



Oral evidence: [UK policy towards Iran](#), HC 904

Tuesday 18 March 2014

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Members present: Sir Richard Ottaway (Chair); Mr John Baron; Sir Menzies Campbell; Mark Hendrick; Sandra Osborne; Andrew Rosindell; Mr Frank Roy; Sir John Stanley; Rory Stewart

Questions 195-224

Witnesses: **Rt Hon William Hague MP**, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, and **Edward Oakden**, Director, Middle East and North Africa, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, gave evidence.

Q195 Chair: Foreign Secretary, I put to you a question on the Floor of the House a few months ago, before the Joint Action Plan was done, that we should judge Iran by its actions rather than its words, and you agreed. Is that still the approach, or would you make a concession without seeing any movement from Iran in order to try and jolly the process along?

Mr Hague: The actions are still what we should judge them by above all. Of course, we are watching very closely how they implement the Joint Plan of Action that came into force on 20 January. There is to be an IAEA report every month. There was a report released on 20 February, which confirmed that Iran is implementing the nuclear measures agreed under the Joint Plan of Action. We will watch that through the whole six months of the agreement—we will watch that carefully. That is not to say we do not analyse their words carefully as well, but this is what matters most of all, and so far they are honouring the agreement that we had made.

Q196 Chair: We will get to the plan and the future in a moment. On President Rouhani, were you surprised that Iran elected him? Someone of his style?

Mr Hague: I'm not sure any of us are ever surprised by any election outcome anywhere in the world. I think many in Iran were surprised at how his support gathered and how he won such a very clear victory from among a field of eight candidates who managed to get more or less to the final stage. There were some 678 candidates who did not get to that stage, so this was from quite a limited field. Clearly, he became known as the most reform-minded candidate, and I think the fact that he won such an overwhelming victory gave us some indication of public opinion in Iran. We could not have predicted the exact percentages, but it was not surprising that the candidate who presented himself as most reform-minded was elected.

Q197 Chair: What do you think are his primary objectives? Where do you think he wants to take Iran?

Mr Hague: That remains to be seen. He has made important statements about being ready to work with the international community, particularly about improving Iran's economic situation, and those two subjects are of course inextricably linked. There is no reason at the moment to doubt his sincerity about those things. For Iran, there has been the pressure of our sanctions in part, as well as the great inefficiencies in economic management—it has had declining GDP in recent years—so this is an important priority.

Beyond that, I think it is difficult to say. He has made some welcome releases of political prisoners, but as the Committee knows, other respects, such as Iran's human rights record, remain appalling, so it is too early to tell whether he will make a decisive difference in that regard.

Q198 Chair: Do you think that others in positions of power in Iran share his agenda? Will he be able to carry the rest of the establishment with him?

Mr Hague: He has appointed some Ministers who share that agenda. I have met Foreign Minister Zarif several times, and I think that he is sincere in wanting to improve relations with the international community and thereby help his colleagues to improve Iran's economic situation.

However, as the Committee knows extremely well, Iran has a very complex and opaque power structure. There are very important alternative interests. The Supreme Leader is in a position of great power, as his title suggests, so it is not possible to say that the whole body politic in Iran has embarked on this course of action.

Q199 Mark Hendrick: Foreign Secretary, you mentioned that Mr Rouhani was very reform-minded, giving the impression that he is some sort of a moderniser. We also recall that he was their nuclear negotiator. What is your assessment? Do you feel that Iran with Rouhani wants to develop a nuclear weapon, or is he just using that to try to get better leverage for Iran's negotiating positions on other issues?

Mr Hague: It is hard to speak corporately of Iran on this, for the reasons I just gave. From everything we have seen, President Rouhani and Foreign Minister Zarif are setting out to reach a deal with the international community on the nuclear issue. We have agreed the Joint Plan of Action and they are implementing that. We have started the negotiations on a comprehensive deal. Those are described in the words of my officials as workman-like discussions at the moment. They are nothing to get too excited about, but the detail is being ground through. They want, if they can, to achieve such a deal.

What remains to be tested is how much flexibility and leeway they have to do that. Will they be able to address all the concerns about Iran's nuclear programme, identified in a succession of UN Security Council resolutions, so that they can reach a comprehensive deal? That will depend on other parts of the power structure in Iran. We do not know yet whether Iran corporately has the sincere and sustained intention to do that, but we are testing to the full their readiness to do so.

