

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Work of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, HC 385

Tuesday 8 July 2025

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Members present: Emily Thornberry (Chair); Alex Ballinger; Aphra Brandreth; Phil Brickell; Dan Carden; Richard Foord; Uma Kumaran; Blair McDougall; Abtisam Mohamed; Edward Morello; Sir John Whittingdale.

Questions 249-318

Witnesses

I: Rt Hon Mr David Lammy MP, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs; and Sir Oliver Robbins, Permanent Under-Secretary, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Mr David Lammy MP and Sir Oliver Robbins.

Q249 Chair: This afternoon, the Foreign Affairs Committee is holding the second of two sessions today on the work of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. We are delighted to be joined by the Foreign Secretary and, for the second time today, by Sir Olly Robbins, the permanent under-secretary. Thank you very much for joining us today.

I think I ought to begin with a general question, in the light of funding constraints. Leaving aside the overseas development budget being cut, which is obviously a big part of the Foreign Office budget, there are also going to be 17% cuts to the administrative budget, which Sir Olly told us this morning will result in a 15% to 25% cut in staff. The question I want to ask you is the same one I asked him: why does the Foreign Office have to have the biggest cuts of all the different Government Departments, given that we are wrestling with so many issues, whether it is Iran, the chaos in the Middle East generally, Donald Trump or the war in Ukraine? When Britain is back on the international stage and trying to be a force for good, why are we doing this to ourselves? Why are we cutting the Foreign Office by 15% to 25%?

Mr Lammy: I think we should step back, for starters. The Foreign Office has a footprint across the world of over 17,000 people. When I came to you last, I was very clear that it was at a low ebb; it was a Department that some might describe as bloated as a result of the merger between DFID and the old Foreign Office, and because of Brexit issues, so that needed a clear take. As you know, we made a decision—the Prime Minister made a decision—around defence spending. That had an effect on our development budget, which is the lion's share of the cut that you are talking about.

In terms of foreign policy, we have done well with the Treasury to get transformation funds for the staff changes that the perm sec discussed with the Select Committee this morning. I am actually very comfortable with saying that it is important that our middle-ranking staff across the globe have places to go in the organisation, and we have had promotion freezes across the Foreign Office that I would like to see come to an end over this next financial year. As the perm sec explained, we have had a lot of directors general, and a lot of directors, across that footprint. My judgment is that there are too many in the organisation.

Chair: But that does not account for 15% to 25%.

Mr Lammy: Let me come to the second part, which is about capability. The truth is that there are innovations like AI, and we want to free up better-paid, more capable diplomats to make those fine judgments. I am therefore comfortable with the cut we have to make.

In terms of the development cut, it has always been the case, when you think about our foreign policy, that you have hard power, you have soft

power, including development, and you have diplomacy. Over the last 50 years, if we see that as an accordion, it has gone up and down to defence and to foreign and development. I think where we have landed is about right for the times we are in.

Q250 Chair: But the ODA budget is the ODA budget—it is not this admin budget. The admin budget is separate, is it not?

Mr Lammy: I said to the Committee when I was last in front of you that I did think that we would have to go into a change programme. We are now in that programme, and we will be losing staff as a result of that. In terms of the spending review, our development budget was cut, but we had transformation funds within the old Foreign Office, which is the change we are making. I am comfortable, broadly, with the settlement that we received.

Q251 Chair: How many staff do you think will be freed up by the use of AI? We are talking about how you are going to get to 15% to 25% cuts in staff, and with respect, I do not think that AI is going to be it—there must be more than that. You will be losing people.

Mr Lammy: That is not the sole change we are making. I have also said that we will, over this period, be losing some of our more senior staff. Those senior staff are generally paid more. Some of that exit will free up people—and certainly middle-ranking staff—for promotion and to do things.

We are having an intensive look at our capability. For example, we are the delivery arm of the Government on growth. We need business and economic capability, and we have to have staff with the appropriate skills. The Foreign Office cannot be solely about geographic expertise. In order to deliver on behalf of the British people and to be focused on our national interests, we have to be conscious of the capabilities we need and also how technology can help us.

On the AI point, you will recognise that I am also responsible for the SIS and GCHQ. I find it slightly bizarre that one arm of the building, GCHQ, has intense capability on AI, and the Foreign Office largely has very little. I want that to change.

Chair: I just do not think that cutting some senior people, and the people you might lose through more extensive use of AI, will result in 15% less money being spent on your admin budget, let alone 25%. There must be other people who will be losing their jobs, and I presume you know that.

Mr Lammy: As you know, I have set out six priorities that should run through the Department. This is a period where I have tasked the perm sec and his senior management team to be focused on the areas that we might no longer be doing. Clearly, in the area of development, we are having to make some tough decisions. I am really keen that we are much more co-ordinated with the G7 and European allies who fund development. We do not all have to duplicate, so there will be areas

across the organisation where we are not as present as we have been today or as we were five years ago.

Q252 Chair: The other thing you announced recently, which has caused us all a certain amount of confusion, is the China audit. From what we understand of it—which is not much, because we have not been told much—there will be 1,000 Mandarin-speaking mandarins, and the Foreign Office will be leading on the China strategy and will be where the information comes from and where assistance is directed. Given that you will be reducing your staff by 15% to 25%, what percentage of Foreign Office staff do you think will be China specialists in two years' time?

Mr Lammy: I think we have to step back to get the context of that question. The first thing is, has Britain had a stable policy towards China over the last 10 to 15 years? I think it would be hard to find an expert, a journalist or indeed a member of any political party who would say yes. It jumped around under the last Government. We were absolutely committed to setting a course, hence the audit right across Government. The audit was, understandably, led and co-ordinated by the Foreign Office, which had most of the capability, while working with other colleagues like the Cabinet Office and the national security architecture to fully understand our needs and capabilities.

I set out that audit in Parliament. It is underpinned by several reviews, including the national security review, the defence review and the industrial strategy—China runs across all of those. I said to the House of Commons that I think we need more capability in the China area, and some of that, of course, is the requirement to be able to speak Mandarin at various levels. There are around 70 or 80 people in the organisation who are extremely proficient in Mandarin. I would like to see that number grow.

Across Whitehall—not all the capability will be in the FCDO—I want to see that number increase. If you are in our embassy in China, you will know that it is made up of not just Foreign Office staff—there are DBT staff, staff from the Department of Health and staff from the Department for Education—because this is a full-spectrum operation in the second major superpower in the world.

What I have said is that we need to be better at China capability. We need more Mandarin speakers, and I have tasked this Department with having more Mandarin speakers and also having a fast-stream cohort that is dedicated to China, because that is the capability I think we need. That was one of the themes that came out of the audit.

Chair: We are going to come back to the fast stream; we are beginning with these general questions. You tell me that at the moment we have 70 to 80 people in the Foreign Office who speak Mandarin.

Mr Lammy: No, that is people at the highest proficiency. In a Department of linguists, there are obviously different levels of proficiency across the organisation.



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Chair: But your phrase was so memorable—having 1,000 “mandarins speak Mandarin” is something that we can remember—so I want to know where they are going to be. Let me ask again: how many people are we going to get speaking Mandarin in the Foreign Office in two years’ time?

Mr Lammy: That represents a figure across Whitehall; some of that capability is in the agencies. I would have to take advice, but I am happy to write to you.

Chair: It would be good just to have an idea, given how little we know about the China audit or the China strategy.

Mr Lammy: I defer to the perm sec, who is responsible in the end for staffing.

Q253 **Chair:** Okay. If you don’t mind, can I move on to Palestine? Have you been briefed on what Israel Katz has said in the last 24 hours? The latest is that he has reportedly ordered Israel’s military to prepare for establishing a camp, which he has called a “humanitarian city”, on the ruins of Rafah. In a briefing to Israeli journalists, he said that Palestinians would have to go through “security screening” before entering, and once inside they would not be allowed to leave. Israeli forces would control the perimeter and move 600,000 Palestinians into the camp. I understand that this is an emigration plan and that it would be seen as a humanitarian transit area. I just wondered whether you had been briefed on that and what the British reaction was to it.

Mr Lammy: What we are seized of at the moment is getting a ceasefire. I would like to brief the Committee on the sticking points in getting that ceasefire.

Chair: We would be very interested to hear that—thank you.

Mr Lammy: The Committee will recognise that we are closer than we have been for some time to a ceasefire, but we are clearly not yet there. First, I want the ceasefire to be permanent. I do not want a pause of 60 days; I want it to be permanent. I know that between our Qatari and American counterparts, in discussion with Israel and obviously Hamas, there is still a discussion about how permanent that ceasefire will be. That is the first thing.

Chair: May I just interject? The last time we saw you, we seemed to be in exactly the same position, if you remember. I think we were still in a war at that point and hoping there was going to be a ceasefire. There was one for a time and now we are back again.

Mr Lammy: Hence I would like it to be a permanent ceasefire.

Chair: Exactly. I understand.

Mr Lammy: The second point you make is about the IDF and their location outwith Gaza or in a buffer zone. I suspect the statement from Defence Minister Katz is in relation to that, and if indeed he is insistent on



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that position, it will be very hard to see how we get that ceasefire, because there is an acute discussion about the degree to which the IDF withdraw from Gaza.

