

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: The work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, HC 253

Thursday 19 March 2020

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 19 March 2020.

Watch the meeting

Members present: Tom Tugendhat (Chair); Chris Bryant; Chris Elmore; Alicia Kearns; Andrew Rosindell; Bob Seely; Henry Smith; Royston Smith; Graham Stringer.

Questions 1-120

Witnesses

[I](#): Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, and Sir Simon McDonald, Permanent Under-Secretary and Head of the Diplomatic Service.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dominic Raab and Sir Simon McDonald.

Chair: Welcome to this morning's session of the Foreign Affairs Committee with the Foreign Secretary. Thank you very much for being here, Secretary of State, and thank you for joining him, Permanent Under Secretary; it is very good to see you both. Secretary of State, these are rather extraordinary times. We are going to be more focused than we would normally be, for obvious reasons.

Graham Stringer: Can I declare an interest? I am an unremunerated director of the Centre for Brexit Policy.

Q1 **Royston Smith:** Good morning, Foreign Secretary. The obvious place to start is the outbreak of coronavirus. We were very lucky to speak to Professor David Harper a day or so ago about the response. We discussed briefly our response to the last pandemic, lessons learnt from that one and how we are now implementing those lessons. Will you outline the Government's response both globally and nationally and how that ties in with what we know from past pandemics?

Dominic Raab: We are constantly learning from past pandemics. We work quite closely with the World Health Organisation. It is not perfect, but it is the key international multilateral organisation that we work through, whether it is on the research that we are doing on vaccines or capacity building for vulnerable countries. More broadly, outside the WHO, we are learning all the time about things like repatriation and the consular effort that is going in. So there is a huge amount of work going in at the moment.

We have learnt from things such as Ebola. We are looking at ways to reinforce, strengthen and indeed reform the WHO. It needs to be more action-specific and more agile, but equally it is an incredibly important multilateral institution. Obviously within the Foreign Office more generally there is a huge amount of bilateral and multilateral work being done, on everything from the issues I mentioned to the question of consular support and repatriations. That takes place not just between Governments and international organisations; it also involves things like the airlines and indeed different aspects such as the voluntary sector and voluntary groups on the ground.

Q2 **Royston Smith:** This is a global issue but, certainly to people watching, it can appear that it is being dealt with nationally by individual countries, not globally. What is this country doing to work globally with our international partners to find solutions to fit all of us? If we deal with this individually and not globally, it does not go away, does it?



Dominic Raab: I think you are right, and I spoke to my Canadian opposite number last night about this. We are looking at an initiative to try to drive a bit more consensus. The reality is that the virus is hitting different countries in different ways. There are different views on the way to address it—look at the approach taken by some of the countries in Asia compared with the approach taken elsewhere. On the other hand, there are reports that they are seeing a second wave in Asia.

The approach that we have taken and will continue to take is to be guided by the best science that we have available—the chief medical officer and the chief scientific adviser have become household names in a very short period of time—and to take practical measures and constantly seek to engage. Obviously, as Foreign Secretary I am engaged with everyone—from the Cuban Foreign Minister over the weekend in order to secure the repatriation of the Braemar cruise ship via Havana, through to my South Korean opposite number. At the outset I was engaged very closely with my Chinese opposite number and with the EU, the WHO and the G7, which is a particularly important format.

You are right to say that there hasn't been a consensus on this. At a practical level, though, there is an awful lot of collaboration going on. The challenge of having a more universal approach—if that's the call—is made difficult by the fact that the virus is hitting different countries in different ways, and we are at different stages on the line graph. But I share your aspiration: we want to try to forge as much consensus as we can. Obviously, we have to be guided ultimately by the science, and that is what we have done in the UK.

Q3 **Royston Smith:** Whenever people talk to me about what has happened in the past, they frequently talk about what they have read on Wikipedia about 1918, and not what they ought to remember about 2009. I asked about collective amnesia on what happened last time, and one of the responses would be—perhaps not in civil service terms, but in politician terms—that people move on; they come and they go, and there are therefore new faces when a new pandemic hits. How is this pandemic being handled differently from the swine flu pandemic in 2009? It strikes me that this is an entirely different approach.

Dominic Raab: But it is a totally different disease.

Q4 **Royston Smith:** Excuse me, Foreign Secretary. I am sorry, but the principle of how we isolate the virus should be the same, shouldn't it?

Dominic Raab: It depends on how it is being transmitted. No, I think the key issue is to look at all the facts in relation both to the way the virus is transmitted and to which countries it starts in. You have to take into account behavioural change, and that includes the behavioural change of Governments. Of course, I wasn't in Government—certainly not in this role—during the swine flu pandemic, but I can tell you that we look very carefully at the science. I attend the morning Cobra meetings, and we listen very carefully to what the chief medical adviser and chief scientific



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adviser say. We distil that down into what it means for the UK, and we then try to forge the strongest international collaboration.

One of the things that will come out of this—it is a positive—is working with different partners and in different ways from what we have done before. A good example is the Cuban offer to allow the Braemar to come through via Havana. In terms of the medical differences, you would have to ask someone with greater medical expertise than me.

Q5 Andrew Rosindell: Good morning, Foreign Secretary. Clearly there is one key role that the FCO has to play at this point, apart from co-operating with other Governments to defeat this virus. British people around the world are stranded in difficulties and need consular assistance and the assistance of embassy and high commission staff. What do you say to those people? Are we being effective? Are we there for them when they need? It seems to me that the communication has not been as good as it could have been, and people are deeply distressed at the situation they are in. What are we doing to make sure that all British citizens are protected, supported and, if necessary, brought back to the UK by the UK Government?

Dominic Raab: That is a perfectly reasonable challenge. Let's also start with the scale of the challenge we face, which is that we have anywhere between 300,000 to 400,000 and nearly a million British nationals travelling abroad. We do not know for sure, and there is no register of Brits travelling abroad. I am not talking about permanent residents. That is a massive, massive scale. The consular network has performed extremely well under difficult conditions. I am working with Simon, and of course we are constantly reconfiguring and reprioritising to make sure it has the maximum resources possible. We understand the challenge that we face, which is threefold.

Before I talk about the challenge, it is worth saying that when the situation broke out in Wuhan, we got 200 Brits back between 31 January and 9 February, despite the lockdown. We got 30 Brits back from Japan after they had been on the Diamond Princess cruise ship, and 135 Brits from the Crown Princess cruise ship were repatriated between 10 and 11 March. The Braemar cruise ship has in the region of 600 British nationals on it. It is a huge effort, and it needs to take place with the airlines. Given all the travel restrictions in place, let's say they are coming under a measure of pressure.

The challenge we now face falls basically into three categories. The first challenge lies in an area such as Spain, where we have large numbers of British nationals but where there is a clear commercial route. I spoke to the Spanish Foreign Minister yesterday. As we are aware, the Spanish have introduced some restrictions, including the closing down of hotels, within a relatively short space of time. But there will be collaboration and flexibility to ensure that British nationals are not kicked out of hotels. We are working with airlines to make sure that that group can get out within a reasonable period of time, but it will need to happen swiftly. Once that situation is looked at, it is easy to see why we took the decision to change



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the travel advice. We do not want to increase the pool of people in a vulnerable position abroad, and one of the ways of doing that is to say, "Think very carefully about travelling in the first place."

The second challenge is the group of people who may be in significant numbers but not at that scale—hundreds of thousands in Spain—who are in areas that may be less accessible or where it is now difficult to get out of the country, as is the case for Peru, Vietnam or wherever it may be. We are working closely with our international partners. I discussed the matter of those areas with the Canadian Foreign Minister last night. Morocco was also raised in the House of Commons when I made my statement. The challenge there is first to make sure that those countries' Governments keep a route so that British nationals can get out, secondly to make sure that the airlines can get in, and thirdly to make sure that it is done within a reasonable timeframe, giving people the reassurance they need.

The third bucket is cruise ships. There are a lot of Brits on those, which is why we have advised those aged 70 or over with underlying health conditions against going on cruise ships. A large number of Brits are still on cruise ships. There are 600 Brits on the Braemar cruise ship. As is clear from the cases cited, that is a significant challenge but we are confident that we will get them back today. We are doing everything we can, given the scale. Andrew, I started my explanation by stating the scale and challenge, but we also need to be realistic. Given the changing advice, anybody travelling out now or anybody who can stay safely in the countries where they are for a period of time would have to think seriously about the choice they are making. Getting hundreds of thousands home is an epic challenge, but I am confident that we are rising to it.

Q6 Andrew Rosindell: I have a quick supplementary question. Will you assure us that high commissioners, ambassadors and staff in commissions around the world are absolutely going to be there for people who need their help; that phones will be answered and advice given; that it will not be a situation in which people cannot get through to anybody and there is nobody to speak to? Can you assure us that everyone will be dedicated to making sure that our constituents who are in these countries, and in desperate need of someone to talk to, will be looked after until they all come home?

Dominic Raab: Yes, that is exactly the instruction and the strategic objective. Of course, remember that in some of these countries the restrictions that the host Government have placed have limited the ability for consular and embassy staff to get to the embassy. People have talked in the House of Commons about embassies being closed when actually the staff are working remotely. Equally, across business, across Government and across the country, we have a resilience issue, given the advice that we are giving about self-isolation, but I am confident that we are doing everything that we can. In every case, we have a back-up plan if the normal first line of defence, if I can put it like that, is not functioning.

On the helpline, of course we have seen an exponential increase in calls, but I have been talking about that from the start of the week with Simon



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and we are confident that we are boosting that capacity so that people get an answer within a reasonable timeframe, and that is one example of it. The call centre in Málaga took 28,000 calls yesterday, so you can see the scale of what they are dealing with. Given the resource, the issue is how long it takes for the phone to get picked up. I am very clear in my mind that we need to make sure that we rapidly reduce that, because the first thing that people want to do is at least get through to someone and get the basic advice.

Q7 **Chris Elmore:** Good morning, Foreign Secretary. As a supplementary to Andrew's question on the helpline, we understand that the helpline is £1.80 a minute if you have to call it. Is there a way of ceasing that or reducing it? For some people the costs are completely unaffordable. That seems to be our understanding: that there is a cost per minute.

Dominic Raab: That is a new figure to both me and my permanent secretary, so I will have to take a look at it. Obviously, it goes back to the question about how long people have to spend waiting and answering. We have to fund all the things that we are doing, but my undertaking is that I will write to the Committee about this and give you a more detailed answer.

Chris Elmore: We are happy to be wrong; that is just our understanding.

Dominic Raab: I understand, Chris. I take all challenges in the spirit in which all Select Committees should make them.

Q8 **Royston Smith:** May I ask you about a specific country, Foreign Secretary? I think most of us have constituents contacting us about Peru, where all sorts of rumours abound, including other countries putting in repatriation flights, and all those things. Can you update us on what the Foreign Office is doing about people who are currently in Peru and cannot get out?

Dominic Raab: First of all, I think the suggestion had been that the embassy had closed down. It hasn't, but because of the restrictions that the Peruvian Government have put in place, it is very difficult for staff to operate in the normal way. However, we are back up, with the contingency plans in place.

Secondly, my understanding as of yesterday is that there was no obvious way out of the country because of those restrictions. What we are doing is contacting the Peruvian Government. I raised this particular case with the Canadian Foreign Minister, who was due again to speak to the Peruvian Foreign Minister last night. That is quite a good example of where we obviously need to work with the host Government to make sure that there is a window of opportunity for British nationals to get out. We then need to work with the airlines to make sure that they are willing to go and access. I am not quite sure about Peru, off the top of my head, but sometimes we are going to be asking the airlines to operate lines that they might not have in the past, which takes some configuring.



The third element is what I was hinting at: working with our international partners. That is a good example of where we need a team effort. I can tell you that when we take back British nationals, whether they are getting off cruise ships or are just repatriated from the countries that they are in, we are constantly looking, where we have spare capacity, to bring on board Europeans, Canadians or whoever else. Part of that is because I think it is the right, moral thing to do in this crisis, but we also want to be able to pick up the phone and say, "By the way, if you've got any spare room, can you help get the Brits out?" That is the approach we are taking.