Q200 Mark Hendrick: Do you not think that leaving you in doubt about their intentions spills over into our attitude to Iran's involvement in the Syria crisis?

Mr Hague: Sorry, by leaving what in doubt?

Mark Hendrick: By leaving their intentions in doubt, do you not think that a little thing at the back of yours and President Obama's mind gives them a little leverage on how you deal with them in the Syria crisis? I am not saying that there is a direct connection, but perhaps there is a spill-over.

Mr Hague: Yes, of course that ambiguity leaves the world wondering what their broader foreign policy intentions are. At the moment, we should understand what is going on. The negotiations we have had, and continue to have, on the comprehensive deal on the nuclear side are really a transaction on the nuclear issue and do not necessarily change or imply any changes to the rest of Iranian foreign policy. We would welcome major changes in broader Iranian foreign policy and a real opportunity for Iran to work well with its neighbours, and to have a much better relationship with the Arab world and the western world lies in broader changes to its foreign policy. It has not yet shown much sign of making such changes in terms of concrete actions. That remains, from the point of view of the nuclear negotiations, a separate issue. It is right to try to resolve the nuclear issue, irrespective of those wider changes, but of course we hope that there will be some wider changes.

Q201 Mark Hendrick: In terms of UK foreign policy, do you perhaps feel that during the past 10 years we have been too much in tune or on track with the US? If you cast your mind back to the 2002 State of the Union speech, President Bush talked about the axis of evil. Obviously, the current US Administration takes a softer line, but do you think there was more scope for us and that perhaps we should have been a bit more independent in our view of Iran and in UK policy towards Iran?

Mr Hague: I do not think that our policy on Iran would succeed without strong international co-ordination and unity. I really saw that during the E3+3 negotiations. I attended the final two weekends of those negotiations in Geneva in November. They succeeded because of a leading role by the United States and by the whole E3+3 working cohesively together, including Russia and China, in bringing Iran to this agreement. If European policy was detached from American policy, I do not think it would be effective or successful.

Q202 Mark Hendrick: I am not saying detached, but less following and more interactive to come to a position.

Mr Hague: Of course behind the scenes—and we do this in the run-up to all the E3+3 work on Iran—we should be influencing the other nations, including the United States. It is not as if the United States alone makes decisions about Iran policy; indeed, the Prime Minister and President Obama have had many discussions themselves, as have American Secretaries of State and I, in the run-up to the E3+3 deal. So we should not see American policy as something that is just determined without us in any way. It is interactive, so I agree it has to be that.

However, I think in more recent times that we have to recognise the important role played by the United States. It was clearly acknowledged in the E3+3 negotiations in November that the work that the United States had done directly with Iran before the E3+3 negotiations was crucial to the breakthrough.

Q203 Mr Roy: Foreign Secretary, in relation to France and the negotiations that were on in November in Geneva, France received great credit for holding out for more concessions while we seemed to take a softer line. Did we lose some credibility because of our line, as opposed to the tougher stance taken by France and nations such as Israel, for example?

Mr Hague: No, I don't think so. First of all, any differences among the E3+3 countries were very small. Secondly, the E3+3 pursued together the bottom lines of all six countries. Iran was not dealing with a different position from different members of the E3+3. So French views, like British views, were incorporated into the position of the E3+3 as a whole, and the main thing was to get an agreement, on the right terms, with Iran. Everybody contributed to that, including France.

Q204 Mr Roy: The French did block a deal, didn't they?

Mr Hague: No, that would not be the right way to describe it. You are referring to the negotiations on 7 to 9 November, the first weekend, which did not reach a successful conclusion. That was not blocked by France; that did not reach agreement because Iran was not able to agree with all the E3+3 on matters that we subsequently agreed on two weeks later. So no, it would not be correct to say that that was blocked by France. France, as always, made an important input into that meeting, but there was not a deal that everybody else was happy with except France, who then blocked it. That would not be a correct interpretation of events.

Q205 Rory Stewart: Just to finish Mr Roy's questioning, would it be correct to say specifically that Laurent Fabius took a much stronger line over the Arak reactor and made that a red line and that that was a distinctive French contribution to the negotiation?

Mr Hague: Well, this overlaps with the question from Mr Roy. France had particular concerns over what might be agreed on the Arak reactor, but in any case it was very important to reach an agreement that was strong and sustainable, particularly on the provision of fuel for the Arak reactor. So yes, France had its concerns about that, but France, like the rest of us, was happy with where we arrived at the end on the Arak reactor, where the provisions are quite detailed and clear as to what Iran has to do.