The third issue, of course, is aid. I imagine the Committee is as concerned as I have been now for months at the new aid architecture that has been set up, which is entirely unacceptable and is not delivering to people—people are dying, in fact, waiting for the aid. I think I described it as an “abomination”. You saw the United Kingdom co-ordinate with 26 other countries about our horror at the current aid programme. I spoke to Tom Fletcher earlier this week, and clearly there has to be a role for the UN and UN agencies if we are to get the aid issues sorted out. That is the other issue that is before us.

The fourth issue, of course, relates to hostages. I think there are some 56 hostages still there. Sadly, many of them are no longer with us; about 20 are likely to be alive. There is some discussion about how you co-ordinate that—do you get 10 to exit on the first phase? I hope the hostage situation can be dealt with and resolved with Hamas.

The statements that you have just described from Defence Minister Katz relate very much to where the IDF are located. You will understand that if what you describe is true, I think that would be a big sticking point for getting that ceasefire.

Q254 Chair: I am just quoting from Haaretz—I do not know. Can I move on to the issue of the recognition of Palestine? The Government have repeatedly said they will recognise Palestine at an “appropriate time” during the process of moving toward a two-state solution. I know that today it seems like a two-state solution is a million miles away, and I appreciate that, but increasing numbers of people are concerned that if we continue to hold back on the recognition of Palestine, there will not be anything left to recognise.

People are concerned that, given what is going on on the West Bank and what is happening in Gaza, there will not be a Palestinian state, and we will have missed an opportunity to make it as clear as can be that we think that the long-term solution and long-term peace of this area can happen only if there are two states. They think that we should recognise a Palestinian state and then work towards ensuring that one happens practically, but if we continue to hold back, it will slide through our fingers.

Mr Lammy: Again, I think it is probably best to step back a bit to say that the United Kingdom has been clear—it is a cross-party position—that we believe there have to be two states. That position has been maintained for well over a generation.

Chair: I was part of the vote that voted for the recognition of Palestine, and it was always clear that we would recognise Palestine at an appropriate time. That is also a cross-party position.

Mr Lammy: As you state, recognition is also something that we remain completely committed to. The debate, the discussion, and I think the



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language in the manifesto that we signed up to is about recognition as part of a process, because as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, we want that recognition to actually lead to those two states.

There is a debate; I recognise that. There will be some members on this Committee who believe, as a result of the expansion that we have seen—more expansion in the West Bank in the last year than we saw in the 15 years preceding it, with more violence than we have seen previously—that the viability of two states is being put in question by those who are determined to pursue that, and indeed, that the commitment to two states in parts of the Israeli Government gives the impression that actually what is being committed to is either one state or no state. I recognise that, but the truth is that, despite some countries and European partners recently deciding to recognise, it has not led to change on the ground.

There is a debate currently being had. France and Saudi Arabia, of course, were going to have their conference, but it has been delayed. There is some discussion about whether it will be re-upped in July or September—I do not think that has been settled. I had a conversation with my French counterpart yesterday, and it had not quite been settled, but I will speak to the French later on again today, because they are here on the state visit. The debate is about how this can tangibly lead to change on the ground. Of course, the UK will play its part, and we are in close discussion with French and international colleagues about this.

Q255 Chair: Let me put it this way: over 100 years ago the French and the British signed up to Sykes-Picot, and it has carved up the Middle East. We are at a stage where the Israelis are about to grab enough of Palestine for Palestine not to exist anymore. While I appreciate that you are saying it ought to be part of the process, should it not be seen as the beginning of the process that the two parties to Sykes-Picot, France and Britain, recognise Palestine at that point at the Saudi conference in New York, when it is reinstated? We then start a process, and we play our part in trying to ensure that Trump gets his peace prize by organising a settlement of the Middle East that everyone in the region can cope with. Pressure is then exerted on the Israelis by Trump, so that we finally get a peace in the Middle East.

Mr Lammy: I hope that it is part of that peace, and part of the beginning of a process. You will recognise that, despite the recognition movement, we have actually seen further annexation on the West Bank. It has not led to us getting closer to a process; it has led to further annexation. Of course, you can then make the case that, regardless, it is time for the United Kingdom to recognise.

I would prefer that the United Kingdom is part of a process, particularly if you look at the history, including our relationship with Balfour and the two communities that were effectively brought together at the birth of the Israeli state. What I outlined to you on the ceasefire might be the beginning of a process, and I suspect that our French colleagues are also waiting to see whether there is a ceasefire in the next few days. That



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would be the beginning of something, particularly if it is a permanent ceasefire and not a pause.

I acknowledge what you are saying and I have sympathy for it, but these are fine judgments and this is a live situation. The crucial questions at the moment are: will the IDF still be there? Will the aid mechanism be reasonable? What are the governance arrangements of the new Gaza, and how does that link back to the West Bank? Of course, I think you will also recognise that the United Kingdom is playing a greater role than any other partner in our support for PM Mustafa, Abbas and the Palestinian Authority, as well as the reforms that are required to put them in the strongest possible position when that day comes.

Q256 Chair: This will be my last question, and I will then let Uma ask one. If there were to be recognition at this stage, or at some stage in the near future—this year—would it not also underline for the Israeli people just how far Netanyahu has moved them, as a country, away from public opinion in the world?

Mr Lammy: As the country's chief diplomat, I probably have to leave issues for the Israeli people to the Israeli people, and I should not stray into that area, although you are tempting me.

Q257 Uma Kumaran: Foreign Secretary, you have set out extensively your take on recognition, but I want to press you a bit further. Your Department said earlier this year: "UK bilateral recognition is the single most important action the UK can take with regard to Palestinian statehood. That is why it is important to get the timing right". What is the right timing?

You set out a few things earlier, but we seem to be holding Palestine to a different standard from the one we hold the rest of the world to. There are several states or countries that perhaps do things that we do not agree with, and there are contentious situations going on in many states in the world. With the recognition of Palestine, we would say that is the inalienable right of the people. We put several markers down on timings, and what the public might say is always an excuse for why the timing is not right. If there were three tests for the timing to be right, what would they be?

Mr Lammy: Again, I have to step back, because this is not a binary question. When I was last here, the Committee was concerned about the humanitarian catastrophe in Israel and the aid situation in Israel. The Committee has historically been concerned about the funding of UNRWA; I restored that. The Committee has been concerned about arms sales to Israel; I took the sober decision in December to suspend sales to Israel of arms that could be used in Gaza. The Committee has rightly been concerned about the support that we give the Palestinian Authority; I have explained that we are the biggest bilateral supporter of the Palestinian Authority. I hosted Prime Minister Mustafa; he signed a memorandum of understanding with our Government; he sat with the Prime Minister in Whitehall just a few weeks ago.



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Most recently, you will have seen that I sanctioned those who commit settler violence: I have sanctioned Ben-Gvir and Smotrich for their extremist statements within the Government. The list goes on. That is what I have done in office—

Chair: Can I just say—

Mr Lammy: Hang on a minute; let me finish the point.

Chair: I just want to make it clear that we appreciate what you have done, but it is our job to continue to push you and never to be satisfied. That is what we do.

Mr Lammy: Precisely. So on your question about recognition, I am not going to set a timeframe because I have explained that this is a moving, live situation. There are delicate ceasefire negotiations under way. I have explained the issues that sit within that and whether we will in fact get a ceasefire. I am hopeful that we will.

We are discussing recognition alongside French and Saudi colleagues, but my indication and my instinct is that I want things to change the situation on the ground. I do not think I and the Committee disagree on that, but there will be a judgment call, and I am not going to tie myself to a calendar because it is convenient for a soundbite. There is a judgment call that, quite properly, you would expect the Government to think very hard about.

Q258 Uma Kumaran: Foreign Secretary, I understand what you set out. For many people, this is not a soundbite; this is their life and their future. These are the things that people care about. That is why I am pressing you on the timescales. When you spoke to us in November, you said that your hope was that Israel would secure a normalisation deal with Saudi Arabia and that, as part of that deal, there is a pathway to a Palestinian state with a two-state solution. Is normalisation between Saudi Arabia and Israel a prerequisite for the UK to recognise the state of Palestine?

Mr Lammy: I want to make it crystal clear to this Committee that no country has a veto over when we recognise. I want to be absolutely clear about that. Some have expressed concern that Israel has some sort of veto—it does not. From my conversations with the Saudis and the Saudi Foreign Minister, normalisation will be impossible to achieve until there is a ceasefire and unless there is tangible progress on two states. Frankly, I commend my Saudi counterparts for holding true to that. That is why I was speaking to the Saudis as recently as earlier this week.

Q259 Uma Kumaran: Thank you, Foreign Secretary. This will be my last question to you. In the last 24 hours, we have heard reports that at least 700 Palestinians have been shot while waiting for food at sites run by the so-called Gaza Humanitarian Foundation. There are further plans to expand on that: the Israeli Defence Minister now plans to move 600,000 Palestinians to a camp in the ruins of the city of Rafah. That is just the first phase; they eventually want to move the whole population of Gaza there. They are calling it a humanitarian transit area, but there are no



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schools, medical provisions or any other facilities there. There are plans for forced screening. Katz wants international partners to be involved in that. Will Britain oppose that? Can you guarantee to the Committee that no British companies or NGOs will be involved in those plans?