Q9 Alicia Kearns: Thank you for coming before us, Foreign Secretary. I put on record my thanks to the consular and crisis staff, who I know will be working 24 hours a day. On that exact point, are we confident that we have the right measures in place to protect our staff around the world? Are there any countries where we are particularly concerned that they are being put at risk by the actions of the host country, or where we are worried about their safety and their being looked after—both them and their families?

Dominic Raab: Thank you very much for your generous words about the consular staff. It is important that we recognise the effort that is going in. Equally, you have touched on one of the challenges for us. We have, as I said, a resilience issue across the country, but obviously you can see why that is a particular pressure in post, particularly for posts in far-flung bits of the world where they get travellers, but not on the huge scale that you might get, for example, in Spain.

We have to do the responsible thing by our teams and our staff as, for example, hauliers have to. We want to keep freight in supply chains open, but we have to make sure that the staff are protected. That is an issue, and we will always make sure that our staff are safe. Some of the challenges that the Committee is quite rightly raising involve and factor in the fact that we are taking the right measures to make sure that they can operate, for the best interests of our constituents, but can do so safely and securely.

I am not directly concerned that host Governments are doing anything improper or putting them at risk. I think some of the actions that have been taken make the challenge that we have of accessing and giving normal consular advice to constituents a bit harder. That is the challenge.

Q10 Andrew Rosindell: Specifically on Peru, there does seem to be an issue here. A number of us have constituents who are affected. An email has just come through to me from someone from my constituency who is in Peru, and they say that they have tried to contact the British embassy but no one will answer and no one is willing to help. They need to get home. What is happening in Lima? Is our mission operational, or are there issues that are preventing assistance from being given? There seem to be a lot of Brits stuck out there at the moment.

Dominic Raab: There is a significant number. It is nowhere on the scale of some of the other destinations.



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Q11 **Chair:** It's about 400, we are told. Does that meet with your—

Dominic Raab: I am not sure. That sounds like the right ballpark, but I am not quite sure. We can check and write to you if that would be helpful. As I said, the challenge that we have is that some of the restrictions that the Peruvians have imposed make it very difficult for Brits to get out. I am not sure that there is any outward route for UK nationals at the present time. That is one of the issues that we are working on.

It also makes it very difficult for staff, who have to work from home if they cannot get to the embassy, to give them the support that they need, but I checked on this case yesterday and we have the arrangements in place so that they can work remotely. I think that the challenge has been with the call centre, but, as I said, we have significantly increased the capacity, and I get daily updates to make sure that we are on top of this. I am not going to say to you that it is not a challenge in places like Peru; it is a challenge, but one that I am confident we will rise to.

Q12 **Royston Smith:** Can I just ask you about one of the things that our constituents are saying to us? I know we are getting a bit bogged down on Peru, but it is broadly the same everywhere. Are other countries putting in repatriation flights? Are they able to? If that is the case, that would indicate that it is not the Peruvian Government, necessarily, that is stopping anyone leaving, or stopping those routes being open. It would indicate that it is not just them, if that makes sense. For example, we have been told that other countries have put in repatriation flights to Peru. I do not know whether that is true.

Dominic Raab: Well, who? Do you know anyone?

Q13 **Royston Smith:** This is what people ask, isn't it? I do not want to get too specific, but I have been told that the Israeli Government have put in a repatriation flight. Do we know whether that has any basis in fact?

Dominic Raab: I don't know. What I do know is that when I ring up my Foreign Minister opposite numbers, we all have the same list of countries that we are facing a challenge with, and we are all saying, "If you can get a flight out, let us know, because we'd like to take up some of those spaces."

I am very happy to go and check whether the Israelis have an access in or out that we are not aware of, but the challenge is not that there is a perfectly viable airport or air route in or out and that we have just not persuaded UK airlines to go and access it. We can plug that gap; it is the logistics of getting in and out.

Q14 **Chair:** Can I pick up some points for Stewart Malcolm McDonald, who is not with us today, sadly. Three of his constituents have family members in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom of Morocco and the Republic of Egypt. Those three countries can be tricky, on occasion. Can you talk a little about those particularly, and whether or not you are able to offer help to his constituents there?



Dominic Raab: We are looking at all of the routes. Those three are tricky. Morocco in particular, as I mentioned in the House earlier this week, is one of those that comes up again and again, like Peru and Vietnam. Again, I have had the same conversations with all the Foreign Ministers I have discussed this with, and we are working rapidly to find out whether we can charter a flight or various flights to provide a route back. That is the same with all three countries that you have mentioned.

Q15 **Chair:** A lot of the instructions are to contact insurers and airlines. Is there any way in which the Foreign Office can pull together a basic list of what is credible to be offered, so that people realise what a viable solution is, rather than what some people—perhaps unwisely—might be expecting to be possible?

Dominic Raab: We of course liaise very carefully with the travel sector, whether insurers or tour and airline operators. We want to make sure that we take smart decisions that do not have negative impacts on them but, obviously, in the last analysis, people have to check their own terms of insurance. We cannot, for example, allow insurance considerations to be the reason why we change travel advice. That is not the way it works. We would face a legal risk if we did that. We change our travel advice on the basis of the risk to UK nationals. Obviously, these things all have a knock-on effect, and we do not operate in a vacuum.

I am not sure what additional advice you might think we should consider giving that would not then step on the toes or prerogatives of those operators and insurance providers. We cannot speak for the insurance industry. What we try to do is make sure that we have enough support in place for passengers, for the airlines, so that they are viable and their commercial terms can provide the consumer protection that they rightly should.

Q16 **Royston Smith:** I am not sure how much I should say in a public forum. However, it looks like there is an email from the embassy in Lima about Peru, which says that Avianca will put on a flight if people pay significantly for their tickets—which means there's a route.

Dominic Raab: Again, I cannot say more than what I said earlier. We are very closely engaged on the Peruvian issue, particularly given the number of people who have raised it, even before it was raised in the House of Commons. We will check in real time, today, what the position is. What I hope that email—though I don't have access to it—gives you a sense of is that we are striving to get airlines in, so that we can get UK nationals out.

Q17 **Royston Smith:** With respect, Foreign Secretary, it sounds like if people pay \$3,500 one-way on Avianca, we can get them out, otherwise we cannot. That sounds like there is a route, but only if someone pays significantly. If that is the case, I would be grateful if, out of this forum, someone looked at and answered that, but it does not sound to me to be the way we reassure our people stranded abroad.

Dominic Raab: I do not have the email, and based on selective—forgive me, I am not knocking you—



Royston Smith: I appreciate that.

Dominic Raab: But we will go and check it. The reassurance I can give you is that, as I have described, we are straining every sinew to make sure that in these relatively inaccessible or less travelled routes, we are doing everything we can. Ideally what you want is flights going in on a commercial basis. Obviously, if they cannot take people into those countries, airlines will say that they are in effect operating by going out empty and then coming back, so there is a commercial issue for them. At the same time, we have found the airlines to be very collaborative in this endeavour, and we will team up with whichever countries we need to to get UK nationals out.

Q18 **Chair:** To go back to the earlier points made by Royston, we spoke about learning lessons as this is going on, and you gave us some assurance that that was happening. Will you also talk briefly about the way in which WHO has responded? There was a lot of criticism of WHO over Ebola—that it was very slow. Other people have been more complimentary about it. This time, its ability to deliver is somewhat mixed given that, like many UN agencies, it is very dominated by the larger members of the UN. Will you talk about how you see international co-operation going forward, given that this is fundamentally an international crisis, not a national one?

Dominic Raab: First, on WHO, we have consistently been a supporter, both politically and financially, of the new health emergencies programme, which was set up in 2016. Part of that was to learn the lessons of Ebola and other crises. I don't think that any emergency response, almost by definition, will be perfect, in terms of what WHO does, but we try to feed in and develop. We have a very strong working relationship with the senior leadership team at WHO.

One of the key lessons from Ebola was, first, the necessity for effective, real-time international co-operation and co-ordination, and then—this is definitely my experience so far of this crisis—a multi-sectoral response, so that every level, from the host Governments, the airlines and the insurers, to the countries that are trying to get their nationals out, is in the same room, talking about the issue. It is much easier to resolve in that way.

Beyond WHO, we have talked about the EU context and, actually, the co-ordination with the EU has been pretty good—

Q19 **Chair:** But we didn't turn up to the EU medical meeting.

Dominic Raab: We are joining EU Health Security Committee meetings. We have availed ourselves of the EU civil protection mechanism, which was all envisaged when we agreed access during the transition period, but that is done on an ad hoc basis, because we are not now members of the EU. My point would be that there are examples of repatriations where we have recouped the lion's share of the cost because of that co-operation.

My experience on a bilateral level—I spoke to Jean-Yves Le Drian last night—notwithstanding some of the challenges and the differences in



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approach being taken on the continent from the UK, we all understand that we are in a crisis and that we work together. My reflex, whenever we have got extra capacity, as I said, is, “Can we provide the Canadians, or our European friends, with some assistance?”

Q20 Chair: May I take you away from the consular aspect, where clearly co-operation is working well? I am talking more about two aspects. First, on international structures, should the G7 or the G20 be called upon to deliver? There is a G7 meeting coming up, and there should have been a G20 meeting, but it is not clear whether that is going ahead. Surely those are two organisations that could co-ordinate a response. Forgive me, but what are you and your Department doing to bring those together?

Secondly, until 31 December we are under EU law—the transition agreement—and that includes things like the European Medicines Agency. What are we doing to influence the drugs that may, or may not, be those that will cure, or at least delay the onset of, this disease?

Dominic Raab: First, in relation to the G7, we would be at the active leadership end of pressing for the G7—and the G20—to do more, but what is really important is, if resolutions and communiques are agreed, that we go and implement that afterwards. There are differences in approach. I am not sure that, through a communique, those will be papered over. Our commitment has been—and we stand by it—to follow the scientific advice and to take the right decisions at the right moments. Otherwise there is a risk that, if you take robust action at the wrong time—there is some evidence, but we will need to see how it plays out, that this happens in some of the countries in Asia—you don’t deal with the problem and it can therefore recur. There are some challenges in getting consensus.

In other areas, such as research for a vaccine or on ways to detect who has gone through the coronavirus, which is important information, good progress has been made.

You also asked about the EU bodies. The advantage we have, as we are leaving under the deal we have for the transition period, is that we can tap into and leverage all those areas and mechanisms for co-operation. Where we think it is a useful use of resource and of political and diplomatic energy, we will do it. I have to say that our bilateral collaboration and co-operation—notwithstanding the different approach that the EU is taking—has been exceptional. I do not think there have been any examples of us asking for something that we have not got. I am not saying that that will last. You are right: whether at a bilateral level or a multilateral level, we can always do better. We are actively pushing in the G7 and G20 and I am constantly on the phone talking about it with all our partners right across the network.

Q21 Chair: You spoke about co-operation. How are we making sure that our voice is being heard, for example in the European Medicines Agency, given that we no longer attend those meetings but are bound by their



¹outcomes?

Dominic Raab: We still have very good consultation and engagement in that. I am very happy to take that question away and write to you about the granular-level detail of the co-operation and the influence that we have had.

Q22 **Chair:** Do we have somebody in the room, or are we influencing people who are going into the room and then finding out afterwards what was said?

Dominic Raab: Let me write to you with a full response.

Chris Bryant: I apologise for going out—one of your Ministerial colleagues wanted to talk to me. How many requests—

Dominic Raab: We are actively, on a bipartisan basis, trying to give you the very best service that we can.

Chris Bryant: He said he was trying to prevent me from asking you a question. How many requests—

Dominic Raab: Ask the question anyway—I know you better.

Q23 **Chris Bryant:** I am trying! How many requests from around the world have you had for consular support in relation to coronavirus? I apologise if that has already been asked.

Dominic Raab: Do you mean phone calls made?