Q206 Rory Stewart: Mark Fitzpatrick, in testifying to us, said that there was a 10% chance of success of a comprehensive deal. He said: "it would be too difficult politically for Iran to accept the limits that would be required and for Washington to give Iran what it wants in terms of lifting sanctions." Are you more optimistic than Mr Fitzpatrick?

Mr Hague: I hesitate to put percentages on things. I have been Foreign Secretary for too long to put a percentage on any likely or unlikely agreement.

Q207 Sir Menzies Campbell: Well how about odds then?

Mr Hague: I will say this: it will be harder to reach a comprehensive deal than it was to agree the interim deal. Certainly it is harder to do that, but on the more optimistic side, a year ago sitting here discussing this, we would not have thought the chances of reaching the interim deal, the Joint Plan of Action—most observers would not have said there was a 50% chance of reaching that agreement with Iran in November. So even though it is more difficult and even though it requires Iran to be ready to discuss and resolve a wide range of issues not

yet addressed in the Joint Plan of Action, the fact that we have overcome major difficulties before should give us some cause for confidence and determination, if not yet for optimism.

Q208 Rory Stewart: So is there a danger in an ever rolling, ever extended six-month renewal of the interim agreement? It has been suggested that were we to keep rolling it forward, that would provide cover for ever shorter break-out times.

Mr Hague: This is not designed to be rolled over for ever. The agreement provides for it to be renewed again because it talks explicitly about the efforts being made over a year to negotiate the comprehensive agreement. It is not designed as something that can just be rolled on for years; it is an interim agreement. It has sanctions relief involved in it, which is specific to that six months, so it is not designed to go on for many years. Just on the reassuring side, it requires Iran to do things which halt what had been the build-up of highly enriched uranium. It requires it to take important steps, which it is now taking, that prevent what Iranians might have seen as the progress of their nuclear programme in terms of enrichment. As long as the six months is rolled over, those things will remain in force.

Q209 Rory Stewart: Finally, Foreign Secretary, Laurent Fabius has argued that France made a very distinct contribution to these negotiations and suggested that if it had not been for France, we would not have had the exact detail of the Arak reactor agreement. Is it possible to point to a similarly distinctive UK contribution? Is there anything we can point to which the UK brought to the table? Or is there anything going forward which the UK could be particularly well placed to achieve? Is there any way we can distinguish the UK's contribution from the US or France and what French and American diplomats have tried to do in their own contributions?

Mr Hague: The UK makes a huge contribution to these negotiations, particularly with technical expertise that is enormously valued—technical nuclear expertise—by other countries. Our experts have played a big role in these negotiations. You could make a long list of these things. The UK has always played a crucial role, for example, in the European Union adopting the sanctions that helped to bring Iran to the negotiating table. So the UK plays a crucial role. France plays a crucial role, and what we have here is the product—the successful product so far—of the E3+3 working together.

Q210 Andrew Rosindell: If sanctions did have an impact and bring Iran to the negotiating table, would it have been more helpful if the EU had been as strong in its sanctions as the United States were? Would that have accelerated things and helped us to move things forward faster?

Mr Hague: The European Union offered very strong sanctions and continues to have very strong sanctions on Iran. They are not always identical to the United States, but they are of the same order. Sometimes there are some industries or areas of finance that are more relevant to one side of the Atlantic than the other—for instance, insurance relating to London or, in the past, the availability of aircraft parts from the United States, which is more relevant to the United States. These things vary, but in the case of Iran the European Union has applied the strongest and most effective sanctions it has applied in any situation in the world. The UK has always played an important part in achieving those, so I do not think there is a divergence here between Europe and the US that makes our sanctions weaker.

Q211 Andrew Rosindell: You don't think the EU is generally taking a softer line than the United States?

Mr Hague: The EU sanctions on Iran have been very sweeping, particularly on the sale of hydrocarbons and in the financial area. There is now some relief from sanctions agreed under the Joint Plan of Action. Again, that has been agreed by the United States and the European Union. We continue to designate new individuals or entities under the sanctions regime. That is true for us in Europe as well as in the United States. I do not see any divergence of policy here.

