

Liaison Committee

Oral evidence: Evidence from the Prime Minister, HC 712

Tuesday 12 January 2016

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Members present: Mr Andrew Tyrie (Chair), Sir Paul Beresford, Mr Clive Betts, Crispin Blunt, Andrew Bridgen, Ms Harriet Harman, Meg Hillier, Huw Irranca-Davies, Dr Julian Lewis, Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil, Jesse Norman, Mr Laurence Robertson, Neil Parish, Keith Vaz, Bill Wiggin

Questions 1–108

Witness: **Rt Hon David Cameron MP**, Prime Minister, gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: Good afternoon, Prime Minister. Thank you very much for coming to give evidence to the first of the Liaison Committee’s public meetings in this Session. First of all, I want to establish that you are going to continue the practice of the last Parliament and appear three times a Session.

Mr Cameron: Yes, if we all agree. I thought last time it worked quite well to have three sessions: one in this bit, one between Easter and summer, and one later in the year. This idea of picking some subjects, to be determined by you, rather than going across the piece—I am happy either way, but I think it worked okay.

Q2 Chair: We have a problem for this Session, because we have a bit of a backlog. We tried to get you before Christmas but that was not possible, so we would be very grateful if you could make two more appearances this Session.

Mr Cameron: Yes, that sounds right—one between Easter and summer recess, and one—

Q3 Chair: I think it will be two before the summer.

Mr Cameron: I hadn’t banked on that. I think that might be more difficult.

Q4 Chair: Would you like to have a word with your bank?

Mr Cameron: Let me take that away and think about it.

Q5 Crispin Blunt: Prime Minister, the Vienna deal that gave us so much hope of a prospect of a Syrian ceasefire and negotiations relied upon the international community—the partners to that deal—bringing their clients to the table and putting some pressure on them. What is your assessment of whether that willingness of people to put pressure on their own clients within the Syrian civil war is still in place?

Mr Cameron: The good thing is there is a process, and there is a process with dates and intentions. Secretary of State Kerry has done an amazing job to bring about some momentum by holding that meeting before Christmas and saying he wants to see a meeting on 25 January between the opposition and the regime. That would be a great step forward.

What pressure can everyone put on their clients? I am not sure I would totally use that phrase, but certainly in the relationship we have with opposition groups, we will be encouraging them to come forward. We helped with the conference that took place in Saudi Arabia, where a large number of different opposition groups came together. All had signed up to the Geneva principles, and obviously we are encouraging them to form up properly so that they can carry out a dialogue with the regime.

I suppose the warning sign I would make is that it is all just incredibly difficult, because to continue the Vienna process, you need Saudi Arabia and Iran in the same room; that is difficult. You need opposition groups to sit down opposite regime figures who they rightly blame for the most appalling brutality. We have seen in recent days what has happened in Madaya, for example. This is very, very difficult, but it is essential, so we just push as hard as we can, and that is what we are doing.

Q6 Crispin Blunt: Is part of what Saudi Arabia has done recently to seek almost to drive Iran out of the ISSG and out of the more constructive place that it is trying to find in the international community?

Mr Cameron: I don't think so. You would have to ask the Saudis to explain why they did it and why they did it in the way they did. I think they have, as we do, a great interest in a more stable Syria and in a Syria that can have a Government that represents Sunni as well as Shi'a. Obviously, there are deep tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia, but it is in everybody's interests to make this political process work. It will become more difficult, because of the war of words and more between Iran and Saudi Arabia, but we should do everything we can to try to get them round the table together. It is in their interests, and I think they know that it is in their interests.

Q7 Crispin Blunt: Was part of the reason for you cancelling your visit to Saudi Arabia implicitly to express your disapproval of Saudi Arabia acting to disrupt international cohesion at this immensely critical time?

Mr Cameron: My plans were based around the fact that the Government has an emerging Gulf strategy that we are very keen on. We think it is an important area for the

country economically, in terms of security and in terms of trying to create forces for stability in the Middle East, so the Gulf strategy is all about that—re-engaging with this area. We think that previous Governments had rather disengaged from countries like the UAE, Oman and Bahrain, so it is a plan for engagement. My travel arrangements have been more about the fact that I have been rather busy with one or two European issues that I need to bring to a conclusion, but I hope to make a comprehensive Gulf trip at some stage in the coming months.