Chris Bryant: You said that from 300,000 or 400,000 to a million Brits are abroad—obviously, that is a very broad figure. I don't think you are suggesting that all of those people are stranded abroad.

Dominic Raab: They are not.

Q24 **Chris Bryant:** I wonder what the number is.

Dominic Raab: I don't know. I would want to give you an accurate figure. I am sure I have it here somewhere.

Sir Simon McDonald: Yesterday the consular call centre in Málaga took 28,000 calls, which is the largest number so far.

Dominic Raab: But that was in one day.

Sir Simon McDonald: Yes, in one day.

Dominic Raab: That gives you a sense.

Q25 **Chris Bryant:** So are we talking about hundreds of thousands of calls?

¹ Note by witness: I was wrong. The total number of Coronavirus-related calls which the call centre received since the beginning of the crisis on 21 January 2020 is just under 28,000. I misread my brief. I apologise and I hope the Committee will use and remember the correct fact.



Sir Simon McDonald: Yes.

Dominic Raab: Some of those will certainly be repeat calls, but that is a sensible assumption. Equally, to go back to your point, Chris, a large number of people are getting support from the website or otherwise, and do not need to call in, or for whatever reason they have the resilience to sort themselves out, through their networks or resources.

Chris Bryant: Sure. What I am trying to get at is the real nature of the challenge that you have. I think that you have been asked about the situation in Peru, haven't you?

Dominic Raab: Yes.

Q26 **Chris Bryant:** You said something about Spain and hotels and flexibility. I wonder what that meant exactly. I have constituents who say that they are in a hotel in Spain and, if they are chucked out of the hotel, they have nowhere to go, but the hotel is becoming a hospital.

Dominic Raab: I have spoken to the Spanish Foreign Minister about that this week.

Chris Bryant: As you have said.

Dominic Raab: The communication had been that within seven days all hotels would close. We obviously want to make sure that any UK nationals who want to get out, because they do not have alternative arrangements, can do so in that time. The first thing that we are doing is making sure that we liaise with the airlines. Grant Shapps, the DFT and the FCO are working very closely together and with the airlines. We cannot guarantee that that will happen within seven days. The insurance that I have had from the Spanish Foreign Minister is that we will not see Brits kicked out on to the street—the insinuation or allusion—at least not without alternative accommodation being provided, so that we can provide repatriation flights.

Q27 **Chris Bryant:** As I understand it, the hotels are closing on Tuesday, not in a week.

Dominic Raab: It was seven days from earlier in the week.

Q28 **Henry Smith:** I apologise for being late, Chair—it was non-coronavirus related and just good old-fashioned rail delays. I apologise to the Foreign Secretary as well. With regard to the number of countries that are banning travel, there are some noticeable exceptions. Australia is one, even though it is saying that when people arrive, they should self-isolate for 14 days. The other day in the House of Commons you said that you advise against all but essential travel. Can you be a little bit stronger than that and actually say that Britons should not travel to countries, such as Australia, that are still technically open?

Dominic Raab: Just to be clear, we changed the travel advice to advise against all but essential travel globally. What we wanted to do, on top of



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the guidance we are giving—there is some travel guidance that we give generically and then there is the specific travel advice for different countries—was this. We wanted to say that the situation is now at a stage where, because of the measures we are taking domestically around social distancing—you think of the number of people going through airports and on to planes—but also because of the pool of people, to address Chris’s point, who will find themselves vulnerable or stranded abroad, we don’t want to keep adding to that pool. We think that’s a smart thing to do.

Equally—and you’re quite right that that is advice, but it’s pretty strong advice—I don’t think there is a case yet for going beyond that globally. But of course, for individual countries, anyone thinking of travelling should look very carefully and, where it is not advisable, we make that clear, on a country-by-country basis. I think that answers the question.

- Q29 **Chair:** The EU has just closed down its inward border for 30 days. I know that does not include the United Kingdom, but is there any consideration for the UK to do the same, because otherwise we are going to find ourselves in the rather odd position whereby people can come from around the world through the UK into France, say, but they could not fly direct into France?

Dominic Raab: We are talking with our European partners about that, and the Home Secretary keeps it under constant review. We check it every time this question arises, and it has been since the Americans and some others took the decisions they did. Now the Canadians have, and the Canadians are not in a dissimilar position from the UK, given what the Americans are doing. And when we ask the question, the scientific advice comes back that, at least at this stage, doing it is not the advice that they would give us.

- Q30 **Chair:** So are the Europeans shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted?

Dominic Raab: In fairness, they are in a different stage on the line graph of the peak of coronavirus. I am going to be very careful, given that I am speaking to these colleagues on a daily basis, not to cast aspersions, but what we are very clear on is that, at least at this point, taking those measures is not in the UK interest. It won’t affect the spread of the disease. Also, you would then have to look, if we did that, at what impact it would have on supply chains and the airlines. So both the cost and the risk of it are something, along with the epidemiological advice that we get from the CMO.

- Q31 **Chair:** Because they are still in the EU, they have easier supply chains to manage. Is that part of it or is that—

Dominic Raab: We of course compare notes. All I am telling you is that if we introduced those measures, it would have all sorts of knock-on effects. And the truth is that, even in relation to the EU measures, they have been clear that not only is there an exemption for the UK, but any prospective measures would be for freight, which would of course include things like medical supplies.



Q32 **Chair:** Sure. Can I ask another point, about EU solidarity? One thing that has been raised is the concern in various member states that different countries have been in great need of supplies—masks, gloves and so on—and other countries within the European Union have banned the export of them from their own nation states. What long-term issues do you see for European co-operation from the fact that China was exporting medical supplies to Italy at the time when—I know this has now changed—the export of them was banned from Germany, France and other places?

Dominic Raab: I think it just strengthens the case for collaboration. I am not entirely sure that it is accurate to suggest, and I don't think you were—notwithstanding the common front that is often displayed, I don't think there is uniform consistency or consensus within the EU about the measures that will be taken. You can see that from the approach to social distancing and the range of member states between social distancing and social confinement. There is a huge amount of domestic politics within the EU. The message I gain from it is that staying ahead of the curve is critically important and you need to collaborate with everyone. But also—I think this is the fundamental lodestar for the Government—you follow the scientific advice and you take the right decision at the right moment. In terms of the sales that you are talking about between China and Italy—

Chair: They weren't sales; that was a gift.

Dominic Raab: None the less, they were supplies.

Q33 **Chair:** At the time when there was no possible sale, let alone gift, from Germany to Italy, or from France to Italy.

Dominic Raab: What that does show is that you need strong collaboration, and you need to try and stay ahead of the curve.

Q34 **Andrew Rosindell:** A very quick point, Foreign Secretary: is the FCO in contact with the Governments of the overseas territories, in terms of how they are being affected? Are there cases in OTs at the moment, particularly Gibraltar, since it is in close proximity to Spain? Are we providing help, advice and information to the Governments of the overseas territories?

Dominic Raab: Yes, absolutely. They are part of the UK family; they are part of the Foreign Office network. That is instinctive and it is happening regularly, and we are both making sure they have the support they need and looking very carefully with them at the resilience they have. Of course, depending on which OT you are talking about, some of them pride themselves on their resilience and their self-reliance, while others are more forthcoming if they need some support or capacity in certain areas, but we deal with all of those requests the same, which is sympathetically and as constructively and swiftly as possible.

Q35 **Andrew Rosindell:** Are there cases in some of the territories at the moment? Are you aware?



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Dominic Raab: I would have to write to the Committee and give you an accurate, up-to-date answer. Do you want me to do that for all of them, or just for Gibraltar?

Andrew Rosindell: It would be good to know, but specifically Gibraltar is of clear concern, being so close to Spain.

Dominic Raab: Of course. We will do that.

Q36 **Chris Elmore:** Foreign Secretary, do you think that COP26 will go ahead?

Dominic Raab: I cannot give you a cast-iron guarantee, because things are moving so quickly. Obviously it is not until November, so we will have to see. We will keep it under close review. We would of course want it to go ahead, but I cannot give you a guarantee.

Q37 **Chris Elmore:** Have there been any discussions with the BEIS Secretary? Obviously, the BEIS Department is leading on it. Significant planning is going into it from the BEIS Department and, I assume, from your own officials, so is there that ongoing discussion about whether or not it is practical to hold that conference, given what is happening with flights and with international movement of people? I accept it is in November, but all the pre-planning is done many months in advance, so is any of that discussion ongoing now?

Dominic Raab: Yes, of course. You are absolutely right, and we are looking forward to all of the key international events, but particularly the ones we are hosting, and seeing what is realistic. Of course, it also depends on the trajectory of the virus and what happens over the following weeks.

Q38 **Chris Elmore:** If it goes ahead, what is the Foreign Office's work around it and top priority for it, in terms of achievements? Clearly, climate change is still taking place; we cannot pretend it is not happening, and I understand it is one of the priorities for the Department, so what would be the key achievement from it if it were to take place?

Dominic Raab: You are absolutely right: it is our top international priority for the year, and if anything, coronavirus ought to reinforce our sense that with some of these global challenges, we really need to step up to the plate.

You asked about the priorities, and I think there are a number. Obviously we have to try and uphold the Paris agreement and get the process that it put in play driving forward, not stalling. The focus has been on the priority countries that cover two thirds of global emissions, while of course keeping the 197 Paris signatories engaged and co-ordinated, so a big issue will be ambition on nationally determined contributions. We feel that the UK has led the way with what we have said—our commitment to net zero—and the rapid reduction in emissions that we have effected, and of course by hosting COP26 and driving that issue forward.

So far, 114 countries have signalled their intention to produce more plans on the emissions piece ahead of COP26—that is very important—and then



there is a whole series of other campaigns that are crucially important. Those include adaptation and resilience; nature, by which I mean trying to improve biodiversity and reverse and bend the curve on the loss of biodiversity; and energy transition, particularly the campaign to move away from coal, but also from other fossil fuels. Finance is another big one. We are trying to get financial institutions—both private sector and international ones, central banks and otherwise in the IMF—to motor the economic direction towards a zero-carbon economy. And in some of those areas there is huge scope for win-win, and it doesn't all feel like economic downside. So that is really important. I could go on, but I think those, the NDCs and then those four or five campaigns, are at the forefront of what our strategy will be.

- Q39 **Chris Elmore:** With those strategies in mind, are there countries, within the 114 that are engaged, that the Foreign Office is advising BEIS should be particular priorities to try and meet some of these goals?

Dominic Raab: Yes, we have got the strategy and we work back from that. For example, when I travelled to the Indo-Pacific region and visited Australia, Japan, Singapore and Malaysia, we have got our strategy tailored towards encouraging those on NDCs, but then each of the different programmes. I then went for the Middle East—Oman, Saudi and Turkey. Again, we do the same thing. So the engagement is tailored back from the strategy.

- Q40 **Chris Elmore:** In terms of BEIS, how many FCO officials are actually working within the specific team on COP, to develop the programme—assuming it goes ahead, obviously?

Dominic Raab: Do you mean within—

- Q41 **Chris Elmore:** Leading the preparation, so the BEIS Secretary of State is appointed president by the Prime Minister. There was a unit within BEIS that is looking to deliver the programme. We are assuming, from the priorities you just set out, that Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials would be part of that unit, so I am curious to know, if it is one of the top priorities for the Foreign Office and for the Government, how many officials from the FCO are working within that unit to help guide the prioritisation and, obviously, working country to country to deliver it.

Dominic Raab: I am happy to write to you. I don't know whether you know, off the top of your head—it is a test for my permanent secretary.

Sir Simon McDonald: I can say that it is a swept-up effort—so it is a cross-Government effort, and it is significant that the DG leading it is Peter Hill, who is from the Foreign Office. The director working for him, John Murton, is also from the Foreign Office, so the team is an integrated one, and the Foreign Secretary has just approved four COP ambassadors who are taking on different regions of the world to take forward the particular commitments within Latin America, Africa, eastern Europe and the Asian Pacific.