Q212 Mr Baron: Foreign Secretary, may I turn your attention to sanctions in a little more detail? There seems to be little or no flow of humanitarian aid to the Iranian people. One of the key reasons for that, we are led to believe, is that the banks are not prepared to offer facilities. The response from the Government has been that this is a commercial decision for the banks—there are no legal restrictions on British banks handling financial transactions. I suggest this is a slightly disingenuous answer, because what is happening in effect is that those British banks that do trade with Iran are immediately targeted by the US Treasury, and this is having a direct effect on the flow of humanitarian aid and vital medicines to Iran. Why is it that we are allowing US authorities to bring this pressure to bear on British banks and what are we going to do about it?

Mr Hague: As you know, under the Joint Plan of Action, the E3+3 is required to facilitate a financial channel for the use of what was blocked oil revenue in humanitarian trade. The United States has recently provided what are called letters of comfort to selector banks on the permissibility of accessing oil revenues for humanitarian trade and dealing with approved exporters. That action should be sufficient for the humanitarian financial channel to work. In addition, the European Union has increased tenfold the authorisation thresholds for humanitarian and other permitted trades, which means transfers of up to €1 million can now take place without the need for authorisation from the Treasury. These letters of comfort have been quite recently provided. I am keeping an eye on this. It has been raised in the House by several colleagues, so I am keeping an eye on how this works, and if it does not work, we will give it further attention.

Q213 Mr Baron: May I suggest to you that letters of comfort may be one thing, but if the US authorities, particularly the US Treasury, are going to continue to target British banks—this has been referred to in various bits of evidence to us—then letters of comfort have no real effect whatsoever because the hard position, the reality, is that the banks are not going to provide the loan facilities? We have a situation where the Iranian chargé d'affaires was unable to open a bank account in this country as recently as last month. That might have changed this month, but certainly, as of the end of last month, he was unable to open a bank account. That is how ridiculous the situation is. What discussions are there going to be? What pressure can the UK Government bring on the US to stop this targeting which, regardless of letters of comfort, is the real reason why facilities are not being offered and this is affecting the flow of humanitarian aid?

Mr Hague: We can't say regardless of letters of comfort, because this is what they are about—not being targeted on these grounds. But perhaps I could bring in Edward Oakden to comment further. He is the director of the Middle East and North Africa Department. We now have two directors because they are so busy; he is the one who covers Iran.

Edward Oakden: I hesitate to use the word “targeting”. I think the reason why a number of Iranian entities are having difficulty getting the funds through is that the banks will take a commercial decision. They are influenced by the broader array of US sanctions, which in some ways go beyond where the UN ones, and the EU ones that shadow those UN ones, are. The fact is though that UK pharmaceutical exports have gone up about 80% over the last year, so they are finding a way through.

Q214 Mr Baron: I accept that figure, but this is from an extraordinarily low base, as I hope you will be prepared to acknowledge. It still doesn’t answer the question. You say it is up to a commercial decision of the banks and we mustn’t infringe any sanctions. But the bottom line is that when any—or the vast majority of—facilities are offered by British banks, those British banks seem to be then targeted by the US Treasury. That is a fact. It is a commercial decision in the sense that if you are sitting at the top of a major British bank and—whether it is right or wrong—you are going to be targeted with hundreds of millions, perhaps even billions, of fines simply for trading with Iran or providing facilities. That is then, in effect, a commercial decision—I agree with you—but it is not a proper one. The UK Government could be doing something about that in order to help the flow of humanitarian aid.

Edward Oakden: All I would say is, and I think the Foreign Secretary is saying, that this is something we are keeping under review. In the interactive discussions that we do indeed have with the Americans, this is the sort of thing that we need to work through with them.

Q215 Mr Baron: Do you advocate an improvement on this situation?

Edward Oakden: We clearly want the humanitarian exceptions to be working in the way in which they are intended to work.

Mr Hague: But let us be clear that what the United States is saying to them in these letters is that it is okay to do this. So they are not making clear that they are not targeted as a result of doing this. That should be entirely sufficient for the humanitarian financial channel to work, but we will watch closely how that works.

Q216 Mr Baron: Actions speak louder than words, I suppose.

Let’s move on to the opening of the British embassy. Britain is unique in many respects but certainly when it comes to relations with Iran because, of the three stated enemies of Iran, only the British have any form of diplomatic relations at present. I am thinking vis-à-vis Israel and the US. When we met the Iranian chargé d’affaires at the FCO recently, he made it clear that, as far as his country is concerned, they very much regretted what happened. One mustn’t forget the severity of what happened. But he made it clear then—and I have seen it elsewhere—that they are prepared to guarantee the safety of our staff in Iran if the embassy was to be reopened. What is it going to take to get this embassy open? It does feel as though we are dragging our feet on this. We mustn’t rush our fences. One isn’t underestimating the severity of what happened, but there is a bit of a frustration building up on both sides perhaps, particularly in Tehran, that we do not seem to making any progress. What else do they have to do? What do they have to guarantee to get this embassy open?