Mr Lammy: We have been very clear that we do not support the aid foundation that has been set up. It is not doing a good job: too many people are close to starvation, too many people have lost their lives. We have led globally on our condemnation of the system that has been set up.

What we do support is the work of organisations such as the World Food Programme, that can play an important role. My understanding is that, over the last few days and weeks, there have been better conversations between the UN agency system and Israel, so I am surprised at the statements I have seen from Mr Katz over the last 24 hours.

As I have indicated, they run contra to the proximity to a ceasefire that I thought we were heading towards, so I wonder if there is some politicking going on among those within the Government who, for some reason, are standing opposed to this. What you have described I do not recognise as a serious context in which the people of Gaza can get the aid and support they need at this time.

Uma Kumaran: So Britain will be opposing any such plans.

Mr Lammy: Yes.

Chair: I will go to Abtisam. We have a lot of questions. If it is possible to perhaps have a—

Mr Lammy: I will do my best, but these are complex questions—

Chair: Of course they are, and you want to make sure you express yourself as accurately as possible, and we quite understand that; you are absolutely on the record. But we are just saying that we have lots of questions.

Mr Lammy: No, I do understand.

Q260 **Abtisam Mohamed:** Foreign Secretary, if I may take us back to the question of recognition. You said that no country has the right to veto recognition, including Israel, but it voted in the Knesset against recognition, and we have heard from Israeli representatives; the Leader of the Opposition said it would take several election cycles before recognition would take place. Are we just throwing recognition completely into the long grass? Because it does sound like Israel has a veto here.

Mr Lammy: I recognise why you ask this question, but it sort of goes back to what I said before. If you believe that recognition is a symbolic act—an unequivocal reassertion of two states—then, of course, countries like the United Kingdom can make that decision whenever they want, and you might want that to be tomorrow.

What I am indicating is that, despite that movement and countries very recently making that decision, actually on the ground we are getting both statements within Israel and terrible behaviour around expansion and



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violence in the West Bank that, notwithstanding recognition, means things on the ground are getting worse.

All I am proffering to the Committee—I say “all I am proffering”—all I am praying for and wanting is for the situation on the ground to get better. Can the United Kingdom recognise in such a way, at such a moment, that is shifting the dial against expansion, violence and the horrors we are seeing in Gaza, and towards the just cause that is the desire for Palestinian statehood and the solemn obligation I think this country has in relation to the foundation of Israel?

That is all I am indicating. But I recognise why you are raising the point.

Q261 Abtisam Mohamed: On the point of expansion, Netanyahu and Trump are meeting this week. We know, in their own words, that they want to “redraw” the lines of the Middle East and last month it was reported that the US is considering recognising limited Israeli sovereignty over parts of the West Bank. There seems to be a pattern to these announcements—that they are something completely indefensible, but then the international community prevaricates on the announcements, and Israel just goes ahead and does what it likes anyway. Can you give us your word that the UK will not follow the US lead and that not a single part of the West Bank will form part of new Israeli territory and that we will not be handing it to Israel through a deal that flouts international law?

Mr Lammy: Let me be clear: the 22 new settlements approved by the Israeli Government in recent weeks, the at least 59 illegal outposts established in 2024—up from an average of seven over the last 25 years—and the over 14,000 incidents of settler violence in 2024, all flout international law and Oslo and we condemn them.

Q262 Abtisam Mohamed: So the UK will not recognise any Palestinian land that is given to Israel, even if the US decides to do that?

Mr Lammy: This sits under the auspices of the United Nations. It is not about what a country unilaterally recognises. The UK position on settler expansion and occupation has been crystal clear and under successive Governments our position has not changed. In fact, the position has hardened within the UK Government over this last period because of what we have seen.

Q263 Abtisam Mohamed: Thank you, Foreign Secretary. Moving on to a different angle, you will have seen from the recent court judgment on the F-35 carve-outs that sensitive and political issues are a matter for the Executive, not the courts. I asked the permanent secretary this morning about the UK National Committee on International Humanitarian Law in the Foreign Office and how legal assessments are made on things which may breach international law. It was not clear from the permanent secretary’s answer whether those assessments are triggered by evidence, compilation by civil servants or whether the Ministers are involved. The permanent secretary said that it would depend on whether there had been any material changes and the nature of the incidents.

Could you expand on what you would consider a material change in the



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types of incidents which would result in an assessment of whether international law had been breached and whether the IHL committee would give you that assessment?

Mr Lammy: I saw your questioning this morning. I understand the seriousness that sits behind it. To be clear: we came in a year ago in July. I said in Opposition that we would do a complete review of this position. At the first opportunity, when we were returned in September, I announced that we would be suspending arms sales that could be used in Gaza. That situation is reviewed on a cyclical basis, between every six weeks to two months. It is a quasi-legal process that involves Government lawyers, as you would expect, making those assessments on IHL. It takes place against the backdrop of our export licensing regime and the test is a "clear risk", which is quite a low bar. It is not a "reasonable doubt" test. A "clear risk" is a lower legal standard. When those documents come across my desk on that six-week to two-month timetable, I have continued to assess that there is a clear risk of a breach of international humanitarian law, and those arms have continued to be suspended. I made the judgment in September, that judgment has been reviewed several times since, and because of my judgment that there is a clear risk of a breach of international humanitarian law on the basis that I set out to the House in September, there has continued to be a suspension.

Q264 **Abtisam Mohamed:** Has there been a recent assessment in relation to the indiscriminate killings that we have seen of people queuing up for aid? Has there been a recent assessment in relation to those incidents that we have seen? Does that qualify as a material change?

Mr Lammy: The assessments made are holistic assessments across the whole range of fronts, including, for example, the treatment of detainees. As I have said, my judgment has continued to be that there is a clear risk, and therefore we have suspended all arms sales that could be used.

Abtisam Mohamed: But have you had any assessments more recently, Foreign Secretary?

Mr Lammy: There have been several assessments since September, so there has been a recent assessment in which I have made that judgment, yes.

Q265 **Abtisam Mohamed:** Does the people queuing up for aid qualify as being in the nature of incidents that you would look at holistically, as part of your assessments?

Mr Lammy: My assessment pertains, of course, to our export licensing regime, and understandably the British public, and Members of Parliament on their behalf, wanting to ensure that we are not contributing to something where there could be a clear risk of a breach of international humanitarian law.

Q266 **Abtisam Mohamed:** Is it just in relation to licensing, or is it a holistic—

Mr Lammy: That is the basis on which I am asked to make a judgment. I recognise that there is also a broader political set of considerations, and



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indeed there are considerations that other states have brought to international courts around these issues. Of course I am cognisant of all that as well, but my ultimate role here is to make a decision where the United Kingdom is not playing any role in relation to that, and therefore there has been a suspension of arms.

Q267 Abtisam Mohamed: Have any assessments been given in the last three months in relation to—

Mr Lammy: There have been assessments in the last three months.

Abtisam Mohamed: Okay, but not enough for you to act on those assessments.

Mr Lammy: To act in what way?

Q268 Abtisam Mohamed: Have they breached international law?

Mr Lammy: That is a decision for a court; it is not a decision for the Government.

Abtisam Mohamed: But the court said that it is a decision for the Executive.

Mr Lammy: I am sorry?

Abtisam Mohamed: The courts in the recent F-35 carve-out case said that any decisions in relation to sensitive and political issues are a matter for the Executive, not the court.

Mr Lammy: Forgive me. The court case that you are referring to, the Al-Haq court case, was in relation to arms exports, and they have said—you are quite right—that it is a decision for the Executive. I have told you that I, as the Executive, have made the decision. I made the decision in September; it has not changed.

Q269 Abtisam Mohamed: But no other recent assessments into why the international law—

Mr Lammy: I think you are then pushing me to go beyond arms exports to make a judgment about Israel's behaviour. That is where I am gently pushing back and saying that that must be a determination for an international court. I cannot act in terms of that broader judgment. I recognise that you have strong views on that, but I am not here to act as a court; I am here to act in relation to our arms export regime, and the Al-Haq case that largely confirmed the Government position is that I have acted correctly and suspended those arms sales, save for the F-35 carve-out.

Q270 Richard Foord: Staying with arms export licensing for the moment, Foreign Secretary, I take your point about the law, but many of our constituents suspect that the British Government are not doing all that they can to influence the Israeli Government in relation to the war in Gaza, and specifically on the subject of the sale of F-35 parts into the global spares pool. There is no tracking of these parts, so what do you

make of the charge that this is a deliberate decision to look the other way in relation to F-35 spare parts?

Mr Lammy: I don't accept that, first because we are not selling arms to Israel. We were only 1% of global arms sales to Israel, it is important to remember, so we are having a conversation about 1% of the global arms sales to Israel. That is the first thing.

The second thing is that we have suspended arms sales to Israel. We have suspended direct arms sales that could be used, by the way, in the F-35, but what we have said, which has just been upheld by UK courts, is that in terms of that supply chain—in which we play a role, but it is a global supply chain—we are not going to bring down F-35s in other theatres of conflict. Members of this Committee, with respect, might also press me on our obligations to Ukraine and other conflicts around the world. That is why I made that decision, and that has been upheld by the courts.