Dominic Raab: Beyond that I can tell you that we have got 180 diplomats engaged globally on climate issues. We have currently got 42 protocol staff on the event co-ordination, because that is the hosting of it, which is a major exercise. We have got the FCO climate and energy attaché network expanding by 50 local staff, as well as the appointments that the permanent secretary referred to. I can come back to you on the number within the Cabinet Office COP unit.

Q42 **Chair:** Forgive me, Secretary of State: you are quite rightly describing a massive effort to be prepared for an event in November that is supposed to showcase—I hope will showcase—Britain’s ability to champion an issue that really does affect us all and will affect us for several generations. It strikes me as somewhat unlikely that we are going to secure the level of international co-operation required so that in November we can have the Heads of State and Government walk into a room and sign an agreement. After all, it won’t be in November that the talks are held. They will be held, from now—I believe the French took two years to get to COP21; I believe the Mexicans took a similar time for their moment. It seems extremely unlikely that we are going to be in a position to deliver in November. That is through no fault of yours, but simply because finding interlocutors is hard at a time when, quite rightly, everybody is focused on the pressing issue of the day.

Dominic Raab: I agree that it is going to be a challenge, which is why we will keep striving to make it a reality. Obviously we would rather avoid delaying if we possibly can, but we haven’t got to the stage where I can tell you we have given up on it, and we are still hoping that we could deliver on it.

Q43 **Chair:** Clearly it is a UN conference. Have you spoken to the UN about it?

Dominic Raab: We are constantly speaking to the UN, but also to the EU and all our other interlocutors.

Q44 **Chair:** And what does the Secretary-General’s office think?

Dominic Raab: I haven’t got the very latest on that but, again, I am very happy to write to you. The reality is that we are engaged, but I think we are all waiting to see, right now, quite what the timing is going to be on the coronavirus. It is still possible, even as of today, that it might be doable and, as long as that is the case, I think we would want to try and give it a go. You are right that we face an even greater challenge by putting it off, but we have to face up to that.

Q45 **Chair:** Is there not a question of cost as well? Shouldn’t we devote our resources to the urgent, pressing issue of co-ordination on international health right now, to make sure we get that sorted?

Dominic Raab: You are right that we are constantly adjusting our resources and efforts to make sure that tackling coronavirus is the top, overriding strategic priority, but we do not abandon everything else we are doing. There are all sorts of areas—COP26 falls into that—where there are important long-term issues that we will need to keep catering for. You would certainly be right to say that there has been a major adjustment



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within Whitehall, and specifically in the FCO, to focus on the immediate task at hand.

- Q46 **Chair:** Nobody is doubting Peter Hill's capability; he is a truly exceptional official—please pass on our thanks for his extraordinary work in many other areas. But surely a bold reset of perhaps a year, to November 2021, would give the opportunity not just for the UK but for the world to come together and, I hope, approach COP26 in a new spirit of co-operation.

Dominic Raab: I will pass on your commendation and your advice.

Chair: Thank you.

- Q47 **Graham Stringer:** Are you relaxed, Foreign Secretary, about the anomalous position of China in the COP meetings? China is a huge CO₂ emitter; it is building coal-powered stations in China and around the world, yet it is classified as a developing country. The expectations that apply to the United States and the United Kingdom do not apply to China. Surely, that is not satisfactory. Do you have a view on that?

Dominic Raab: We have the framework from the UN process. Unpicking any bit of it will get others to do the same. I accept your point about China's trajectory—you could say the same about India and a lot of those other big emerging, dynamic economies. You must have them caught in the tent and we must engage with them to get the most ambitious approach to reducing their emissions. Ideally, we want those countries with intensity emission targets to make absolute emission targets. In a country such as China, we also see huge opportunity to engage in a positive way on things such as green technology, resilience and adaptation. The conversation needs to have enough in it for all those participating, otherwise you will lose the biggest emitters.

Of course, there is a pretty totemic debate of division between what commentators would call developing and developed countries about quite who should bear the greatest burden. Our role in COP26 is to try to bring that together, break down that barrier and try to make sure that particularly the big emitters or the leading countries in the world do their bit. The best way we can do that is by leading by example, which is what the UK has done.

- Q48 **Graham Stringer:** Intensity targets are a blank cheque to increase carbon dioxide production, because it is a division sum against the increasing growth of the economy. In a sense, it is irrelevant. It might be a diplomatic coup. The fact is that while China is defined as a developing country, it comes under a completely different appendix, codicil or whatever it is, of the agreement. Do you not think we should move to get China into the same category that we are in?

Dominic Raab: First of all, I would not be quite that dismissive of intensity targets, but I accept that they ought to be a stepping stone to an absolute target on emissions.

- Q49 **Graham Stringer:** Would you not accept that you can carry on increasing



your carbon dioxide even if your intensity target is reducing?

Dominic Raab: Some countries would spurn even an intensity target. Clearly, it does have a restrictive effect, but it is not perfect. I did not start by defending intensity targets; I said we wanted to get intensity targets on to absolute emission targets, particularly towards net zero. When you are engaging with the diplomatic spectrum of countries that we need in the tent, you have to recognise stepping stones along the way.

I understand the point you are making about China more generally. All I would say is that with China, India and many other countries that are fast-growing and are developing very swiftly, we want to keep them in the tent. For that, we have to coax, cajole and lead by example, to get them to up their level of ambition. It will never be as fast as we would like, we suspect, or not for the moment, but I genuinely sense that China wants to be part of the solution—partly for their own interests on things like air pollution, given the welfare of their population, but also because of their reputation. We need to leverage that. That is the way I would approach it.

Q50 **Graham Stringer:** A final question. I went to COP22 in Marrakesh, and I think we should have been embarrassed. Flying more than 20,000 people round the world to talk about reducing carbon dioxide is a bad symbol, isn't it? Don't you think it would be a really good symbol if at COP26 the Government, obviously in conjunction with the UN, tried to reduce the size of the pressure groups, who are most of the 20,000 people?

Dominic Raab: I certainly see the dilemma, and I accept your challenge to try to reduce as far as we can the scope for us to be accused of double standards in hosting this conference but then contributing to the very challenge that we are trying to tackle. I am a bit careful about poking the wasps' nest of all the NGOs, who would react very badly if they thought they were excluded from the conference.

Graham Stringer: If they miss their jamboree, yes.

Q51 **Chair:** Surely, with all this remote working that we are supposed to do, but aren't able to in Parliament—

Graham Stringer: Which they recommend to the rest of the world.

Chair: It would be a great way to experiment with how we can do international conferences.

Dominic Raab: I was surprised you didn't lead by example, Mr Chairman, and offer to do this meeting remotely.

Chair: We are not allowed to. We have been looking at doing exactly that.

Dominic Raab: You are a buccaneering reformer.

Q52 **Chair:** We are trying to be. I hear the Foreign Office has basically kicked almost everybody out of the office, which is fantastic. Is that right?

Dominic Raab: I don't think that is quite right.



Sir Simon McDonald: That is a prejudicial verb, Mr Chairman.

Dominic Raab: What we have done is to be very clear to people—both from the point of view of social distancing and the isolation measures that the Government are taking—that where they need to for health reasons or where we can keep going and keep our capacity at 99%, people should work from home. That follows from the Government’s advice, and we take it very seriously that we should lead by example. Equally, for all the reasons that you have just said, within Whitehall, we may come out the other end of this with some pretty innovative ways of working, which make sense more broadly.

Q53 **Chair:** I know you are pressed on many other things, but is your HR team drawing lessons from the current emergency?

Sir Simon McDonald: Yes.

Chris Bryant: It is an easy answer.

Sir Simon McDonald: It is an easy answer, but truthful. It is always best to say yes.

Chair: Good.

Q54 **Andrew Rosindell:** I have a general question, which is not about COP but about events. We have a huge event happening in a few weeks’ time for VE Day 75. People are preparing across the country and in other parts of the world for that. Will that now happen? Will that be delayed? Have we thought that one through?

Dominic Raab: Which one?

Andrew Rosindell: VE 75.

Dominic Raab: I am not sure that is in the FCO’s remit.

Chair: It is DCMS.

Q55 **Andrew Rosindell:** It is, but clearly involves the FCO and MOD. It is a national event.

Dominic Raab: I don’t have an answer for you, but, obviously, you are right; we are looking at all those events.

Andrew Rosindell: We have a special bank holiday for it as well.

Dominic Raab: It is a tough decision, but we are looking very actively at all those kinds of events.

Chair: It is worth noting that we have had many delegations to the Committee from various different nations asking the UK to lead on that—clearly, before the current emergency—as they were very grateful for Britain’s place hosting many Governments-in-exile in those dark days.

Q56 **Chris Bryant:** On the integrated review, I guess we should start with whether it is happening.



Dominic Raab: Yes, it is still proceeding.

Q57 **Chris Bryant:** At the same pace and with the same end date?

Dominic Raab: The idea was that it would track the comprehensive spending review and conclude in July. In one sense, we are dependent on that. Is it proceeding with the same pace and intensity? I don't think any of the wider non-urgent priorities, which would otherwise proceed, are going at the same pace or intensity. Coronavirus has clearly become the overriding essential work of the Government day to day, so I could not say that the review is proceeding at the same intensity.

Q58 **Chris Bryant:** Where do you perceive the major threats to be? Will you comment specifically on the misinformation that has just come out of Russia? Russia blames the coronavirus on the UK, saying that it was deliberately devised so as to mask Brexit, or some such weird idea. Will you also comment more generally on the threats of disinformation?

Dominic Raab: I have heard some pretty wild Brexit conspiracy theories in this place, but if that is coming from Moscow, that is one of the wildest. We face a significant cyber challenge and misinformation challenge, and Russia is active and pretty unabashed in that. We also face a significant cyber challenge from China. As well as those classic state-to-state actions, you obviously still have the threat of terrorism from Daesh and elsewhere. That is where it becomes difficult to break down threats by country or state, because some of those just do not fall into that natural paradigm.

As coronavirus and COP26 have shown us, we also have a whole range of non-state threats, of a kind that we have never faced before. The important thing is that we have enough dedicated capacity, right across Whitehall but also obviously in the FCO, to address all those. I visited GCHQ recently. We are very mindful of both the increased threat from cyber, but also of the UK's USP, given the resources, and frankly given our natural comparative advantage in the economy—in tech terms, with that investment coming in, and also the quality of our universities—to rise to that. However, cyber is one that has definitely risen up the pecking order.

Q59 **Alicia Kearns:** We are in a permanent state of hybrid warfare, by which I mean the sustained and persistent deployment of every potential lever of influence, from cultural to criminal to diplomatic—you name it. How great a focus is being given to hybrid warfare in the integrated review, and particularly to the defensive and offensive capabilities of the Foreign Office? We need to be truly hybrid if we are going to tackle this. People might think hybrid warfare has nothing to do with the Foreign Office, but it does, in terms of soft power, counter-terrorism or whether we decide to go to an event or not. How great a focus is there on hybrid warfare, and particularly on the Foreign Office's defensive and offensive capabilities?

Dominic Raab: When you talk about the Foreign Office, you obviously need to take into account the wider Foreign Office family, which includes those agencies for which I am responsible; as I said, I visited GCHQ recently. In terms of how high a priority it is, it is very high, in terms of



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both the obvious security threat that we face and are defending against, and our USP as a tech power in the future.

However, a lot more of the typically conventional diplomacy is also around cyber. For example, we are thinking actively about the norms of cyber, which can apply both to commercial activities and to the rules of the road for cyber and its deployment. Is that something on which we can forge an international consensus? A lot of work is going on to make sure that we can hold to account those states that—covertly or otherwise—engage in cyber-attacks. Some of it is obviously difficult to talk about publicly, but in terms of giving you that reassurance, it certainly occupies a significant amount of my time, whether that is in the diplomatic dimension or in keeping track of and making sure we support the work of the agencies.