Q8 Crispin Blunt: Syrian Kurds, in the form of the Syrian Democratic Council, have so far been excluded from coming forward to these talks. What is the British Government's view of their inclusion, which they have now requested?

Mr Cameron: Obviously, it is a very sensitive issue because of the Turkish position. Perhaps the best I can say is that, clearly, the Syrian Kurds are playing an important role in terms of the military campaign against Daesh in Syria. I am sure we will come on to talk about the figure of the 70,000 non-extremist forces, which of course didn't include the 20,000 Kurds. The inclusion in the political process is more difficult, but let's be clear: a future Syria needs to be a Syria in which Sunni, Shi'a, Christian, Alawite and Kurd all see that they play a role.

Q9 Crispin Blunt: This is fairly extraordinary, because the Kurdish forces in both Syria and Iraq are the ones that we are co-operating with most closely in military terms, yet it seems they are not to have some form of seat at the table. Surely we should be supporting them being present at these talks as part of the opposition?

Mr Cameron: We want a process that is as inclusive as possible, but we obviously have to go about this in a way that tries to keep it on track as far as we can.

Q10 Crispin Blunt: Some of this goes to my wider concern about Turkey and putting the Turkish Government's fight with the PKK ahead of the wider interest in establishing the framework for us to be able effectively to take on the enemy of all of us, which is ISIL. What can you tell us about your reading of Turkish policy and Turkish intentions, and just how much good faith should we place in Turkey's commitment to getting these talks and a settlement away so that we can fight our common enemy, ISIL?

Mr Cameron: The best I can say is that the British Government, along with others, will do everything we can to say to our allies and friends, the Turks, that the enemy is Daesh, and that is where the focus should be. Of course, we do not agree when they jumble up everybody together and label them one large terrorist group, as they sometimes do. We are very clear that Daesh is the enemy. In terms of helping to bring about a Daesh-free Iraq, clearly the Kurds have got a great role to play there, and as I said, they have been taking some important action in Syria. This is an ongoing process of working with the Turks to convince them that that is the right approach—and I think it is important that we understand their sensitivities and concerns.

Q11 Crispin Blunt: We have long been an advocate of bringing Turkey within the European family of nations, and yet now their policy and intentions seem immensely opaque, it is not a good place to be, is it?

Mr Cameron: We would like them to be even more focused than they are on Daesh. I think there are signs that that is improving and changing. If you look, for instance, at the work we are doing on the Turkish border, the interdiction of oil supplies and oil smuggling, the work with partner intelligence services across Europe, including in Britain, I would say they are stepping up the work they are doing to counter Daesh, and in everything we do we need to encourage that as much as we can.

Q12 Crispin Blunt: Is there not a danger that there is a parallel with the behaviour of Turkey in that of Pakistan over policy towards Afghanistan, where there has constantly seemed to be at the very least at a double game played by Pakistan. Is there a danger that there is a double game being played here by Turkey?

Mr Cameron: I don't think that's fair. I don't think that is a fair comparison. Turkey has suffered at the hands directly of Daesh, ISIL, in terms of losing its own citizens. Clearly, if you talk to Turkish politicians—Davutoğlu or Erdoğan—they do have concerns about Kurdish-inspired terrorism, both in the past and the present and potentially in the future. You have to understand that, but to say that they are not fully committed to ridding Syria of ISIL is not fair.

Q13 Dr Lewis: Prime Minister, I would like to start with the Government's determination to see Assad and his regime removed. In March 2003, you and I and a large majority of MPs from both main parties voted for the invasion of Iraq and the removal of Saddam Hussein, who I think we would easily agree was as brutal, if not more so, than Assad. In the light of what we now know happened afterwards, do you share my view that we voted the wrong way and that it was a terrible mistake, even though Saddam Hussein was a terribly brutal dictator?