Richard Foord: The F-35 is not being used in Ukraine; the F-22 is being used in Ukraine.

Mr Lammy: But you will understand that there are partners across our allies in NATO who also are in a defensive posture in relation to Russia. You may not like the decision, but I stand by the decision, which has just been upheld by the courts.

Q271 **Richard Foord:** In a 2016 paper published by RAND, it was suggested that the legal agreement that set up the global spares pool allows participant nations to opt out and establish separate stocks of assets not subject to shared management. Is this something that the British Government have explored with allies?

Mr Lammy: No.

Q272 **Richard Foord:** Are you at all concerned that what we have here is the defence procurement tail wagging the foreign policy dog?

Mr Lammy: That sounds like a soundbite that is just not serious about our national defences. It is my obligation to be serious about our national defences. I am not going to do anything that puts our armed soldiers at risk, but I also meet my obligations under international humanitarian law. There has been a lot of coverage of this. There was a court case. The Government won the court case.

Q273 **Richard Foord:** There are members of this Committee who have served in uniform, so we do take the point that you do not want to endanger British lives.

Staying with procurement, two weeks ago the Government announced that they were going to procure the F-35A and would be seeking to use the F-35A in a nuclear-certified role. How much is that announcement affected by, or affecting, the decision to continue to supply arms to the global spares pool?



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Mr Lammy: I am not sure that that announcement pertains to that question, but I would be happy to ask colleagues in the Ministry of Defence to write to you.

Q274 Phil Brickell: Foreign Secretary, on the topic of export licences for military use, you mentioned the suspension of the 30 licences back in September, out of 350 in place at the time. For the record, can you just explain to the Committee, and to the public, what is constituted in those additional 320 licences that are going to Israel or being used by the Israeli armed forces? Why has the Foreign Office not considered a complete arms embargo?

Mr Lammy: The first thing to say is that this is not solely a decision for the Foreign Office; it is a decision that we make alongside our colleagues in the Department for Business and Trade, who effectively govern the export licensing regime. Secondly, if you are in the weeds of our export licences to the state of Israel, it would be wrong to caricature a significant proportion of those export licences as being to the IDF. There will be chemicals, for example, that might be licensed for use by a university in Israel. There will be IT security software that is going to a security company in Israel. There will be lab equipment. There is armoured body gear that we are licensing for use by journalists or by NGOs in Israel. There is also a market, I understand, that passes through Israel but is going on to third and fourth states.

While I recognise that the debate is understandably concentrated on military use, and scrutinising and checking that there are not some sort of sideways British exports going for use by the IDF in Gaza, I reassure the Committee that that is not happening. Within that 1% figure, there are many things that are properly licensed, because they are poisons, chemicals, armoured kit, IT and other things, but not all of what we export to Israel is being used by the armed services in Israel; some of it is going to other sorts of organisations.

Q275 Alex Ballinger: I want to take us back to the joint statement with France and Canada on 19 May. It was a very welcome statement: it is great that our allies are in the same position, opposing the expansion of the offensive in Gaza, opposing the aid system that was used there and also opposing the expansion of settlements. Of course, we have heard from members of the Committee and from you, Foreign Secretary, that in each of those areas we have gone in the wrong direction. Over 700 people were killed queuing for food, there are 22 new settlements, and of course the offensive continues. You took some measures off the back of that statement; you have talked about some of them already. Do you think that they had any impact on the Israeli Government's behaviour in the direction of the changes that we are hoping to see?

Mr Lammy: Not sufficient, but I am comfortable with what the UK Government, of which I have been part, has done. If you look at all that we have done on UNRWA, on suspending arms sales, on suspending our FTA, on our sanctioning of Ben-Gvir and Smotrich, on our sanctioning of settlers, on our support for the Palestinian Authority, on our memorandum



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of understanding with Prime Minister Mustafa, on the £101 million support that we have got to the occupied territories, on the £129 million humanitarian support to the Palestinian people and for medical aid, I am very, very comfortable that you would be hard pressed to find another G7 partner or another ally across Europe that is doing more than this Government have done. The truth is that I have sat with Foreign Ministers in Europe at the Foreign Affairs Council and there is deep frustration with the situation on the ground in Israel, but that is a combined frustration across nearly every foreign service on the planet.

Q276 Alex Ballinger: I agree with you, Foreign Secretary: we have taken a lot of individual actions—more so than many of our allies—but in other circumstances when there is no response to sanctions, or indeed the situation gets worse, there is an escalation, so the Government can choose to take further action.

Mr Lammy: That is a paradigm of escalation. We are close, I hope, to a ceasefire, but you can see that that is pretty escalating since September. I do not think that you would disagree with that.

Q277 Alex Ballinger: It is a paradigm of escalation, as you say, but there will be some people who might say, “A lot of the measures that were taken were symbolic—important, but symbolic.” The suspension of trade talks leaves the trade deal that we had with Israel in existence. There are some who may argue that Israel has broken its human rights obligations underneath that trade deal and that we should be reconsidering the existing trade deal, rather than the trade negotiations for a deal that was coming in the future.

Mr Lammy: I think that there is frustration that the United Kingdom cannot unilaterally act and change the situation on the ground. I understand that frustration, but you will recognise that the United Kingdom’s ability to do that, in the context of this conflict and this arena, was largely settled during the Suez crisis. We have not had that power since. Between us and France, it was clear that we were no longer the major actor; we were but one actor, and that is what I have sought to do.

Q278 Alex Ballinger: I have a final question, if I may. If we do not get the ceasefire that we are all praying for in the coming weeks—

Mr Lammy: We have to get the ceasefire.

Alex Ballinger: But if that is not the case, and we see the abomination that you have described in the intolerable continuation of the situation in Gaza, will the Government go further to take measures against Israel?

Mr Lammy: Yes. Yes, we will.

Q279 Chair: Some of us met the Red Crescent last week, and we were told about a little boy called Ezzedine. He is a 13-year-old; he was a patient in the Red Cross field hospital in Rafah, and he was hit by a stray bullet. He died on Sunday.

There are so many different examples like that. Many of us understand



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and appreciate the Government's position, which is that it is not for politicians to make decisions about where there have been breaches of international law; it is for a court. But when we were in Kyiv, we met some people who were collecting evidence for future court cases, paid for by the UK. I wonder whether one thing that the UK is considering is in some way assisting with the collection of evidence for when there must be a reckoning on what has been going on in Gaza and the West Bank.

Mr Lammy: I am always clear that it is important not to equate moral equivalence across different theatres in which understandably the international community can be extremely concerned about behaviours on the ground. I feel very privileged that when I was in opposition I was on the West Bank with NGOs that we support, which are counting and monitoring the expansion that you see there, and are supporting and working with Bedouins who have experienced settler violence, say in Area C. That work is being funded and supported by British taxpayers as we speak. It has gone on for many years, so some of the international architecture that is used by NGOs that we know very well, or by UN monitoring organisations or agencies, is actually a result of British work. That work is a lot harder in Gaza because, as you know, there are restrictions on who can be in place in Gaza and get visas to go into Gaza. There are not international journalists in the way that we would like in Gaza, but it is the case that we support the Palestinian Authority, which of course is doing all it can to detail some of that work.

Q280 **Chair:** So people should consciously be on the ground knowing that the British are helping individuals who are collecting evidence for future court cases.

Mr Lammy: I am not over the detail of the future court cases, but I do know that we support NGOs working on the ground in the occupied territories. We have attempted to support organisations working on the ground in Gaza. I have to say that in the context of Gaza the situation is so horrendous that the No. 1 issue is about life and death, food and means of survival against a horrendous medical backdrop. It is less about the questions of accountability that you understandably go to, because the situation is so perilous.

Chair: I know, but in the context of hearing about this little boy—

Mr Lammy: Of course, but I know from my visits to the West Bank and from sitting with organisations like the Red Crescent, which I was with just a couple of weeks ago, or a couple of days ago—I lose track because of the travel—that that work is going on as best it can. A lot of it is actually being done from the occupied territories—from the West Bank, sorry.

Chair: We also want to ask you some questions about Iran. Aphra is going to lead on that.

Q281 **Aphra Brandreth:** Foreign Secretary, I want to ask you a bit about the recent strikes between Israel and Iran, and of course the US involvement. I think it is probably fair to say that you have acknowledged the importance of Iran's nuclear programme being diminished, but have



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perhaps been a little bit less committal about whether you supported the US's airstrikes as the means to achieve that aim. I just wanted to ask whether, if you did not support those strikes, there was, as you see it, a credible, viable alternative course of action that could have put an immediate stop to the nuclear programme.

Mr Lammy: Again, one has to look at the overall context over the last 20 years. Back in 2009, Gordon Brown accused the Iranian state of serial deception, because that was the point at which Fordow and all that was in it were revealed to the world. Since then, of course, working particularly as the E3 with Germany and France, but working originally with the Obama Administration, we have tried to get Iran to sign up to commitments under the JCPOA—commitments that it has then gone on to breach—and unfortunately the United States withdrew from that arrangement.