- Q60 **Alicia Kearns:** To follow up on that, one of my big concerns is that the Government's integrated review is not so focused on cyber. I am aware that in a public forum it is difficult to talk about anything when it comes to hybrid warfare beyond that, although you can talk about the creation of pop-up groups to spread disinformation within communities or the funding of specific groups or all sorts of other things. I am looking for reassurance that we are not just focused on the cyber, because I almost think that when it comes to hybrid warfare, cyber is the easy bit. We know there is a cyber-war going on, but all the other things, from trying to crash our markets to spreading disinformation and inserting people—again, it is difficult to talk about this in public, but I am looking for reassurance that when we talk about hybrid warfare, it is not just cyber.

Dominic Raab: You are right. Cyber is pretty high on that pecking order, but you are right that we look at the threat rather than the means of conducting it. What many of the threats you have described have in common is an attempt to disrupt either the economy or our democracy, in some shape or form, or indeed our way of life. I know the Committee has taken a close interest in freedom of expression in universities; that is something we actively look at, monitor and consider as part of the same constellation of threat as the wider misinformation, cyber and all those other things.

- Q61 **Alicia Kearns:** We have very effective teams in place for countering activities from specific hostile states, but I am interested in our approach to China. Having worked at the Foreign Office, when I was there, only two or three years ago, we were only just getting to a good place with certain hostile states—I will say it: Russia—but I think China is almost a greater and more pernicious threat, because they are also a challenge to securing our foreign policy priorities and they have the financial means. How are we balancing our focus on Russia, which is quite extensive, and China, which I think is a graver threat when it comes to securing the safety of our people and our priorities abroad?

Dominic Raab: They are not binary options, but I can tell you that we are very focused on both, and particularly on the longer-term threat from China. There is a lot of active stuff going around from Russia, which is very significant and serious, and we call it out when it is right to do so, but



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we are also conscious of the growing cyber threat from China. I don't think we have taken our eye off the ball in relation to the Chinese threat because of the focus on Russia; I am confident of that.

Q62 **Bob Seely:** I will just ask one bread-and-butter question, and then I would like to follow up what Alicia was saying. Is the foreign and security review delayed, and how are you taking contributions to it?

Dominic Raab: We have not taken the decision to delay it. In terms of contributions, obviously, cross-Whitehall contributions will be made by all the relevant Departments, but there will also be consultations with experts. That will be both domestic and from our allies. We want to ensure that we are joined up in terms of both the domestic piece and internationally, so that we have the best, world-class review of the challenges we face. Then we can tailor the policy recommendations to it.

Q63 **Bob Seely:** So you are saying that it is not just an internal process, where you are just going to validate each other's homework in different Departments, but a genuine attempt to think in a novel way about how we do comprehensive overseas policy for the next five to 10 years?

Dominic Raab: You will be shocked to hear me say that yes, that is correct. Also, I would not just say the next five to 10 years; I think the horizon will be longer term than that.

Q64 **Bob Seely:** Can I just ask about China in terms of hybrid war and geostrategic policy? It seems to me that we have got it wrong, and we are obsessed by seeing China as an economic El Dorado without understanding the risks—the economic threat and the espionage threat. You talked about the growing cyber threat. I find it therefore bizarre that we are allowing a high-risk vendor with intimate relationships with the Chinese state—in fact, part and parcel of the Chinese state—to have up to one third of our 5G critical national infrastructure. That seems like a geostrategic error, and a failure to understand hybrid war on an almost uniquely bad level.

Dominic Raab: First, in relation to China, we certainly do not view it in the terms that you described, although I understand that you used that language for hyperbole. We view China as an asymmetric power in terms of its trajectory of growth, and we also see the opportunities that lie with that, as most other countries around the world do, but we also have our eyes wide open to the threats. We have talked about cyber; and we have touched on, but not gone into much detail on, the threat to freedom of expression by universities. There are a whole range of other issues.

You talked about 5G as a geostrategic mistake. If we are taking the calibrated approach that I described, we will be very alive to the risks but also look to engage more generally—not just on trade and other issues, but on COP26 and the role that they could play in moving the climate change debate forward. But on the specific issue, we are confident, both on the basis of the telecoms supply chain review and on the analysis by the National Cyber Security Centre, that our approach—ban, cap and



reduce over time the access that high-risk vendors would have to the periphery of the network—is the right one from a technical point of view.

I realise you are asking a geopolitical question. We also need to work to diversify the telecoms supply chain, which will definitely involve attracting more established vendors. Over time, I would like to see us wean ourselves off high-risk vendors and on to high-trust vendors. I was a competition lawyer before becoming a politician and a diplomat. We need to support the emergence of new disruptive entrants into the supply chain. That will involve not just UK fiscal and regulatory changes, but collaboration with Five Eyes and European partners, and potentially with others, in order to make sure that we are ahead of that tech curve.

Q65 Bob Seely: That is despite the fact that we are taking a radically different approach from other Five Eyes nations on Huawei and 5G. The US has ruled them out. Australia has ruled them out. New Zealand appears to be ruling them out.

Dominic Raab: Among Five Eyes, US and Australia are the only ones so far that have gone for a complete ban.

Bob Seely: But those are the only ones that have announced. Can I just check a couple of other brief points? When I was talking to the National Cyber Security Centre, they said that the technical assurances that they can give last seven years. That was a few months ago.

Chair: Forgive me. If you want to ask geostrategic questions, that is fine. I don't want to get into technical questions with the Foreign Secretary, for obvious reasons.

Dominic Raab: It is up to you, Mr Chairman. I bow to the protective wing of your chairmanship.

Bob Seely: If you don't want me to, Mr Chairman, I won't.

Chair: If you have questions about foreign policy on this, absolutely, but not if the question is on the technical capabilities of national cyber-security.

Q66 Bob Seely: One further question. Do you see Huawei as intimately connected to the Chinese state? Where do you see Huawei in the Chinese state's ability to project power—economic power and espionage power—into this country and many other states throughout the world?

Dominic Raab: There are clearly links, which have been well documented. I certainly see China's capability to project itself in all the ways you described, and it will have to decide the extent to which it uses companies with which it has close links to be the vehicle for that. Of course, there are all sorts of risks for China in doing that. We are not for a moment naive about the risk of dealing with high-risk vendors. "High-risk vendor" is a term that we use to describe Huawei and others. The challenge we have with our Five Eyes partners and others, such as Europeans and potentially the Japanese—I discussed it with Foreign Minister Motegi in Tokyo when I was there recently—is to build up a pool



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and a collaboration between high-trust vendors. That is a tech challenge, but it is something that we should lead.

Q67 **Bob Seely:** What is your definition of a high-risk vendor? Just to check.

Dominic Raab: I bow to the technical definitions that the Government put out.

Q68 **Chair:** Forgive me; that is another question for the NCSC. Do you recognise that China is offering a different vision of globalisation from the one that has been set out over the last 70 years?

Dominic Raab: Yes.

Q69 **Chair:** Do you also recognise that China is seeking to assert that vision in ways that are not always conducive to what we would consider our interest, through things such as the belt and road initiative and other areas?

Dominic Raab: Yes. I have to be a bit careful about the belt and road initiative—it is not the way we would do it—but I take your point about norms. As a result, I take your point about means towards achieving those norms.

Q70 **Chair:** And would you also accept that part of the way in which China is seeking to achieve that is by breaking down some of the existing structures that have supported the last 70 years of, broadly speaking, prosperity—first for the west, and latterly for the globe?

Dominic Raab: I think that as a rising power, it certainly wants to reshape the norms that it feels have prejudiced China. That would be the Chinese view.

Q71 **Chair:** Indeed. I accept that. Would you see those norms as having been in Britain's interest?

Dominic Raab: They haven't done it yet, so we should be careful.

Q72 **Chair:** Let me restate the question. Would you see the norms of the last 70 years as having been in Britain's interest?

Dominic Raab: Not universally or uniformly. But overall, the body of multilateralism per se—that way of doing things and its content—has certainly provided the climate and conditions within which the UK has thrived.

Q73 **Chair:** So, broadly speaking, the post-war agreements through Bretton Woods and into the expansion of NATO and various other elements have been in the UK's interests.

Dominic Raab: Yes, but equally I see coming down the track countries—BRICs and others—which are rising, and they feel that those were western-oriented or driven norms that fetter them. I know you are not suggesting that we are going to stay the same, but the challenge for us is to try and shape and guide the new norms.



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The issue around China, I suspect, is to prevent China from dominating that process of influencing norms. That is why the UK's leadership role in the world is so important, now more than ever. That is why we talk about global Britain, and we also talk about not just Brexit and not just free trade, but Britain as a force for good. It is so important because the UK has a leadership role, from the cyber-norms that I touched on in response to Alicia's question through to COP26, and frankly in everything else we do. Some of that will involve shaping and trying to drive our values, but it is also about taking the edge off China.

- Q74 **Chair:** In shaping those new norms—which I accept and do not challenge at all—we must adapt to a changing demographic. China was a broken power in 1950 that had been invaded and that was going through a terrible civil war. It is perfectly obvious that China is now in a different position. India's position has radically changed, and many other countries have radically changed. Most of that is to be welcomed. The question, though, is how those reforms happen. There is a challenge—Huawei exposes it but is not the only element of it—in which we see some of those current organisations, Five Eyes being one, being broken apart, and one could be forgiven for thinking deliberately, by setting up fracture points through which divisions can be leveraged. Huawei appears to be doing that now.

The challenge for the UK is that the United States—various Members of Congress and the Senate—are now saying that investments from countries that accept Huawei into their 5G network will have to be considered to be no longer on the whitelist for technical investment. That is in a Bill before the House of Representatives, though it has not passed any stages of Congress at this stage. The fact that it is a bipartisan Bill that seeks to threaten UK tech investment in the United States should raise deep concerns when so much of our tech investment is fundamentally connected to the United States. For example, the sale of DeepMind to Google in 2016 was possibly one of the worst strategic decisions ever taken by any Government. It is a very dangerous moment for us now, because it implies that changes in US law could change the UK tech sector's ability to defend against the cyber elements to which you were referring.

Dominic Raab: What was the question?

Chris Bryant: That is what I was thinking.

- Q75 **Chair:** The question is: what are you going to do to make sure you defend the existing structures that protect us, and not allow those who seek to break them up to exploit the fractures that already exist?

Dominic Raab: Your premise—that China will look to set up fracture points—is true and is almost axiomatic in their approach. Plenty of other countries do it. Iran will look between the North Americans, the US, and others. If we are smart, the first thing we must do with the transatlantic alliance and other like-minded countries with whom we work—Five Eyes countries and others—is just to be very careful not to let that happen.



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That is a responsibility on our side as well as avoiding ducking the attempts by China.

In relation to Huawei, there have clearly been some rumblings of discontent. I think the President has made his views very clear. Equally—

Q76 **Chair:** To unite President Trump and Nancy Pelosi is quite an achievement.

Dominic Raab: Okay. If you want me to answer the question—

Chair: Go on.

Dominic Raab: Equally, I have engaged with all our Five Eyes partners at a senior level. And the one thing we all agree on, and some take different views from others as we have discussed, is that we are not going to allow that fracture point to happen. Indeed my conversations at senior levels and with those of senior ranks in the US Administration, whatever our differences on it—the NCSC has confirmed categorically that our Huawei decision does not affect either our ability to share sensitive intelligence data or to do so with Five Eyes.

However, one thing that we all understand is that, first, we should not give China that opportunity that you described, and, secondly, that there is a medium-term approach that we need to be much wiser about grasping, which is around the diversification of supply of high-trust vendors. I think that is one of the lessons for us.

Equally, there are all sorts of areas where we are not just going to slavishly do either what our European partners do or indeed what our American partners do. You have a depth of maturity and breadth of relationship that allow for shades of opinion on those issues.

Q77 **Bob Seely:** On that point, just to follow up on what the Chairman was saying, the whole point about Huawei is that it is the vehicle by which China is going to try to get that fracture point, and you are risking a fracture point by having into this country a high-risk vendor—you know the definition of a high-risk vendor as well as I do—and one that we have assurances over for barely seven years. That is the issue. Huawei is the tool for the fracture point.