Mr Cameron: I don't choose to go back over these votes and take that view. I think there are important lessons to learn that what happened afterwards—the dismantling of the entire regime, the dismantling of the armed forces, the radical de-Ba'athification of the entire country meant that there was no state and there was no authority. That was the biggest problem of all and we need to learn the lesson from that. Drawing conclusions between these two dreadful people? They are both ghastly. The extent of the hell that Assad has rained down on his own people—we have seen it most recently in using hunger as a weapon of war in Madaya—could certainly be said to be as brutal, if not worse, than things that Saddam Hussein did.

Q14 Dr Lewis: I entirely agree that there is little to choose between them. It is precisely because I and many other people have learned a lesson from that earlier event that I refer to it. The lesson is that sometimes you can remove a very brutal dictator and end up

with a worse situation. Arguably, some might say, the same thing has happened in Libya. Do you accept in principle, if there isn't a choice between a brutal secular dictator and a totalitarian Islamist alternative, it can make sense to leave a brutal secular dictator in place?

Mr Cameron: Where you and I disagree is that it is impossible, in my view, to envisage a situation in which Assad stays in power and Syria is not a threat to our national interest. It is a threat to our national interest at the moment in two very important ways. There is the migration crisis engulfing Europe, which is clearly a threat to our interests. A large part of the cause of that migration crisis is Assad. The second reason that it is a threat to our national interest is that, as long as you have Assad in power, you are in danger of having a Daesh-style, Sunni-broken, terrorist-style state in western Syria. I do not really buy the idea that there is an alternative view in which you say, "Well, let's pick the one that is least bad and sort of make an accommodation with them," because I just do not think that would work. I think you would still have the problems of the migration crisis and the problem of Daesh, because he has been such a recruiting sergeant for Daesh.

You have to ask yourself, looking at those pictures of people starving to death in Madaya or people who have left because they have been bombed out of their houses by Assad, is there any prospect that they could be part of a Syria run by this man? It seems to me that wanting Assad to leave power and saying he cannot be part of a future Syria, is not so much a question of political preference but a statement of political fact. I don't think you can have a stable Syria with Assad in charge. Therefore, I do not go down your comparison.

Dr Lewis: I think the problem surely is—

Mr Cameron: Where I agree with you is that there are lessons to be learned from previous conflicts in terms of not dismantling states and having plans for reconstruction and thinking through political processes. I agree with all of that; I think there is a lot of common ground there.

Q15 Dr Lewis: It seems to me, Prime Minister, that you still subscribe to the view that there is a third alternative, which is some form of inclusive democracy. Some of us take the view that we have to choose the lesser of two evils, but let's assume then that we are going down the route of saying that there is a third option, and that that option are opposition moderates. We all know that in order to be decisive, air strikes need to act in support of credible forces on the ground. You famously told the Commons, and you have repeated it again today, that the Joint Intelligence Committee estimates there to be 70,000 moderate fighters whom we can support. If those people are fighters, there can be little grounds for secrecy about their identity, so why won't you or the Defence Secretary name the supposedly moderate groups in whose name these fighters are in the field?

Mr Cameron: First, let's be clear about the terminology. The figure I gave to the House of Commons is not a figure I invented; it is a figure I asked the JIC to give me as their best estimate. Their estimate was that there were 70,000 non-extremist opposition fighters in Syria. The largest number of those is the Free Syrian Army, who we are familiar with. As I said, the representatives, who all turned up at the Riyadh conference, all signed up to the

Geneva principles; but if you are arguing, “Are all of these people impeccable democrats who would share the view of democracy that you and I have?”—no. Some of them do belong to Islamist groups and some of them belong to relatively hard-line Islamist groups. None the less, that is the best estimate of the people that we have potentially to work with.

The reason for not breaking down in huge amounts of granular detail exactly who they are is simply this: we would effectively be giving President Assad a list of the groups, the people and potentially the areas that he should be targeting. That is not my approach.

Q16 Dr Lewis: But surely, Prime Minister, lists have been published by people supportive of your position on this which have identified well known groups of various sizes, including the Free Syrian Army, that does have a large number of very small and disparate affiliates to it. The suspicion has to be that if the Government will not name these supposedly moderate groups, it becomes impossible for any sensible assessment to be made of whether they really are moderate or whether they are Islamist and extreme.