The recent IAEA assessment is that in Iran there is now uranium enriched to 60% enrichment. As you know, at our own sites—at Sellafield or at Urenco in Cheshire—you would not see enrichment much beyond 5%. The only purpose for which you could have 60% is that you are intent on making a weapon. We stand absolutely clear that Iran cannot have a nuclear weapon, and we will do all in our capability, working with our allies, to stop that happening. It is absolutely crystal clear, though, that if you have developed the capacity to enrich to 60%, that knowledge is now within your country. Notwithstanding the action that has been taken by Israel and indeed by the United States to degrade what is there in terms of enrichment, in terms of the centrifuges and in terms of the stockpiles, the knowledge still exists.

So there still has to be a diplomatic architecture, and that is why I have spent a lot of the last few weeks with allies—speaking to the Iranians, meeting with the Iranians, the Germans and the French in Geneva and, in Washington DC, speaking to our US counterparts. It is why we are urging Iran to get back into a negotiation with the United States.

Yes, action was taken by the United States. The assessment of the effectiveness of that action, in detail, is still being determined, but it will still be the case, as I say, that the enrichment capability is there. That will require a diplomatic solution, which you would rightly expect the UK to be at the centre of and to play its part in, and that is what we will continue to do.

Q282 **Aphra Brandreth:** As I understand it, there are reports that Iran has now halted co-operation with the IAEA, effectively blocking international oversight of Iran's nuclear programme, which you have rightly been saying is an important part of finding a long-term solution for this. What actions is the UK taking, given that decision? Specifically, what is your assessment of how quickly snapback sanctions could be implemented to put pressure on Iran?

Mr Lammy: I think the decision by Iran to suspend co-operation will only lead to greater uncertainty about its nuclear intentions, and it places it in



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stark violation of non-proliferation. It makes what is a very serious situation much worse. I conveyed that to the Iranian Foreign Minister about 10 days ago, when this was first suggested. I continue to urge the Iranians to get into talks.

Let's be clear about the situation in which Iran now finds itself. Iran has lost its air defences, and I suspect that the Israelis monitoring Iran very closely are free to act again, if they think that they can further degrade Iran's nuclear capability. Notwithstanding Iran's partnership with China and Russia, I have not seen either of those two countries rushing to defend Iran. Indeed, they are also concerned about Iran's nuclear capabilities and its desire. President Trump took a solemn decision. Of course, we were aware that President Trump was having to make this calculation to seek to degrade its capability.

Iran faces even more pressure in the coming weeks, because the E3 can snap back on our sanctions. In fact, it is not just our sanctions; it is actually a UN mechanism that would impose dramatic sanctions on Iran across nearly every single front in its economy. Iran has a choice to make. I am very clear about the choice that it should make, but I am also clear that the UK has a decision to make, which could lead to far greater pain for the Iranian regime, unless it gets serious about the international desire to see it step back from its nuclear ambitions at this time.

Q283 Aphra Brandreth: I can hear the strength of your views on that. As you know, Iran is a destabilising force for the region, but increasingly it poses a direct threat to the UK's interests, including those here at home. Reports suggest that the upcoming Intelligence and Security Committee report will confirm that Iran continues to target the UK at distance, conduct hostile cyber-operations and direct activities via the IRGC. What steps is the UK taking internationally to minimise the threat to British citizens on UK soil?

Mr Lammy: It is the case that our intelligence agencies in particular have thwarted attempts by Iran to commit acts within our own country. It is the case that there are Iranians currently before our courts. It is also the case that it is my assessment that Iran is the biggest state sponsor of terrorism that we are facing in our country at this time. Therefore, for all those reasons, we have been very clear, and that is why the Home Secretary asked Jonathan Hall to do a review on state threats, after which we will be coming forward with further legislation where there are gaps, and he did identify gaps.

As it were, state-sponsored terrorism is a newer phenomenon than dealing with terrorist cells. There is work that we have to do, but we will do all we can to keep our people safe. Yes, of course, when I speak to the Iranians, I am pretty focused on their nuclear ambitions and thwarting that alongside my partners. As you would imagine, I have also successively raised with them their state sponsoring of terrorism.

Q284 Aphra Brandreth: Will we have a clear and comprehensive strategy on Iran?



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Mr Lammy: There is a strategy on Iran. It is a classified strategy, because if we published it, it would assist them. Of course there is a strategy on Iran. You should be confident that, both in terms of counter-terrorism and the work that is done at CTOC, SIS and by MI5, there is a strategy on Iran. As you would expect, it is a subject that the National Security Council has discussed and is a preoccupation of all forms of law enforcement and security agencies across Government.

Q285 Blair McDougall: Foreign Secretary, if you glance out of the window to the left, you will see the hospital where the mother of Alaa Abd el-Fattah has been gravely ill and on hunger strike. The loved ones of lots of those who suffer from arbitrary detention will be watching, whether it is her family, or those of Ryan Cornelius, Jimmy Lai and Jagtar Singh Johal. If time allows, I will ask you about specific cases, as may Sir John. Six months ago, you talked to us about the special envoy that you hoped to appoint and the terms of reference and mandate that they would have. Has there been progress on when you expect to report on the progress of those?

Mr Lammy: I made a commitment in opposition because it was my view that we needed an envoy for those more challenging consular cases. It was important to see in detail how the system works on coming into government. I want to put on record my thanks to our diplomats, both in Whitehall and sites across the world, who deal with 28,000 consular cases every year. Every year there are about 5,000 Brits who die abroad and on which they are assisting. There are Brits who get caught up in criminal cases abroad, who they are assisting. You will have seen in the news all sorts of tragic and complex cases that our officials support on. I want to praise the overwhelming bulk of that work and thank the diplomats that work so hard.

But yes, there are those very challenging cases. This year we have had some successes, for example, Peter Huxham just came out of Equatorial Guinea. We put a lot of effort into that case. I am very concerned about Alaa Abd el-Fattah. I have met with his family, and I have most recently spoken to Laila as she has been in St Thomas'. A lot of work is going on to bring him home.

Q286 Blair McDougall: On the appointment?

Mr Lammy: I certainly hope that when I am next before the Committee, that appointment will have been made.

Chair: I am making a note of that

Mr Lammy: That depends on the Chair, but I am indicating that I hope that we will get there by the end of the year.

Q287 Blair McDougall: On the nature of the appointment, when the Committee was in Washington, we met with the presidential envoy on hostage affairs, and they were really clear in saying that their effectiveness was in large part down to the very clear mandate that they had which gave them a sort of quasi-independence within the State Department to pursue their own



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agenda with regards to hostages. Do you envisage this as being something which is internally advertised and appointed, or something which is spreading wider so that it has that personality in the mandate?

Mr Lammy: Let me give you an indication. I said that I needed to think very hard about how this worked when coming into the Department. You will have seen yesterday that I made a decision around a very sensitive case where I believe that there was tremendous injustice and pain for the family involved: the Harry Dunn case.

We have asked Dame Anne Owers—someone of huge independence who was a former prisons inspector, a very robust and capable individual—to conduct a lessons-learned review for us. I think it is important that we have the right figure who can command the respect of the families that find themselves in these situations, and I hope the respect of the Committee. That is why the deliberations of how that works—you are right to press me on it—is something that takes some judgment, as well as what the best architecture is and the way to move forward.

Chair: As a longstanding friend of Harry Dunn's family, I know that his extraordinary mother would be grateful to have any help—she is a really amazing woman. We will move on to Ukraine.

Q288 **Aphra Brandreth:** Foreign Secretary, in May I submitted a number of written questions to your Department on the ODA budget and the potential impact of reductions to UK-supported schemes in Ukraine, specifically those that address sexual violence, healthcare, education and reconstruction. The Department's replies offered only broad commitments to flexibility and strategic alignment, but they gave very little reassurance about the security of specific programme funding. Now that the spending review has concluded, can you confirm whether any of the UK's ODA commitments to Ukraine are facing reductions or reallocations?

Mr Lammy: At the time that we made a decision to increase our defence spending, the Prime Minister made a solemn commitment to Parliament that he would continue to bilaterally support, through our ODA, our commitments in Ukraine, the occupied territories and Sudan, and that commitment stands. Of course, there are conflicts like those in Syria, where I have been, where you would expect there to be a very important bilateral commitment that we make.

I do not want to pre-empt anything. We have just got the spending review settlement, and we are having to go through the detail. I saw the Committee pressing the perm sec to make commitments ahead of the autumn. I cannot pre-empt that, but I believe that we will end up in a place where our commitments to Ukraine continue as I suspect Parliament would expect them to, and certainly as my counterpart in Ukraine would expect them to.

Q289 **Aphra Brandreth:** I appreciate what you have said about Ukraine being a priority, which the Prime Minister has set out and you have supported. Obviously, we have gone back and forth in written questions, and I am asking you now. There always seems to be another date in the future at

which the answer will come. Really, I am just asking for a commitment about whether there is going to be reductions in spending or not.