Dominic Raab: Again, what is the question?

Q78 **Bob Seely:** Well, I suppose it is: can you defend what you are saying, because our argument here is that Huawei is that tool for that fracture point? This comes back to the point about hybrid warfare and about thinking strategically.

Dominic Raab: So I am confident, first, that we can defend our network; secondly, that over the medium term, we need to wean ourselves off high-risk vendors and on to high-trust vendors; and, thirdly, that the strategic alliance we have with Five Eyes need not and will not be jeopardised by this. More generally, we need to be, in the way the Chairman described,



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very mindful of attempts to probe at the transatlantic alliance, or indeed at Five Eyes.

This is not new; we had it with Iraq before. We have got it with Iran and of course we have got it with China. One thing that I do accept is that, long-term, China presents a very different type of challenge, and I certainly accept that there are members of the Committee who feel that we need to be adjusted and alive to the long-term nature of that threat.

Q79 **Henry Smith:** Foreign Secretary, you have just said that we need to be alive to the long-term threat of China, and we have spoken about the cyber-security concerns that many of us on the Committee, yourself, in Government and across the House of Commons have.

We have also touched on some of the other concerns we have about China. They are a security threat, in terms of intelligence, they are a biosecurity threat, they are a trade security threat, when it comes to counterfeiting and industrial espionage, and they are an environmental threat, as we spoke about during our exchange on COP26.

Therefore, in terms of an integrated review, is it not time that we, with our democratic allies around the world, had a fundamentally different approach to our engagement with China, as China is quite clearly, as the Chairman has said, seeking to change the world order?

Dominic Raab: You didn't mention Hong Kong. I mean, you could—

Q80 **Henry Smith:** Actually, it is a democratic threat as well, and thank you for mentioning Hong Kong, because not mentioning it was remiss of me.

Dominic Raab: There is a wide range of risks and threats that China poses, and economically it has an asymmetric scale and trajectory, in terms of growth, that means it is here to stay. There are also enormous opportunities, the economic ones but also opportunities for international collaboration; I mentioned those around climate change. What we need is a calibrated approach, which mitigates the risks and takes advantage of the opportunities, where that is the smart thing to do.

You are right—it will definitely feature in the integrated review. If the suggestion is that we engage in some kind of cold war approach with our allies to China, I think that would be a mistake. I don't think the nature of the threat from China is the same as that from the old Soviet Union. I also think that both the opportunities and the challenges that they present are different. It is going to be important to look, in a very sanguine way, at the nature of the risks and the opportunities, and the asymmetric scale of what China's trajectory involves, and then to engage, as I have already explained that we will do, with all our partners, and indeed with the academic world and the voluntary sector, to get a rich, granular level of depth to the evidence, which will inform the policy choices we make. As well as being integrated, the National Security Council considers these matters very carefully, and not just on Huawei.

Q81 **Chris Bryant:** Have you seen any direct interference in any form of elections or democratic processes in this country by Russia?



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Dominic Raab: I am going to be a bit careful about answering this, but we are mindful and alive to the ability of Russia, and the willingness, to try to use its capabilities to disrupt the democratic process here, and elsewhere, or indeed our wider way of life.

Q82 **Chris Bryant:** So do you think that the paper that the Labour party used for the general election—nearly every day of the general election campaign—was sourced from Russian intelligence?

Dominic Raab: I am not going to comment on that. You would not expect me to comment on intelligence matters, but I appreciate the test.

Q83 **Chris Bryant:** It is a serious point, because several times Ministers—and Prime Ministers—have previously said that they have seen no successful attempt at such manipulation of our elections. That implies that there is a judgment of what is success. As I understood it, the Government are now saying that there has been a successful attempt, which was the Labour party's document.

Dominic Raab: I am not going to add to what has already been said in relation to that. If you would like me to go back and write to you on this, I am happy to do that.

Q84 **Chair:** Can I quickly come back to the integration review? We have cut quite a lot of issues there on the foreign policy lead to the review. How are you going to lead it? How is it going to be foreign policy-led? Is it going to be led by you? By your team?

Dominic Raab: There is a cross-Whitehall team in the Cabinet Office and a small team of experts in Downing Street. John Bew is central to that—he is a special adviser to the Prime Minister on foreign affairs—

Chair: A former specialist to this Committee.

Dominic Raab: Of an extremely high level of pedigree.

Chair: We agree.

Dominic Raab: I am in regular contact to make sure that we have a foreign policy—a strategic drive—to this, rather than it being led by one or other Department, or indeed being a smorgasbord without a central paradigm to work to. I hope I can give you that reassurance. It will be driven by a strategic analysis of the UK's foreign policy direction, rather than just being a range of competing demands from different Departments.

Q85 **Graham Stringer:** On the EU negotiations, is the transition period going to be extended because of covid-19?

Dominic Raab: I can't say anything more than the PM did.

Q86 **Chair:** Oh, go on. Did you know that Michel Barnier has tested positive for coronavirus?



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Dominic Raab: I didn't know that, but the reality is that the negotiating texts have been exchanged. I would have thought that in the 21st century there's plenty of scope for this to be done through teleconferencing and remotely, at least for the period for which it is required. I will not go any further than what the PM said, at this point.

We don't want to extend; we want to get this done. We don't want any more uncertainty than we have already had from this process. I think we also feel that with the political declaration there is enough of a set series of guidelines, now followed up by the negotiating texts, to enable this to be done in time.

Q87 **Graham Stringer:** I have no doubt about your role, Foreign Secretary, or the Prime Minister's in this respect, but one of the reasons—not the only reason—for having a transition period was so that business could prepare. Business has other things on its mind at the moment because of covid-19. What measures, if any, are you taking to focus business on getting ready for 31 December while it is trying to deal with the huge problem of covid-19?

Dominic Raab: A huge amount of that work has already been done. You are right that the idea of having a transition period is so that there is one change of rules for British businesses and they have got a lead time to prepare for that. I think they have got the guidance in the form of the political declaration, and we have been very clear that we are looking for a best in class free trade agreement. That gives them a considerable steer. You are certainly right to say that it is a challenge with coronavirus, but we will get through coronavirus and I am confident that we can deliver Brexit successfully.

Q88 **Graham Stringer:** Are the negotiations recommencing next week?

Dominic Raab: I do not have the latest on it, but we will try to make them as seamless as is possible.

Q89 **Alicia Kearns:** Rumours are dangerous, but I am going to ask this anyway. I heard rumours that the reason we have been able to respond quickly on many aspects of coronavirus—particularly on stockpiling and so on—is because of the no-deal Brexit planning. Is that true?

Dominic Raab: I think that having a really granular set of preparations for no deal certainly means that two things have happened. We have got a much more sensitive and agile grip on issues like supply chains, and we have a mechanism through the Cabinet Office and Whitehall which has got used to looking at these cross-cutting issues in a way that had not been done before. So I think it has battle hardened the system, which has been at least some help in dealing with coronavirus.

Q90 **Bob Seely:** To talk again about the review, and specifically about strategy, I am going to put a pejorative remark to you—I am sure you will defend the Foreign Office. In the Foreign Office and British overseas policy, are we still thinking strategically enough? I know we have a security council, but that tends to be reactive. It is slowly getting into the



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space of looking ahead, but, Foreign Secretary, is there not an argument for saying that, as part of your ability and desire to think much more strategically—I know you are keen on that—you need a strategy adviser and strategy council? That could be very similar to the folks you have got on the security council, but its job would be to look ahead a decade or 20 years and not be reactive. It is about being proactive about the future and not reactive on a continuing basis.

Dominic Raab: That is a very good challenge. One of the things I said when I came in as Foreign Secretary was that I wanted to spend 40% of my time broadly on strategic issues and 60% on reacting, because there is the risk that you get swamped by the day-to-day. Then coronavirus happened. However, that is still the long-term aim.

It is not quite right to say that the NSC looks only at reactive issues; it doesn't. It looks strategically and forward. Certainly, the discussions and the preparations for that encourage us to do so. I will be a bit careful in what I say about the substantive content of it. Of course, the integrated review is encouraging us to do just that.

On your challenge to us—to set up another body that does the strategic thinking—I am not sure I can see the attraction of it. We have just to get ourselves and mainstream that bandwidth where we think more strategically. I hope I have given you some sense that I personally in the Foreign Office was committed to that on day one. It was one of the first things I said in our all-staffers, to give you a sense of wanting to mainstream it. The reality, though, is that if you look at a country like China, it has the ability to think long term in a way that is much more inherently difficult for a democracy responding to public opinion. Sorry, Mr Chairman, I wanted to give a full answer.

Chair: Absolutely. We were talking about the EU talks and I thought that was about an EU issue.

Q91 **Graham Stringer:** Beyond your role in Taskforce Europe, do you have a specific role in advising the Government on its negotiations during the transition period?

Dominic Raab: I sit on the XS Sub-Committee, which is the group that looks at all the strategic issues we have got. Obviously, it is very important—I remember, because I was Brexit Secretary—to protect the integrity of the negotiating room and team. The way I would put it is that we have that nucleus of the team, led by David Frost—who is doing an exceptional job—and we have the strategic-level committees that make sure those decisions are taken. The job of the Foreign Office, through our network, is to then make sure that we engage with capitals as effectively as possible.

Put it this way: while it is quite important if you are going to hit your 40:60 target that we just talked about, and I am very keen to delegate and have an active team, I deal with the European side of it very personally. We delegate less on that, not just in relation to the Brexit issue, but the relationship with the capitals.



Q92 **Graham Stringer:** At the Salzburg summit in 2018, it was felt that the Foreign Office had not provided the Prime Minister with accurate information about the views of members of the EU. What have you done to improve that situation? As for the more difficult question about the culture of the Foreign Office, as somebody who campaigned to leave the EU—I did, and you did—I always viewed the Foreign Office as remain central. What have you done to alter that culture and improve the supply of good-quality information?

Dominic Raab: First, just in terms of Salzburg—I was in the eye of that particular storm as Brexit Secretary—the misjudgment, or the misunderstanding, was not because of a lack of advice on the likely receptiveness of EU capitals to the Chequers proposal. That is not what happened. I can tell you that—I was there, involved.

As to your question about whether there is a Foreign Office pro-EU bias, what I would say, based on my experience at the Foreign Office—you can see it in other areas as well—is that if you have a lot of people working in an area, they try to make it work. There is certainly a cultural sense that some of those instincts were right. By the way, I spent six years in the Foreign Office between 2000 and 2006 as a lawyer. I worked on Gibraltar and European issues, so I remember the situation back then. Equally, you had a Government then that was giving a very clear steer that the Foreign Office would be active in Europe, trying to influence Europe from within, so let's be clear about the mandate that officials were getting.

Certainly, my experience as Foreign Secretary, particularly given the mandate we have since the election, is that everyone, whatever their personal or previous views, is fully committed to delivering the best deal, because we have left the EU. I think there is also an excitement about the global Britain vision, which is about getting the best deal with our European partners and also about the kinds of European co-operation that of course should continue—from coronavirus, to Iran, to Libya. I work very hard to engage, for example, with my French and German counterparts, but also with others.

We are excited, and I think the Foreign Office is excited—at some point, I am going to let Sir Simon weigh in to evidence this—about the global role we have when it comes to free trade, and when we talk about Britain emerging through this as not just a more active player, but as a force for good in the world, on everything from COP26, to media freedom, to 12 years' quality education for girls. I sense nothing but energy and excitement for the challenge ahead. Certainly, the one thing this Prime Minister has been very clear on is that the Foreign Office is central to that vision of global Britain. Have I got any of that wrong, Sir Simon?

Sir Simon McDonald: No.

Chair: Excellent.