Mr Hague: First, we are making progress on the upgrading of our bilateral relations. Last week, our non-resident chargé made his fourth visit to Iran, and indeed, there have been

visits in the other direction; I am very pleased that members of the Committee have met the Iranian chargé. Those visits have been going reasonably well, and I have discussed with Foreign Minister Zarif—late January was the last time—our approach to all this.

It is absolutely true that the Foreign Ministry of Iran is positive about the reopening of embassies and use words about the future operation of the embassies, similar to what we are hearing from Mr Baron; but of course, in November 2011, the Iranian Foreign Ministry did not itself pose any threat to our embassy. When the Foreign Minister of the time, Mr Salehi, phoned me on the day our embassy compounds were invaded, he sounded horrified about it, and I am sure he was, but the Foreign Ministry in Iran is not the sole decision maker on these things. So we need to have a level of confidence that support for the reopening of an embassy and readiness to allow it to perform the functions of an embassy is there across the Iranian system—or sufficiently there across the Iranian system, not just in the Foreign Ministry.

Q217 Mr Baron: May I suggest, Foreign Secretary, that we would all agree with that? No one wants, in any way, to put our staff at risk, but what more assurances does one need on that? Is it a question of your subjective take on the stability of the regime, or do you need written assurances from the various power centres that exist in Tehran, or what? What will it take?

Mr Hague: It is something that we have to judge—that I have to judge—over the coming weeks and months, as we upgrade these relations in stages. We are clearly very willing to do so. I do not think there is a crucial form of words or piece of paper. After all, since Iran has—as I say, probably not through the fault of the Foreign Ministry—acted before in complete defiance of the Vienna convention, we have to go on our judgment of behaviour and their readiness to allow an embassy to perform its normal diplomatic functions and for its staff to be safe and secure. I said to Foreign Minister Zarif at the end of January that I hoped, within a few months of January, to be able to make a decision about further steps—about the reopening even in a small way of our embassy—and that remains our position.

Q218 Mr Baron: Foreign Secretary, may I move us briefly on to the issue of trade? There is no shortage of anecdotal evidence that planeloads of French business people, Germans, Danes and Scandinavians are flying over to Tehran. Although no deals are being signed—that would break sanctions, of course—I equate the situation to the idea of the practice run on a grand prix, where you position yourself on the grid, ready for when the firing gun is set off. It feels as though we are right at the back of the grid at the moment. Again, I come back to the fact that we all know that sanctions are not there to challenge ordinary Iranians, but we seem to be behind the curve when it comes to positioning ourselves for what will hopefully become a more open relationship over trade with Iran, when that day comes. Do you agree with that assessment?

Mr Hague: I do not think of it as a grand prix. The main thing is to ensure that the whole race track does not have nuclear weapons on it and is safe for the whole world—to slightly fall into the grand prix analogy. We do not support, facilitate or promote trade with Iran, and we communicate that to British businesses. We lobby other EU partners about it. There are reports of trade delegations from several EU countries travelling to Iran. I am assured that, in the cases of France and Germany, those do not have support or endorsement from the French and German Governments, who agree that active trade promotion is inappropriate at the moment. I make no apology for giving by far the greatest weight to

resolving the nuclear issue. Until we have done that, we will not embark on encouraging trade with Iran.

Q219 Mr Baron: One is not suggesting that one should encourage trade with Iran, but there is little doubt that we are behind the curve compared with many other countries when it comes to trade delegations going out there to prepare the ground for better days when perhaps sanctions get lifted. We seem to be almost conspicuous by our absence in that respect. When speaking with businesses, one gets back the message that they are actively discouraged from developing any sort of trade contacts. One is not talking about trade, but preparing the ground. Some have hinted that perhaps that is the influence of the US in trying to stop or blockade trade.

In my series of questions—this will be the final one—I am trying to paint a scenario of succumbing to US pressure on British banks, which is affecting humanitarian aid. We are dragging our feet on the embassy, although I do not want in any way to put the lives of our embassy staff in any form of danger. I suggest that we are behind the curve on trade as well. It feels as though we are very slow off the mark on this and that we need to learn lessons from where we were slow off the mark in other countries in situations of this sort. Will there be a change of tack?