Mr Lammy: There will not be reductions in spending on Ukraine. Across the UK's commitment on both military and non-military, we have committed £18 billion since the invasion began, and we have disbursed £1.5 billion of our ERA loan. Our commitment to Ukraine is ongoing, and we have signed a 100-year partnership with Ukraine. That happens to be the one area in which I am pretty clear and confident that there will not be any reductions, not just because of what the Prime Minister says but because we have made commitments, alongside our allies, to Ukraine in NATO, in the G7 and across the coalition of the willing.

That is in a context in which we are also stepping up on defence spending and our defence obligations to Ukraine. In the 100-year partnership, there is also technical assistance to Ukraine, some of which will not be ODA. These things will be finely balanced over the next five to 10 years, but I am very confident that I can make the commitment that we are not stepping back. I do not expect that Ukraine will be making representations to us about less commitment. I suspect more that it will be asking us to encourage others to play their role as well.

Chair: Do you have many other questions, Aphra? I am starting to get concerned about the time.

Aphra Brandreth: Can I ask two quick questions?

Chair: Two quick questions—so can we have two quick answers?

Mr Lammy: I will try.

Q290 **Aphra Brandreth:** We visited Ukraine earlier this year. Following that, I met with one of the legal advisers and senior lead teams within Ukraine's conflict-related sexual violence mobile justice team. She expressed serious concerns about the scale of conflict-related sexual violence and the limited capacity of the Ukrainian system to respond effectively, given the sheer scale. I just wondered whether the FCDO was providing any specific support to strengthen Ukraine's ability to investigate and prosecute such crimes. Do you agree that meaningful accountability must ultimately include prosecutions at the highest levels in Russia?

Mr Lammy: Yes, I do. I have sat with victims of sexual violence in Ukraine. The Committee knows I take a particular interest in children and vulnerable children, often who do not have parents, and we are funding that work. We are also, as the Chair indicated, funding work on accountability, monitoring and the legal work that goes into understanding where those crimes have been committed. That is ongoing work in which we play our part. We also fund some of the work being undertaken by the International Criminal Court in The Hague, so yes, you have that commitment.

Q291 **Aphra Brandreth:** You have talked about some of the issues with children. Of course, there is the horrific abduction of children from



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Ukraine, and I hear what you say about supporting funding for some of the organisations. I understand that the Yale Humanitarian Research Lab, which undertakes some of the work to track down such children, has had its US funding removed. It has been seeking funding from other sources. Has it approached the FCDO? Is that something you might be prepared to commit funding to?

Mr Lammy: We are an active member of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children. Obviously, I have a personal commitment, and we are doing work alongside Madam Zelensky in this area. I will write to you on that particular stream, if I may.

Q292 **Dan Carden:** Good afternoon, Foreign Secretary. To what extent is the UK now leading on Ukraine? Obviously, the role of the United States has changed over recent months, and I wondered if you could update the Committee on how you see the UK's role now, and on where the coalition of the willing is currently.

Mr Lammy: I applaud President Trump's efforts to bring this war to an end and to try to get a ceasefire. I roundly condemn President Putin's obfuscation and maximalist demands, which have not led to that ceasefire. President Trump was very clear that it was unlikely that another supplement would pass through Capitol Hill for further military funding for Ukraine. Right from the beginning of his time in office, he has called for the other allies, particularly across the NATO family, to step up.

You saw the very successful NATO summit in The Hague, where those commitments to step up were made. At the same time, I think after another very difficult meeting between President Trump and President Zelensky, I was hugely proud of our Prime Minister. I think you saw the strength of the relationship in that the first place that President Zelensky came to was No. 10. The embrace outside No. 10 also calmed the nerves of the global community, frankly. The coalition of the willing was born out of that.

The coalition of the willing was effectively an attempt, with UK and French leadership—I also commend the work of France in this area—to go not at the pace of the slowest, but the pace of the fastest, in terms of our support for Ukraine, including, absolutely, in the event that we got that ceasefire. When that work began, we hoped for a ceasefire. We still hope for a ceasefire, but our assessment is that Putin is not yet ready to make the compromises necessary to get that enduring ceasefire.

So, good work has gone in. A lot of that work is across Chiefs of Defence Staff and Ministries of Defence across the sort of "western alliance" of countries who stand in support of Ukraine, and we have played a very important leadership role and will continue to do so. It is one that our Baltic colleagues in particular are very grateful for.

Q293 **Dan Carden:** Thank you, Foreign Secretary. It is sickening to think that Putin has sent a million of his own young people to their deaths in this conflict. What is your view on whether supplying long-range missiles to Ukraine would aid or hinder achieving a peace?



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Mr Lammy: Obviously the last period has been intense. Russia has launched over 20,000 drones at Ukraine, and 2,500 in April alone. It has also crossed the 1 million mark in terms of its own casualties, but the toll in Ukraine over the last few weeks has been significant. In the last six months, the number of ballistic missiles that Russia has deployed has risen from 20 to 25 per month to 43 in June.

Your question around missiles is important. At this time, the Ukrainians are raising questions around Patriot missiles particularly, which they believe that they are in need of. Not all of that capability is actually in the stockpile of the United Kingdom, as you will understand, but we are speaking to other allies on these issues. It would not be right for me to comment on operational issues so I will not go there, but we are playing our role.

Q294 **Dan Carden:** I have one quick final question, since I presume that other colleagues will ask about sanctions. I just wonder whether you think it could be time for our Prime Minister to engage in direct diplomacy with President Putin.

Mr Lammy: That must properly be a decision for the Prime Minister. But I think our diplomacy in this area is a tribute to this country; this has remained a cross-party issue, so I also pay tribute to my predecessors for their leadership on Ukraine. Successive Prime Ministers have not determined that it is of any benefit at all to speak to Vladimir Putin at a time when he is clearly desiring imperialist ambitions and tremendous aggression that is costing lives. By the way, there is evidence too of an aspect of state-sponsored terrorism—we have had poisonings on our own soil. It has not been the determination of successive Prime Ministers that that would be of benefit. That could change—he could have a different posture—but that has been the assessment, and I do not see that changing at this moment.

Chair: I want to go to Richard, but we are really getting quite short of time. I think we will have about 10 minutes to ask you about sanctions, with three people wanting to ask questions, so if it is possible to have shorter questions and shorter answers, I would appreciate it.

Q295 **Richard Foord:** Certainly. I have only one question, Chair, but first I must correct the record: it is the F-16 that is being used in Ukraine, not the F-22.

I would like to ask about contingency planning for the US withdrawing what remains of its supplies to Ukraine. Can you tell us about discussions that you have had with the UK's allies in Europe about filling gaps that emerge from US disengagement?

Mr Lammy: I do want to emphasise that, in terms of intelligence sharing and deep co-operation on military lines, I think that US “disengagement” is a strong word. What I see is the US still playing a considerable part in this conflict, although it is clear that, in terms of their obligations in the Indo-Pacific particularly—and other theatres of conflict—at this time, they have been asking Europe to do more. In part, that position was well

understood before Donald Trump came to power, but the conversations then accelerated after that.

In many ways, the coalition of the willing has been a very good forum in which we have been in that deep discussion. There are capabilities where it would be problematic if the Americans were to withdraw, but in terms of Europe and allies beyond that—particularly Canada, but also others such as Australia, Japan and South Korea playing their part—I am confident that we can continue to support Ukraine and keep Ukraine in the fight.

I want to emphasise—I suspect the Committee will return to this in its questions—that we also believe that it is the economic might of those combined allies that can bring Putin to look at these things seriously. If you look at inflation, the oil price and military losses in Russia, in the end it is that that might bring Putin to his senses.

Chair: I think we do have some questions about that. Edward?

Q296 **Edward Morello:** The Committee was in Washington fairly recently. Almost to a tee, conversations with Republicans on the Hill were that there would be no further military assistance, and that the best that Ukraine could hope for would be more sanctions on Russia. Senators Lindsey Graham and Richard Blumenthal have brought forward the sanctioning Russian assets Bill. There is concern, as I understand it, among UK and European allies about secondary sanctions within the Bill falling foul of potential 500% tariffs, which could happen by accident. How is the UK engaging with the US Administration to make sure that anything the US does is supportive of Ukraine, but not penalising those other countries that are also trying to support Ukraine?

Mr Lammy: I thought it was very good for Secretary of State Rubio to bring Lindsey Graham to the informal Foreign Ministers meeting at NATO in Turkey, so that we could have that discussion with Senator Graham. Of course, our embassy, led by Peter Mandelson, is making the necessary representations. At this stage, that is not so much in the White House—I think it is understood in the White House—but on Capitol Hill. I think that Bill has, just in the last week, been on the Senate floor. We suspect that it will be subject to amendment, because there has been concern about the secondary sanctions and the effect on allies and partners and the global economy.

Q297 **Edward Morello:** I felt that a lot of the conversations I was having on the Hill were with Senators and Congresspeople who were echoing the President's line that Ukraine must settle and accept loss of territory. To what extent do you agree that that must be the cost of peace, or do you believe that we must return Ukraine to its full sovereign integrity?

Mr Lammy: My experience of speaking to Senators Risch, Warner and Graham and Democratic Senators Murphy and Shaheen, and then in Congress—

Chair: Please don't list any more, because we really are running out of time. Lots of Congressmen.