Q93 **Alicia Kearns:** I am really sorry, but I am going to slightly challenge that. I was in the Foreign Office on the day of the Brexit referendum, as a civil



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servant—an apolitical one; I quit long before I tried to go into politics—and on the day of the result, I was required to go to multiple town halls held by multiple directors general, and at more than one the exact words out of the director general’s mouth were, “We all know this is the wrong result,” or, “Many of us know this is not the right thing.”

I agree there was a lot of excitement around all the campaigns, but there are still concerns that I saw directly on the day. It was deeply concerning to hear those words being said at formal meetings, not one-to-ones. I agree that it does feel like there has been a shift, but I do think we have to constantly keep slightly in mind that unfortunately, Brexit is harder for some people to be completely down the line on.

Dominic Raab: First of all, it has been hard for diplomats and for politicians, dare I say it, and it has been hard for the country. I wasn’t there in 2016, although I was involved shortly thereafter. All I can tell you is that, if that was the case in 2016, it is not the case in 2020. I can really reassure you on that. I think that the network, the officials, are really up for this. In any event, let us remember—this was my experience as Brexit Secretary—that advisers advise and Ministers decide. What this requires above all is clear leadership, which we have in this Prime Minister and of course in the mandate we got from the last election.

Q94 **Graham Stringer:** During the campaign to leave the EU and since, many of us said that we are leaving the EU, not Europe. We will still have good relationships individually with the countries of the European Union and with the European Union. Would that not be better fostered by an institutional framework, rather than ad hoc one?

Dominic Raab: The best way to demonstrate that, and to do it in a way that serves the British national interest, is to strain every sinew to get a political declaration and the future relationship concluded in short order, based on the best-in-class free trade agreement, but also looking for opportunities to demonstrate that to our European friends. We have talked a bit about this in relation to the Foreign Office—Alicia mentioned it—but I think it is true, not just in the UK but elsewhere, that we have gone through a catharsis, some of it emotional as well as rational, and we need to show our European neighbours and partners that, naturally, we feel the way you have described.

My father was Czech, he was a refugee to this country, and I feel no less proud of my Bohemian roots than I did pre-2016. When I talk to my French and Spanish opposite numbers, and some of this is personal, I made the point that when we have space on those repatriation flights coming from these far-flung places, we are looking to fill them with the nationals of our European friends. I am not sure that it is the institutional framework that will demonstrate to them that we are serious that we are leaving the EU, not leaving Europe. Actions speak louder than words.

Q95 **Graham Stringer:** William Hague, when he came before the Committee, made the point that it would be valuable, among other things, to have Government observer status at the Political and Security Committee. Do you agree with that?



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Dominic Raab: We have set out the approach we are taking. The most important thing is that there is no reason why we cannot have a relationship that enables us, where it works in the UK and the EU interest, to work together. We shouldn't be shy about that but, equally, it needs to be enabling, not mandatory, because we left the EU so that we had that freedom to manoeuvre. That is the way we approach it.

What matters most is the spirit and leadership we take to that. Some of it is personal. It matters. I know what it is like when I pick up the phone—I was speaking to my Canadian opposite number last night. He said, "Whoever gets the first flight out of Lima, you make sure Canadians are on it, and we will make sure Brits are on board." That kind of commitment matters. We can say to our European friends and partners, "We understand that we are going through the same thing, and we will work with you", and that matters. It is the spirit of the political will, and the relationships that we keep nurturing, that probably matter more than the forum.

Q96 **Chair:** May I come back to one point that Graham made right at the beginning? You are asking not just to achieve this among civil servants and officials, the most senior of whom on the European side now has coronavirus, but businesses to adapt while they have a lot of other things going on. When will you make the call whether you need more time?

Dominic Raab: I am afraid that I am not going to feed the beast on this. The Prime Minister has been very clear, and I fully support that approach.

Q97 **Chair:** We are going to come on to some very quick questions, if we may, because we have taken up quite a lot of your time already. We are glad that you have agreed privately, and now I hope publicly, that you will try to come before us every six months, which would be fantastic.

Dominic Raab: At least.

Q98 **Chair:** Exactly. And your Ministers as well, and the PUS, who we are seeing next week, I think.

Dominic Raab: We will try to give you a very good service. Can I also say, because it has come up, that my view, which I hope is reflected in the way we have conducted these proceedings, is that Ministers should come here and account to you, as parliamentarians and members of a highly esteemed Select Committee, for what is going on? I remember what it was like on the Brexit Select Committee, where everyone was trying to find the differences between the views of the Ministers and the officials. I am also very happy for officials to come and give evidence, but I want to be clear that I think it is right that Ministers stump up. That is what ministerial accountability involves. My preference will always be for you to ask, "Why can't, and why shouldn't, a Minister do it?", but we will equally be pragmatic and helpful on requests for officials.

Q99 **Chair:** I suggest that the way to do it, for a policy question or a question looking at that sort of area—an information question, where we are looking at what is actually happening at a particular moment—is perhaps



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to have a bit more flexibility.

Dominic Raab: I am happy to take your advice.

Q100 **Andrew Rosindell:** The recent ministerial reshuffle effectively saw a merger of most FCO and DFID Ministers. It almost looks like the two Departments have essentially merged, certainly at a ministerial level, although maybe not at the Secretary of State level. Are we effectively in the process of putting DFID back under the wing of the FCO and merging the two structures back together again?

Dominic Raab: I think that kind of issue will be actively considered as part of the integrated review. I think that is right. Strategy should dictate the formal outcome, rather than vice versa. Certainly, on what we are trying to do, Sir Simon McDonald has been working with Matthew Rycroft, and I work very closely with Anne-Marie Trevelyan, to make sure that we are as aligned and integrated as possible. To give you a sense of that, you are right that we have joint Ministers, but we are also very keen that the ambassadors in post represent one voice, and I think it is fair to say that we also want to make sure that we leverage the wider international equities, whether that is in trade or defence.

To give you a sense of that, if we are going to do all these global free trade deals, we will have very close access in countries where otherwise we might not have spent so much time in the past. Also, because of the nature of what the Department for International Trade is doing, it is very important that I can supplement what Liz Truss and the DIT are doing. Likewise, if there is a particularly important message, when she or DIT Ministers are out in capitals, they can do the same. There is a DFID piece, but there is also a much broader piece about the UK speaking with one voice and having an integrated foreign policy.

It comes back to your point, Chair—I am not sure whether it was yours or Bob’s—about it being a foreign policy-driven approach. My experience, both as a former Foreign Office lawyer and as a Minister, is that you just do not want shadow foreign policies going forward. We need to have the discussion, reconcile the means and the ends, and then deliver it as one.

Q101 **Andrew Rosindell:** That is a very sensible approach, if I may say so. I have one final question before Bob comes in. There is yet another new Minister for the overseas territories. It is the one area of your Department that is not foreign—it is British. It is not even Commonwealth—it is British. It is part of the British family. There has been a big conflict here about DFID’s approach in certain territories, compared with FCO Ministers, who are perhaps more sympathetic. Now that DFID and FCO are coming together, can we have an assurance that the overseas territories will be a priority? They were not always with DFID. Can we ensure that that is brought back together again, and that the FCO, under your leadership, ensures that the overseas territories are not treated like foreign bits that we have to placate but as part of the British family? We should cherish and look after them and ensure that they are given the support they need.



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Dominic Raab: Yes, absolutely. They are very close to my heart. They are part of the family. When I was a Foreign Office lawyer, I remember one of the first jobs I had was to do an agreement with the Americans—it straddled 9/11, so it was particularly difficult—to open up the Wideawake airfield on Ascension Island to civilian flights. Work like that gave me a real appreciation and love of our OTs, so I will certainly strive to give the leadership on that that you expect.

Q102 **Bob Seely:** To follow up quickly Andrew's point, Foreign Secretary, when it comes to integration abroad, is there going to be a single management structure in embassies? And, in relation to FCO people—who, if I understand correctly, are not as well remunerated as those in other Government Departments—will there be a balancing up and equality of pay scales so that people doing similar jobs, whether in DFID, the DIT or the Foreign Office, will actually be paid the same?

Dominic Raab: Yes to your first, and levelling up to the second.

Chair: Sorry?

Dominic Raab: Levelling up, so yes, we will: we'll level up.

Chair: Excellent.

Q103 **Alicia Kearns:** I am interested in your position on diplomatic immunity, because we know that diplomats from other countries are committing heinous crimes in the UK, ranging from rape to modern-day slavery and child abuse, and obviously there is the devastating case of Harry Dunn. I am wondering what work is being done to ensure that diplomats cannot come here and commit appalling crimes. I recognise it is not a unilateral decision we can make, but is there any work going on in the Foreign Office on this?

Dominic Raab: Yes, there is. Obviously, the Harry Dunn case has been a very sharp reminder of the tragic consequences of having the wrong approach. We are bound by the Vienna convention. It is there for proper reasons—to allow diplomatic work to continue. You only need to cast your minds to some of the environments in which our diplomats work to consider what would happen if we did not stand up for that.

Equally, it is quite right to say that we expect anyone that comes to this country—diplomatic or otherwise—to adhere to the law. The assurance I can give you, Alicia, is that the number of alleged serious and significant offences involving foreign diplomats and their families is very low. Just to give you a sense of it, in 2018, which is the last year for which I have data, just three such offences were committed, by two diplomats; they were all driving-related. That is against a foreign diplomatic community of 23,000. So we are as red-hot on this as we can be. The approach we would take is that, if a diplomat abroad committed a criminal offence and we were asked, we would waive immunity, assuming that they are in a country where there is a reasonable justice system. And of course we expect that of any country that sends its officers here.



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Q104 **Chair:** Did you read *The Mail on Sunday* report by Harry Cole about the Foreign Office official who acquiesced to the departure of Ms Sacoolas from the United Kingdom?

Dominic Raab: I can tell you that is simply not the case. We made it clear, at the point at which the US took the decision not to waive immunity, that we felt that was the wrong decision. We objected and we sought, in clear and strong terms, for that decision to be reconsidered.

Equally, as I said to the House—I'm just checking, because I don't want to get this wrong. I said on 21 October that "under the Vienna convention"—the way it's applied in the UK—"UK police could not lawfully have prevented" Anne Sacoolas "from leaving". I think we need to think about the responsible advice that we are giving. The exchange that was referred to—selective and partial as that was—was simply a recognition of that reality.

We have consistently objected to the failure to waive immunity. I am on the side of the family in this case. I have raised it at every opportunity with Mike Pompeo. The Prime Minister has raised it at every opportunity with the President. And beyond seeking extradition as we now do, I have made it clear, as I said to Parliament—I will update Parliament in due course—that we are committed to changing the exchange of letters and the arrangements for the Croughton annex, which is the base in Northamptonshire, to avoid the anomaly ever happening again, the anomaly being that the immunity applied to the spouse but not the officer in question. I will update the House once we have continued and concluded those negotiations.

Q105 **Chair:** Forgive me, but just for absolute clarity, you are specifically saying that at no stage did a Foreign Office official agree—acquiesce—to Anne Sacoolas leaving. It was merely a restatement—or any communication would merely have been a restatement of the existing Vienna convention, which simply stated that we had no ability to prevent her. Is that correct?

Dominic Raab: By the way, the messages that are being referred to are the subject of court restrictions, so forgive me if I don't—

Chair: Fine.

Dominic Raab: But what I will say is this. We consistently objected, but we also recognised that once the US had refused to waive, we could not—it would have been unlawful. We were very careful, given the implications of this. It would have been unlawful, in our view, for the police to have arrested Anne Sacoolas if she had tried to—the only communication that was made would have been a reflection of that.

Q106 **Bob Seely:** I just want to ask a quick question about Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, since we are vaguely in this area. There are lots coronavirus cases in Iran; we have people there we are trying to get home. Do the unique circumstances of the case and of coronavirus throw up an opportunity for greater diplomatic access to Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, because she is out of prison?