Mr Cameron: Our reason for not publishing is the reason I have given. Other people publishing this is different from the Government officially publishing a list. I am being very frank with you. In the debate I said, “If people want to say there aren’t enough opposition ground troops, I totally agree”. They are not all in the right places—I couldn’t agree more. They are not all the sort of people you would bump into at the Liberal Democrat Party conference—correct: I would agree with all those assessments. But the point I would make—which you go back to—is whether there is a third way. Is there a third way between a Daesh-style state and President Assad, the butcher remaining in charge of this country? My answer would be that there has to be a third way—we have to find a third way. It should involve of course people, perhaps Alawites, perhaps even who have taken part in the state run by Assad. We don’t want to dismantle that; but to argue that the Sunni majority in Syria simply are too extreme, too hopeless or too whatever to take part in the future running of their country is a counsel of despair. We have to try to find this third way. To be fair to these opposition groups who pitched up at the meeting in Riyadh, who signed up to the Geneva principles, a large number of them do want to see some form of diverse, democratic regime in Syria, which we should be supporting. So I do not think we have a lot of choice but to back that.

On the numbers, to be clear, that 70,000 does not include the 20,000 Kurdish fighters in Syria. The other point I make to people who say that somehow 70,000 is a chimera or doesn’t properly exist—if it doesn’t exist, who on earth have the 240,000 troops that Assad has been fighting for the last four years?

Q17 Dr Lewis: Prime Minister, I have no doubt at all that there is a large number of fighters in Syria who have been fighting Assad. The question is, are they moderate or not? I will quote to you an answer that was slightly more informative than the answer I got when I asked who the groups were that have been classed as moderate. This was a question answered by the Defence Secretary. He was asked which moderate, non-Islamist groups with credible ground forces, other than Kurds, are fighting Daesh in Syria. He was asked that on 19 October, and he replied on 26 October as follows: “There are a number of moderate opposition forces focused on fighting the Assad regime. Many are also fighting ISIL in areas

of strategic importance, for example north of Aleppo. The vast majority of these opposition groups are Islamist.” Unless there is a mistake in the Secretary of State’s answer, it reveals that what the Government regard as moderate groups are actually, in many cases, Islamist ones. That is why I urge you again, if you want people to be able to make an informed choice between a secular, brutal dictator and an Islamist alternative, we really ought to be told more about the composition of the allegedly moderate forces that we are mounting air strikes to support.

Mr Cameron: I have given you my answer about what we are going to publish and I am not going to change that answer. I repeat, though, that, yes, some of the opposition forces are Islamist. Some of them are relatively hard-line Islamist and some are what we would describe as more secular democrats, but I would make the point that there are groups such as al-Nusra Front or Jund al-Aqsa whom we would not work with. If you arguing that there are not enough, we need to build them up, yes, we do, I agree, but you have to start somewhere.

Q18 Chair: We are running over the same ground.

Mr Cameron: I know, but that’s the point: every day we do not support moderate forces, they are hit by Assad and attrited further.

Q19 Chair: Have you not considered that there might be something between this huge, granular detail, as you put it, that might give assistance to Assad on the one hand and some general information that might give more credibility to that number which you could put into the public domain?

Mr Cameron: I have considered it, but I have given the answer I think is appropriate.

Q20 Chair: Because without it, people are going to wonder whether this is a reliable number.

Mr Cameron: Look, all I can say is that we had an NSC discussion, the Joint Intelligence Committee produced a figure, I questioned and probed the figure and they said they thought 70,000 was the best estimate of non-extremist opposition fighters. The Americans have said that is within their estimates. To be absolutely transparent with you, the Americans said it was towards the top end of their estimates. If you want to say that the JIC mislead me or Parliament—

Q21 Chair: Of course we do not want to say anything in particular; what we want to do is to get to the facts.

Mr Cameron: You are saying that no one is going to believe me unless I give more detail, but I think that is why we have a JIC. It was set up after the Iraq war for precisely this purpose.