Mr Lammy: There is a range of opinion, I think, that exists on the Hill. I think there is support for Ukraine. Of course, at some point, there will be a settlement—all conflicts end with a settlement—but we are supporting Ukraine to stay in the fight. They are the ones suffering civilian losses. They are the ones dealing with this act of aggression and bombing of their energy supplies and other things at this time. We are supporting them, and we are ratcheting up economic pressures. The EU will have, I think, an 18th sanctions package very shortly. I hoped that it would land yesterday, but I suspect that it will land in the next couple of days. As you know, the UK has sanctioned more individuals in this area than any other nation, so we continue with that pressure and the leadership that you would expect the UK to play.

Q298 Edward Morello: But the core of my question was whether it is your view that Ukraine must accept the loss of territory to achieve peace.

Mr Lammy: That must rightly be an issue for President Zelensky and the Ukrainian people, and is not for the UK to determine. This is his peace, which he must determine. What we do is work to support him in his fight. I remember being with President Zelensky when they commemorated the invasion of Crimea, and standing with him on the territory that he would like to see returned.

Q299 Phil Brickell: Foreign Secretary, you have talked about keeping Ukraine in the fight. What progress have you made in securing the £2.5 billion proceeds of the sale of Chelsea football club for use in helping Ukraine?

Mr Lammy: I regret that we have not been able to deploy those funds as I would have wished. We have indicated that we will go to the courts on this issue, because we are determined that that money is deployed for the means that Parliament and the Government at the time settled that it should be used for.

Q300 Phil Brickell: Taking a wider view, €300 billion of Russian state assets are currently held in the west, including substantial assets in Euroclear Belgium. What progress have you made with allies across the west in confiscating and seizing those assets to keep Ukraine in the fight and fund the reconstruction of Ukraine?

Mr Lammy: You are right that it is crucial that both European Union and G7 partners tackle the issue of Russian sovereign assets. We have to accept that 90% of those assets are held outside the UK, and where there are countries in Europe that feel vulnerable, it is important that we come together and act as a coalition as we assess how to deploy those sovereign assets.

We have sent technical teams of lawyers and economists to those countries and offered to help them better understand what could be part of the architecture to deliver that. Different systems do have different legal assessments of their vulnerability, and there are different economic assessments, understandably, of their vulnerability. We will not be able to act unilaterally, and neither will these countries. We have to come to a shared view.



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The European Union has been pretty focused on its most recent sanctions package. You will recognise that there are countries in the European Union that have held up some of that discussion, but I think that they are settling on that. I hope that it can turn its mind, in a bigger way, to the issue of sovereign assets over this next period, but I have to be sensitive that it is not the United Kingdom that is most exposed. Other countries are most exposed, and some of them are particularly small.

Chair: Thank you. I want to move on and talk about soft power.

Q301 Sir John Whittingdale: Foreign Secretary, before lunch I explored with the permanent secretary the consequences of the need to find savings in the Foreign Office budget, particularly in ODA expenditure, for two major elements of the soft power programme of this country: the BBC World Service and the British Council. Both are terrific assets and are doing an extremely important job in the face of an increasing tide of disinformation from authoritarian states like China and Russia. Should we not be looking to increase our commitment to those organisations, rather than looking at how we can save money by cutting their budgets?

Mr Lammy: In simple terms, I commend the work of both the BBC World Service and the British Council. They are stellar institutions and organisations. I have seen their work over my 25 years in public life. It is tremendous work. Most recently, I saw the British Council's outstanding work in Morocco, and I have also seen great work in India in the year that I have been in office.

On the BBC World Service, it is important to remember that in my period, I have increased the money available to it by 31%. That shows my commitment; I don't think any other part of the Foreign Office got quite that upgrade to its finances.

In terms of the British Council, we give them between 15% and 16% of their overall funding, so the lion's share of their funding comes from revenue raising—

Q302 Sir John Whittingdale: But you will be aware that the British Council have said that they are going to have to close possibly 36 offices unless they get an uplift. Those will include offices in places like at least one, if not more, of the Baltic states, which are of vital strategic importance. How can you say that we will continue to influence and project British values when the organisations that are best placed to do that are looking at these budget reductions?

Mr Lammy: The British Council are in the midst of a transformation. They have not yet come to me with their transformation plan—

Q303 Sir John Whittingdale: Would you accept the closure of 36 offices, if that is what they say?

Mr Lammy: Can I finish the point? It is a serious question. They have been losing money in the last few years—I think it is about £50 million a year. You will understand that, particularly around English language teaching, there are other actors in the marketplace in some of the areas



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where they work. They understandably want to get back to a good business model and they will come forward to me with that.

I have seen the speculation about the closure of offices, but that decision has not been made by the British Council and has not come to me. They have a presence in around 100 offices across the globe. They have closed offices in the past, but not a number of the order that I am hearing about. I have to wait for them—in the end, they are an independent agency—to come forward to me with the plans. We give them grant in aid that is less than a quarter of their overall budget. You will understand that they hit tough times during the pandemic; I think some of the problems have come as a consequence of the pandemic and changing models. They are doing that work. They will then come to me and I will hear where they have got to with their plans.

Q304 Sir John Whittingdale: May I make a suggestion? We are all committed to the overall increase in defence expenditure—I raised this with the permanent secretary—but we are actually facing aggressive activity on behalf of China and Russia. You can make the case that the BBC World Service and the British Council are doing more for the overall defence of our country than spending a tiny bit more on an aeroplane. The money that we are talking about is relatively small in comparison with the overall defence budget. Can you not make the case to the Treasury that this should be included as part of the overall uplift in defence expenditure?

Mr Lammy: In terms of the sentiment of the question, I am not sure that I am in disagreement. If you look at what has happened, the BBC World Service had an uplift of 31%, which I made, and the British Council also had an uplift of taxpayers' money, if you include the loan that they got of taxpayers' money. Both organisations have had a big contribution from taxpayers to them as institutions.

However, the British Council have to make a determination about the direction of travel and transformation to get back into health. They rightly have to present that to me, and then we can come to shared decisions, recognising that we play a relatively small role in direct grant in aid to that organisation, and have done over many years—I do not think it was that different when the Labour party was last in power. They must determine the model and then come back to me. It has to be something that puts them on a good footing and is a business model that can survive. All organisations, however much we adore them, have to be fit for purpose for the 21st century, and that is what they are trying to work out over this next period.

Sir John Whittingdale: I am gratified that both you and the permanent secretary have said that you agree, at least in part, with the principle. Can I move on to media freedom?

Q305 Chair: Before that, let me ask something else. Secretary of State, you have talked about wanting to get the British Council back to health. Of course the World Service is in a much better state than it would have been if it had not had the increase in its budget, but do you believe that it is



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back to health, and in a healthy state? We spend £400 million on the World Service, whereas China and Russia together spend £8 billion a year. That seems like a bit of an unfair fight.

Mr Lammy: The BBC World Service is reaching about 320 million people. That is outstanding, and it plays an important role. Obviously, on behalf of the British taxpayer, I understandably must be insistent about value for money, however sympathetic I am to the organisation. Those are judgments that we have to make, but I think I was right to seek extra funds from the Treasury, and to win those funds for the BBC World Service last year.

Q306 Sir John Whittingdale: Moving quickly to media freedom, Blair McDougall raised the specific case of Alaa Abd el-Fattah. You have expressed strong support in strong words, but four years ago you asked, "What diplomatic price has Egypt paid?" I could put the same question to you now. Fine words are fine, but he is still in prison, his mother is still on hunger strike and there is no sign of his being released. What more will the British Government do?

Mr Lammy: We are in intense discussion with our Egyptian friends. This issue has been raised, and is being discussed at every single level: between the Prime Minister and President Sisi, between NSA Jonathan Powell and his equivalent, and between myself and the Foreign Minister of Egypt. Those discussions are ongoing, and I hope to bring him home.

Q307 Sir John Whittingdale: May I draw your attention to another concern that has been raised? The closure of the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme has just been announced. In the later phase of that scheme it was intended to bring journalists out; it appears that has now been dropped. That will potentially put some brave people at risk. Is that something that you will also look at again?

Mr Lammy: That is to some extent led by our colleagues in the Ministry of Defence, alongside the Home Office, but of course we will play our role.

Q308 Sir John Whittingdale: May I put one last question to you, which I hope you might welcome and certainly think about? The UK founded the Media Freedom Coalition in 2019, and it is an organisation in which we have taken a lead throughout. Today, the need for media freedom is probably greater than it has been at any previous time. As you may know, the chair is on a rotating basis of two countries at a time. Will you consider the UK, and yourself, taking the chair in the forthcoming change?

Mr Lammy: I am happy to look at that.

Chair: Good. Edward, I think you want to talk about China.

Q309 Edward Morello: I do. Earlier, we spent some time talking about the China audit with the permanent secretary. The other week, Foreign Secretary, you presented the national security strategy to Parliament. That document said, "Instances of China's espionage, interference in our democracy and the undermining of our economic security have increased in recent years." Earlier you talked about the threat of Iran, and you have

talked about the threat of Russia; are the Government prioritising trade with China above adding China to the enhanced tier of the foreign influence registration scheme?