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Dominic Raab: First of all, I spoke to Foreign Minister Zarif on Tuesday before Nazanin's release. I will be careful what I say, because that channel is very important to protect. I made it absolutely clear, first, that we expect all our dual nationals to be released; secondly, that there is an increased imperative, given the risk of coronavirus in Evin and other prisons in Iran. I am hugely relieved that Nazanin has been released on furlough but, frankly, that is a stepping stone. I will not pause for breath until all UK dual nationals have been released. Then, we must make sure that we can facilitate their return to the UK.

Q107 **Bob Seely:** What else is happening this week on that? Are you making daily representations to the Iranians? Are you talking medical supplies with them? Is there manoeuvrability in the relationship in general?

Dominic Raab: I will be a little careful. We will do everything we can, properly, to secure their release and return for those who do not want to stay in Iran. The fact that we have managed to secure the furlough of Nazanin this week and the engagement that we have had, including from Mr Zarif, given the complex and challenging wider relationship, is progress, but it is partial progress and I would not want to say any more than that.

Q108 **Alicia Kearns:** On human rights, I wanted to raise with you how we approach preventing atrocities: Syria, the Yazidis, the Uighur, the Rohingya and Cameroon. It feels like we need a better way to tackle those atrocities earlier. I am aware that when we start seeing indications of human rights abuses taking place on a mass scale in a country, it is left to the team that has responsibility for it. When I was in the Syria team, the Iraq team and the counter-Daesh team, it would sit with those teams, who are almost certainly in a situation that is very stretched—peace talks, sanctions, you name it.

Have we given any thought to whether we introduce some sort of specialist team for preventing atrocities, who are experts so that, early doors, the CSSF programme can be used to put in place some form of measures that will have an influence on the Government? They would say, "These are the sorts of comms things that we can be doing; these are the policy approaches and bilateral things we can do." It feels like each country is having to find its way, and the human rights team is never pulled into conversations, and seems to be focused on specific, big campaigns. I wonder if we have thought about it, whether you would be willing to look at it, and how you make sure that we better tackle atrocities to prevent human rights abuses.

Dominic Raab: We have a human rights policy department, and part of that would be their remit. When I was at the Foreign Office I was responsible for war crimes, and I was head of war crimes at The Hague. Nothing could be closer to my heart. Let us also be clear: in all the examples you have given, there is no deft tool to stop the atrocity, whether we are looking at Syria, in Idlib, whether we are looking at human rights abuses like the Uighurs, or wherever. There are probably examples where it could be lost within the maelstrom of other issues that



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diplomats or officials are dealing with. I do not think in relation to those big cases it is.

Human rights abuses of the scale that you describe are appalling in their own right, but they are also symptomatic of a much bigger strategic threat. Look at the refugee implications of what is happening in Syria. That all stems from the appalling abuse by the regime, backed up by Russia. The truth, as you are pointing to, is the huge challenge that we have in a multipolar world to actually deal with a situation through hard power, with a reticence to use force where you risk entanglement. That does not mean that there is not more that we should do, whether diplomatically, through sanctions—although for Syria a whole suite of sanctions is in place—or ultimately in being willing, as the UK has in the past, to use hard power. That is the challenge.

As someone with a human rights background—I worked for Liberty and covered war crimes, so that is close to my heart—I do not think that it just slips through the cracks. I can reassure you. For example, often in the Chamber, human rights are raised in relation to Saudi Arabia. To be honest, I want a really strong, positive and constructive relationship with Saudi Arabia as we embark on global Britain. There is huge scope for tackling Yemen, on which we need Saudi's leadership. We do not shy away from raising women's rights defenders—

Chair: Just on that point—

Dominic Raab: Hold on. Raif Badawi and Khashoggi—I raised all those issues. I want to reassure you that it is not somehow slipping through the cracks.

Q109 **Chair:** Forgive me, but one of your predecessors referred to the murder of Jamal Khashoggi as a "murder". Would you call it that?

Dominic Raab: Yes.

Q110 **Alicia Kearns:** Just to clarify, I do not think that it is slipping through the cracks or that there is no desire to tackle it, but that it is more about giving diplomats the resources that they need. Quite often, you sit there as a team and say, "Right, what can we do to tackle this issue?", and you are desperately trying to find a way to do that. Perhaps if there were some sort of central repository, resource or individual who could say, "Do you know what? I'm going to come and spend a day with the Syria team. These are the things that we have found have worked in other countries CSSF programming-wise."

On the Uighur question, I will ask you about creating some sort of CSSF programme to track the missing. That is a small CSSF programme that casts great light that Governments do not like. Although we cannot stop the atrocities, it could help to slow, mitigate, or make them re-think. I just want to be clear, I am not criticising the officials; I am suggesting repositories.

Dominic Raab: No, I understand, and I am not sensitive or defensive about that—I am trying to give you an answer. On human rights, I will



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give you an example of something that we are going to do—it will almost certainly be delayed slightly by coronavirus—in introducing Magnitsky sanctions. We are very close to doing that through both the statutory instrument—the regulations that would create the basis—and the designations. That is a very good example, particularly with countries to which we want to highlight abuses and continue talking to, because other issues are at stake. That is a good example, and it is a shame that Chris is not here, because I know that he—

Alicia Kearns: Don't worry—I care just as much about Magnitsky.

Dominic Raab: It is a good example of a new mechanism to hold to account individuals who engage in gross human rights abuses—I think the UK has a leadership role on that.

Q111 **Chair:** On that point, congratulations for bringing that forward. Many of us on the Committee are totally supportive of you in that. This clearly is not just about Russia but about global sanctions or, rather, sanctions to anybody around the world. Could that include companies?

Dominic Raab: I would need to check whether the legal scope could cover corporate legal entities as well as personal legal entities. You are right—we need to be very clear about this—that the Magnitsky case is the paradigm that has been promoted, but it is universal in its application. One of the things that I want to be clear about when we do it is that it is a general mechanism applied across the board. I will have to check the extent to which those powers or other powers can be used for companies.

Chair: Your family and mine are both central European—

Dominic Raab: Let us be clear: if you think of Magnitsky as visa bans and asset freezes, the visa bans are by definition almost always personal, so it would be asset freezes.

Q112 **Chair:** Exactly right. You and I, given our backgrounds, are particularly conscious of certain companies that supported various genocides in central Europe between 1939 and 1945, and we would hate to find ourselves partnered today with companies that are in any way similar.

Dominic Raab: I totally agree. I am not sure that the Magnitsky model has ever been used to target companies or whether we have other powers, but I will write to you on that.

Chair: That would be great, thank you.

Q113 **Bob Seely:** Specifically on that point, there was a recent report by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute about Uighurs being put into forced labour in China and then indirectly, or directly, working for companies that sell through the west and western brand names. It included Huawei. I don't want to use Huawei specifically, but a bunch of companies were named in those forced labour stories. I think there is a Magnitsky angle to that.



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Dominic Raab: You are absolutely right that we need to be across the board on this.

Q114 **Bob Seely:** To follow up on Alicia's war crimes point, the deliberate targeting of hospitals in Syria, highlighted by David Nott, the White Helmets, Hamish de Bretton-Gordon and others, is one of the great attacks on the Geneva conventions and the rule of law in the last 50 years. It feels like we are very silent because one of the countries doing it is a permanent member of the Security Council. We are not even publicising the names of commanders or the units involved. It does not seem to me that we are out there on this subject. This is something that we should be taking much more of a leadership role in. It is extraordinary what has been happening in Syria.

Dominic Raab: I totally agree with you. I do not think that we are being backwards, but I will certainly take it very seriously, and I will look at what more we can do. I think we have been pretty clear in calling out both Russia and Syria. We have condemned the war crimes by the regime and Russia in Idlib, as reported by the UN commission of inquiry. We have been providing funding for the international impartial and independent mechanism to investigate these.

As a Government, we want to make sure that we are on firm footing. People talk about genocide, for example, in quite loose terms. It has a very narrow definition, but in terms of holding to account those who commit terrible abuses, we will never duck it—that is the point I was making in relation to Saudi, but frankly in relation to any other country. In relation to Russia, we are certainly not shrinking from calling them out. I called them out on the annexation of Crimea, given the anniversary this week. We will continue to do so. Indeed, Sergei Magnitsky was tortured to death by the Russian state. There is no shrinking from calling out Russia on its human rights abuses.

Bob Seely: More broadly, you are right. It takes us time to get to those positions, so we are not always as—*[Interruption.]* Do you want me to stop?

Q115 **Chair:** I want to move on. There are a couple of other tidy-up points. One is that we have just had your response to our media freedom inquiry. Why is the Foreign Office not willing to criticise Turkey on what are some of the most flagrant abuses of human rights in media freedom?

Dominic Raab: Sorry—why are we not willing to do what?

Chair: To call out Turkey's abuse of journalists.

Dominic Raab: I was over in recent weeks talking to the Foreign Minister, and indeed I had a meeting with President Erdoğan. We raise all of these issues. You are right to say that the way we do it with a close NATO partner may at times feel different, but at the end of the day, as I have said before, there is never going to be a shrinking from calling out significant human rights abuses.



Q116 **Chair:** Many of us are hugely supportive of Turkey and the position it finds itself in with millions of Syrian refugees, and the struggle that it is facing against Russia. We should recognise the position that it faces, but as a close friend of Turkey's—I think that we can say that the UK is, and will remain, a close friend of Turkey's—should we not occasionally be a bit clearer that this is something where Turkey is letting itself down?

Dominic Raab: I think that is exactly the way that it can be described, and I will take that on board. You are right as well, though, at the same time, to say that as a close partner, with potentially an influence on Turkey, we need to recognise both the huge scale of the refugee crisis—4 million refugees have made their way into Turkey—and the wider challenges that it faces because it is right on the forefront of the Middle East.

I certainly agree with your challenge that we should not duck giving advice and candour that only a good friend can, for example on human rights. By the way, we were pretty clear in relation to the initial incursion of Turkey into Syria, and the humanitarian plight that that would contribute to. I think that is a good example of where we have been, both privately and in public, crystal clear.

Q117 **Chair:** One other point on that report: we recommended the possibility of a particular category of visas for journalists who are undergoing persecution. Have you thought about that?

Dominic Raab: I have and I know it is something that Amal Clooney has championed. I have discussed it with the Home Secretary. It doesn't naturally fit into the immigration system, but I know it is something that she wanted to consider.

Q118 **Chair:** I would be grateful if you would take that up again.

Dominic Raab: Absolutely. I am absolutely passionate about the media freedom campaign. We have 35 members. Japan announced when I was out there in Tokyo that they would join. We have got new members coming on board. There is some great work we are doing, in terms of protecting individual journalists, but also supporting those countries that may be willing but not able yet to provide the legal protections. I will look at that with the Home Secretary, as it is her bailiwick.

Q119 **Chair:** My last point is on the British Council. Coronavirus has had some very severe implications on many organisations and groups. The British Council, being an organisation of the state, clearly does not hold reserves and is reliant therefore on cashflow to continue its operations. The loss of exam revenue in China and Pakistan and the loss of teaching in Spain has put a severe cost on it. Can you tell me what you are going to do to ask the Treasury to relieve some of that burden?

Dominic Raab: We are looking at that actively. I am obviously aware of the situation. It coincided with a broader review of the British Council's work. It is a key part of our soft power and our influence and what we talk about when we talk about Britain as a force for good abroad—particularly the English language qualification and the gold standard that it provides. It



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is a precious part of the Foreign Office family and I will make all the overtures to the Treasury that I need to.

Q120 **Chair:** There is an urgency to this of course, because we don't want the British Council taking decisions now that we are then going to seek to reverse in a month or two or three's time, when this crisis is over.

Dominic Raab: I totally understand. We are appraised of the urgency.

Chair: Excellent. Foreign Secretary, thank you very much for coming. Please take our huge thanks back to the consular staff in the embassies and missions abroad for the work that they are doing, particularly at this time.

Dominic Raab: I will do. I really appreciate the commendations and the kind words from this Committee. It genuinely does matter when we take back the warm words, as well as some of the criticisms that we inevitably get.

Chair: The criticism is only for the politicians. The praise is all for the staff. Thank you.

Dominic Raab: Very good. Thank you.