Mr Hague: I see it in a different way, and no, I am not contemplating any change of tack. We will continue steadily and calmly with this approach. We are achieving important improvements in our relations with Iran, particularly with the E3+3 Joint Plan of Action. That is not a question of anyone just following the United States; it is the E3+3 working together, including Russia and China. But it is premature to give the signals of encouraging trade with Iran. As I said in my answer to Mr Stewart, we are not there yet: the comprehensive deal will be harder work and more difficult to achieve than the Joint Plan of Action and the interim deal. We should not be sending the signal to Iran that they can relax or that we are nearly there. There is a lot more negotiating to do, and we will take it at a pace consistent with that situation, rather than think that we have nearly solved the problem now.

Q220 Sir Menzies Campbell: What are the consequences of the relatively low level of diplomatic exchange at the moment? To what extent does that low level inhibit Her Majesty's Government and the Foreign Office in particular in having a full and encyclopaedic understanding of what is happening in Iran?

Mr Hague: It is always easier to have a good understanding of a country with an embassy there, but we did not seek the situation in which the embassy was closed; that was forced upon us by events. We have maintained a great deal of expertise in Iran and its affairs. We have an Iran office in Dubai, which I find extremely useful, and we maintain a great deal of expertise here in Whitehall as well, tapping into the strengths of the many diplomats who served in Iran in recent years.

Of course, from the point of view of understanding a country, it is better to have an embassy. That would be one of the advantages of reopening an embassy, but they get that understanding only if they can function properly as an embassy, which means being able to meet who they need to meet, to travel around and be part of that country's society, as any properly functioning embassy is. That is why, when we get to that point, we need to be doing it on the right terms and with the right understanding.

Q221 Chair: Have you had any discussions about opening the British Council office in Tehran?

Mr Hague: No, not yet. Edward, do you want to talk about the British Council?

Edward Oakden: The British Council are thinking about how they could increase their educational and cultural links, consistent with what President Rouhani said when he came into power about wanting to open Iran in that direction. Until we have secured a way forward at the political level, the council will want to develop their thinking.

Chair: It has probably slipstreamed behind a substantial agreement.

Q222 Mr Roy: Foreign Secretary, Iranians looking for a visa for the United Kingdom at the moment have to travel from Paris, Abu Dhabi or Istanbul. What can be done to relieve that burden for those applicants? Have you pressed the Home Office, for example, to consider various options?

Mr Hague: They do have to travel, and that is difficult for them, but of course that is the result of the invasion of our embassy compound in November 2011. It is an unfortunate consequence of the closure of our embassy that Iranians have to travel to another country to obtain a visa for the UK. We do, however, continue to welcome applicants via our visa centres worldwide, and we are discussing with Iran now ways that we can improve our respective visa services. I hope that it will be possible to make improvements as we upgrade our bilateral relations. Edward, do you want to add anything?

Q223 Mr Roy: Are there any discussions with the Home Office in relation to this matter?

Mr Hague: Anything we do on this is co-ordinated with the Home Office.

Edward Oakden: From memory, about 150,000 students still manage to come here, even when going via third countries. Clearly, it is something that the Iranians have got a big interest in doing on a reciprocal basis here, but it is, logically, something that we will concentrate on once we are able to re-establish a presence in the country.

Q224 Mr Roy: Foreign Secretary, you spoke about neighbouring countries. How is the FCO managing the risk of damaging relationships with other regional powers—for example, Saudi Arabia and Israel—through our negotiating stance?

Mr Hague: These are countries we work with very closely and we have very regular foreign policy discussions. As you know, the Prime Minister just visited Israel. We have had many high-level visits recently to Saudi Arabia. Prince Saud, the Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, is the one I speak to very regularly, including about policy on Iran. In December, I visited the Gulf and met pretty much all of my Gulf Foreign Minister colleagues to discuss the interim agreement with Iran. We have taken a lot of steps to explain the details of the Joint Plan of Action with Iran to our Gulf partners and to the Israelis, including sending senior officials who have been involved in the negotiations to take them through the details. So we take every opportunity to make sure they are well informed. Of course, it is in the interests of all of those countries that the Iranian nuclear issue is resolved peacefully.

Chair: I think that completes our questions on Iran, Foreign Secretary.