Mr Lammy: What we did was a comprehensive audit of our relations with China. I refer you to the strategic defence review and the national security strategy, where our concerns are pretty clear—

Chair: Yes, there are three paragraphs.

Mr Lammy: I have said in Parliament that the sanctioning of our parliamentarians is unacceptable, and the espionage undertaken in our country is unacceptable. We have allocated an extra £600 million to our security agencies to assist them, because of our concerns. It would be a caricature to suggest that this is all about trade. It is not about trade. It is about a complex relationship with a global superpower on many different levels.

Q310 **Edward Morello:** Do its actions not meet the criteria for being added to the enhanced tier of FIRS?

Mr Lammy: Those determinations, quite properly, are made across Government. I am not going to anticipate that determination today—that would be quite wrong. What I set out to Parliament was a comprehensive audit. Understandably, a significant part of that audit is classified and, understandably, it is the Intelligence Committee that is able to explore and look at those issues in detail.

Q311 **Blair McDougall:** May I explore a little further the classified nature of the China audit, which we spoke about with the permanent secretary earlier? The concern with the earlier conversation was that not only the audit itself, but the strategy coming out of the audit is classified. It was clear from your statement that the Government view the challenges from China as wide-ranging. We need local authorities, academia, people in the science and technology sectors, and communities such as the Hong Kong community in my constituency to know what they should be doing in response to the China audit. How does one operationalise something when not only the analysis, but the plan coming out of the analysis, is secret?

Mr Lammy: Our position is consistent with those of our Five Eyes partners, which, when determining their own China strategies, have been in a similar place on what they feel they should make public and what they, understandably, should not. I have to be clear about that. However, across our industrial strategy, our strategic defence review, our national security strategy and the statement that I have given to the House, there is clearly a direction of travel and a certainty on our position. I summarise that as follows: we will co-operate with China where we can and challenge China where we must.

I have talked about the three Cs and about extra funds and capability that we have to invest in at this time. I am confident that we now have the right architecture across Government to move forward with a comprehensive approach to China that will not see the Government

bouncing around from pillar to post, which is what we saw in the last 14 years. That is why I wanted to do the audit, and that is what I have completed. I recognise that the Committee is a little frustrated because it would like to see some of that classified work—

Chair: To do our job.

Mr Lammy: In terms of our system, the Intelligence Committee is capable of doing that work. There are Privy Counsellors on this Committee who could see more, should they seek to, and ask the Government to assist them with more. But that is the nature of the system.

Q312 **Blair McDougall:** My concern is less about whether we get to see the sexy secret stuff and more about the breadth of how the relationship with China will impact every part of society in the coming years. Germany published its China strategy. Will anything that is publicly available come out of the China audit so that all the sectors and communities that I mentioned can be informed in some way? I completely agree about the importance of protecting Five Eyes and the intelligence behind the audit, but I am talking about the behaviours that we need people to pursue in response to the threats it identifies.

Mr Lammy: We have said that there will be a new China hub and guidance for business, particularly where we were working with China. I am keen to continue discussion with colleagues in the Department for Education on the further support we should give to universities at this time as a result of the China audit. You have heard the perm sec talk about capabilities across Government, including in Mandarin-speaking, which the Chair focused on in her questions to both the perm sec and me today. I hope that reassures the Committee that we are taking these issues seriously. There are streams of work that flow from the audit and build on the strategic defence review, the industrial strategy and the national security review. They are public, and will be public over the coming months and years.

Q313 **Blair McDougall:** Finally, Jimmy Lai is still detained under incredibly dubious legal circumstances and is denied consular access. He is in advancing years, and in ill health. The United States sanctioned the individuals responsible for that in 2020. I know you are working hard through gentle, behind-the-scenes diplomacy, but at what point do we follow the lead of the United States and take tougher action on the people responsible for the crackdown on human rights generally in Hong Kong and on Mr Lai in particular?

Mr Lammy: We remain really concerned about Jimmy Lai. We have been clear that we believe the prosecution is politically motivated, and we have made those representations at China at every single level. I have certainly done so to Foreign Minister Wang Yi when I have met him on numerous occasions. I expect to see him again shortly, and I will make those representations once more.

Putting a 77-year-old man through a 52-day testimony was hardship indeed. We are expecting the closing arguments to be on 14 August, and



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then we will get a judgment in October or November this year. As you would expect, we are co-ordinating closely with the United States and the Trump Administration, which has taken a big interest in the injustice facing Jimmy Lai. We will continue to press this with the Chinese. I think it would be a catastrophe, frankly, and a huge mistake for China and its global reputation if that 77-year-old man, who is clearly in the twilight of his life, as you would expect at that age, were to die in custody. I have made that very clear to them.

Blair McDougall: For exercising rights that the Chinese signed up to guarantee.

Mr Lammy: Absolutely.

Q314 **Chair:** May I ask you one more question on China? I said that we would come back to it. How many China fast streamers will the Foreign Office be recruiting? When will we see the first cohort?

Mr Lammy: I am going to ask the perm sec to write to you on that.

Chair: That's good. Thank you. We have three questions and eight minutes—just so everybody knows.

Q315 **Uma Kumaran:** Foreign Secretary, when you last appeared before the Committee in November 2024, I asked you about justice for the Tamil community. I want to start by saying how grateful I am to you for your personal commitment to this and the support that you have shown to the Tamil community for over a decade. You know my family's story.

I am really pleased that in March the UK finally introduced sanctions against those responsible for serious human rights violations and abuses during the armed conflict, including extrajudicial killings, torture and sexual violence. It was a hugely important moment for the community. Sadly, in the past month, there has been a horrific discovery of another mass grave in Chemmani in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka, where the bodies of three babies were discovered. That was a fresh reminder of how close to home these atrocities are.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has voiced concerns that there are not sufficient resources in Sri Lanka to conduct exhumations of newly discovered mass graves in line with international standards. Has the UK Government raised that with officials in Sri Lanka? Is the UK providing any support to ensure that the exhumations are conducted properly? I know that our Minister was there recently.

Mr Lammy: I have very grave concerns in relation to the mass grave that has recently been discovered at Chemmani. We have raised it with the Sri Lankan Government directly—we did that last month. We are in close touch with families of those who have disappeared from across the country, and we are working with NGOs and others to make sure that their voices are heard. I am happy to look at whether there is technical expertise we can bring to bear to support those looking at the mass grave

issue, understanding that there are capacity issues within the country. I am prepared to look at that, and will do.

Q316 Uma Kumaran: Thank you. Can I just ask whether you would consider the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' recommendation that the perpetrators of atrocities are referred to the International Criminal Court—yes or no?

Mr Lammy: My understanding is that Sri Lanka is not an ICC state party, so the Court would not have jurisdiction to investigate any crimes that might be committed. That is the difficulty with what you recommend.

Chair: We have five minutes and two questions left.

Q317 Phil Brickell: Foreign Secretary, you have long campaigned for London to be the anti-corruption capital of the world, and I commend you for those efforts. In that context, I want to talk briefly about the overseas territories. In Georgia, leading members of the pro-Russian Georgian Dream party, while crushing civil society and cracking down on the Georgian people's civil liberties, have allegedly used British Virgin Islands-registered companies to secrete and hide their wealth behind a veil of financial secrecy. At the same time, the British Virgin Islands has missed yet another deadline to introduce publicly accessible registers of beneficial ownership. Following the passage of the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018, it missed the deadline in 2020 and in 2023. What message do you think that sends to the world at large?

Mr Lammy: It sends a terrible message. It is one that we continue to discuss with the British Virgin Islands—and we are serious. That is why I will be having a conference later next year on illicit finance. It is why I asked Dame Margaret Hodge to support us in our efforts to grip this issue and rally the international community. There is more to come from the Department. I am not on the detail of the case that you raise about Georgia and corrupt activity there, but I will look at it closely, and we will make those representations to the British Virgin Islands.

Q318 Alex Ballinger: Thank you for being so patient, Foreign Secretary. In your Mansion House speech, you announced a new counter-hybrid taskforce that will focus on a "new age of sabotage and subterfuge where technology is power." I appreciate that in this setting, you will not be able to tell us too much about that, but could you expand a little on what the taskforce might do? The Committee has a strong interest in this, given our disinformation inquiry.

Mr Lammy: I encourage the Committee and applaud you for taking an interest in the activity of a number of autocracies at this point in time and the cyber-warfare they are engaged in. Under the last Government, the country did invest in our national cyber-capabilities and certainly in supporting the work of our security services, particularly GCHQ, in this regard, but there is more that we can do to co-ordinate, working with allies. I saw excellent work when I was in Moldova on the support we are giving it in this area. There are a number of countries saying, "We'd like British expertise." I do not want us just to deploy that to defend



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ourselves; I want us to be able to deploy that expertise with partners, where appropriate.

That is the starting point for what I announced in Mansion House. There is a lot of activity that has to underpin that, and there are other Government Departments we need to work with—particularly the work that Peter Kyle is doing—to make this really effective.

Chair: That concludes the session. We got through all the questions with a minute to go.

Mr Lammy: Thank you very much. I look forward to coming again.

Chair: Thank you very much for coming. We appreciate it.