least one from a country that we support.

Lord Ahmad: If I could come in there, Chair. First, on lots of nominations and appointments, we work with like-minded partners. Earlier this afternoon we had a discussion around the WIPO candidate, ensuring that the director general position was filled by someone who was reflective of our view. It was the Singaporean who prevailed in that instance.

The same applies through the audit function as well. We would continue to identify, as Neil did, where there is a particular like-minded country that has already put forward or suggested a figure and then we will work in support of their candidate. Neil may wish to come in on that.

James Kariuki: I will make a general point. We co-chair with the US an organisation called the Geneva Group, which is formed of like-minded and major donors to all the UN funds, programmes and agencies.

That is one of the best fora for us to co-ordinate with partners on a range of budget, financial management and reform issues, including audits. That is in the weeds and below the radar, but it is a useful way in which I, Julian's team and the team in New York keep an eye on all the ways in which we hold agencies to account.

Q348 **Chair:** Thank you. I will come to the last question now, which is about the United States. We have heard that, at some point, the United States itself may have been obstructionist in the work of multilateral organisations. One can think of the World Trade Organisation in your remit, Julian. Do you agree that is sometimes the case? How do you think the UK is helpful or able to get around such obstructions?

Lord Ahmad: Before we go to Julian, I will give you an example beyond the WTO. I'm using the Minister's prerogative here.

Chair: Of course.

Lord Ahmad: We had a specific disagreement at the UN with the previous US Administration in the passing of a resolution on sexual and reproductive health. The previous US Administration took a different perspective from ours on issues of protection and affording support to victims, particularly women, of sexual violence. In that regard, we were very clear with the US in our private interactions, and then used an expression of our reason for vote, after the vote was cast, to elaborate on our disappointment.

In that instance, that was a disagreement between ourselves and the US on a point of principle. It is right that we have the exchanges in advance to inform a key strategic partner, such as the US, of our position when it is different. Equally, we should not shy away when we have a difference of opinion. That was one practical example that I can share with you, Chair.



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Chair: Thank you.

Julian Braithwaite: The last four years haven't been easy. The role that the UK has played was always to try to find ways of bringing the Americans in, and to avoid what you sometimes heard in the multilateral system, that the previous Administration were trashing the system and we shouldn't be reaching out to them, trying to involve them. We never took that view.

It is true that, without the Americans fully engaged in this multilateral system that they were instrumental in building, the system will change, and our collective influence as like-minded countries will decline. Therefore, we were constantly looking for ways to bring in the Administration.

As the Minister mentioned, the World Intellectual Property Organisation and the election there is a good example of us working with the previous Administration. We tried very hard when the previous Administration wanted to reform the Human Rights Council to see if we could help them with that. We were not successful on that.

The point with the previous Administration is that they were not always wrong about the multilateral system in their criticisms of it. We just disagreed with their tactics for having influence and achieving those things. They were ready to walk away, rather than to remain engaged, build coalitions and work with the like-minded. It is frustrating and involves compromises, but it is much more effective than walking out.

We hope that with the Biden Administration coming in we will be in a much better position. The US policy at the WHO has changed dramatically with the new Administration. We will see how much the actual substance of the policy changes in the WTO, although the nature of the engagement we expect to change significantly. They have already said they are going to engage with the Human Rights Council, which will be very welcome as we discuss how we push back against others in that fora—the fora of values in the US system—who are trying to rewrite the values and principles that underwrite the UN system.

Q349 **Chair:** Can I ask the Minister specifically? The change in tone that Julian has spoken about is something that I don't think has been missed by anybody. While I think many of us recognise the criticisms of many in the international organisations of which we have spoken in this session, the general principle that if there is a table, Britain should sit at it seems to be a powerful one, I would argue, for British diplomacy, and one that we should encourage our friends and allies to do as well in order to maximise our voice. On that basis, Lord Ahmad, how have you begun to engage with the incoming Biden Administration, where Tony Blinken, the new Secretary of State, and Jake Sullivan, the new National Security Advisor, have already made very powerful statements in support of the multilateral system and the US voice within it?



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Lord Ahmad: First of all, just a quick word or two on the previous Administration. There were instances—I can reflect on my own portfolio—where we very much welcomed the engagement and strengthening of our work with the United States. We saw some very positive progress, for example, in the area of freedom of religion or belief with the creation of an international alliance. That is also underlying the point that while we may not—[*Inaudible.*]*—*key objectives that we did align ourselves with on common values that we share. Equally, we had lobbied quite hard for them not to—[*Inaudible.*]*—*the HRC.

Coming to the Administration today, you would have seen, and we know full well, that the Prime Minister has engaged with the President. Equally, the Foreign Secretary has engaged directly with the new Secretary of State as well as Jake Sullivan, and we have had early and very structured discussions on key priorities. Barbara Woodward, our new permanent representative, has reached out already and is working with the United States on our shared agenda and priorities within the context of the UN. We were waiting for the formalities of the earlier FCDO engagements to take place, but I am certainly looking forward to engaging with my opposite number in terms of multilateral human rights issues, as well as to see how we can further strengthen our work.

We welcome the early announcements about re-engaging on the Paris agreements, which means it lends greater strength to our objectives behind COP26. As Julian said earlier, indications are very much about their re-engagement with the Human Rights Council, which will also be welcome to, again, counter the influence of other states who seek to influence the governance structures. Overall, we are very much looking forward to a progressive and close working relationship with the country that is still and remains our strongest ally and friend, and we will continue to work closely with them across a range of key priorities for Her Majesty's Government.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. We will close there. We heard powerfully about the British Government's actions in engaging with multilateral institutions and of course the challenges that lie within them. On that basis, we owe huge thanks to the entire FCDO team. For reasons purely of personal bias, I am going to thank especially Julian Braithwaite, who is a very old and personal friend, so forgive me for exercising that privilege. Minister, thanks very much to your entire team, all of whom have explained themselves with clarity and candour, for which I know the whole Committee is extremely grateful.