Q22 Chair: I did not say no one is going to believe you; I said it would increase your credibility if you come forward with some detail, but you have made it clear you are not going to. We went into Syria to degrade ISIL. Is it fair to say that the Libyan intervention has deprived the region of one of ISIL's most ruthless opponents, in Gaddafi?

Mr Cameron: It is certainly true that Gaddafi was, particularly in his latter days, an opponent of extremist groups such as al-Qaeda, and he worked, famously, with the previous Government towards that end, but I do not think we should in any way look back fondly to the time of Gaddafi.

Q23 Chair: No one is suggesting that either. I am just asking whether we have lost a character there who, for all his manifest shortcomings—and he was an extremely nasty piece of work—was at least on the right side on the main reason you have gone into Syria.

Mr Cameron: Well, towards the end of his time in office he might have been on the right side on that issue, but we are still dealing, in Northern Ireland, with Semtex given to the IRA by Gaddafi, so I do not look back and think that was somehow a golden era in Libyan relations. Look, we have a problem now with a growing ISIL franchise in Libya, just as we have a problem with growing ISIL franchises in many countries around the world. The truth is that we are dealing with an extremist, violent ideology that is taking hold in all states that are fractured, broken or insufficient in any way. You see that with Boko Haram in Nigeria, with al-Shabab in Somalia and in Libya. This points towards making sure, as Ban Ki-moon put it, that a missile can kill a terrorist but good governance is what kills terrorism. We need to work, in all these circumstances, in the same way, which is to build strong and inclusive Governments that can deliver for their people.

Q24 Chair: Yes. You said on that there are lessons to be learned from these earlier interventions. In fact, you said that we have learned that we have to be careful about not dismantling states and having plans for reconstruction. That also went disastrously wrong in Libya too, didn't it? We intervened, got rid of Gaddafi and now they are in a terrible mess.

Mr Cameron: Well, the Libyan people were given an opportunity. Gaddafi was bearing down on people in Benghazi and threatening to shoot his own people like rats. An international coalition came together to protect those people and to help the Libyan people who then got rid of Gaddafi. They had an opportunity to build what they all said they wanted, which was—

Q25 Chair: You are not saying it is their fault, are you?

Mr Cameron: No. What I am saying is that that opportunity was not taken. It is a matter of huge regret. A lot of assistance was offered. I took the Libyan Prime Minister to the G8 in Northern Ireland but, for reasons that we can go into—of militias and all the rest of it—it was not possible to deliver that sort of Government. There is a new opportunity now, with the coming together of a Libyan national Government, to try to deliver that.

The critics of these things—The choice we made in Libya, partly at the request of Libyans themselves with the demise of Gaddafi, was not to go in heavy-handed with boots on the ground and troops and try to help them construct their Government. They said they did not want that—that it would be counter-productive. They believed they would be able to put together representative institutions. It was not possible, in spite of the help that was proffered.

If you are saying that these things are complicated and difficult to get right, yes, they are.

Q26 Chair: No, I am not saying that. I am just saying that the humanitarian balance sheet of this intervention does not look good, Prime Minister. The failure to engage in nation building has created a breeding ground for ISIL, hasn't it?

Mr Cameron: We were involved in nation building. We were there to help the Libyan people. We tried to do it in a way that was more remote than what had happened in Iraq, but on this occasion clearly it did not work.

Q27 Ms Harman: Compared with the very difficult and intractable issues that my colleagues have raised, I am going to ask you something that is within your power and you can deal with—and just say yes to both of these propositions. Because, unlike these other issues, they are about what you do and what your Government does.

I would like to ask you about the issue of targeted killing by drones, which you told the House about in relation to a targeted killing by drone in Syria, which had been carried out on 21 August. You came to the House to tell us about it on 7 September. I have two questions about that. The first is: will you agree to the suggestion that you set down in writing and publish the policy about targeted killing by drones? Because we have what you said in the House of Commons; we have had statements from the Defence Secretary; we have had a number of different statements. You said when you came to the House of Commons in September that it was a new departure. We need to be clear what the legal basis is, what the operational framework is and what the policy is. The Americans have published their policy on this.

Obviously the situation is different in Syria now, because we voted for the use of force in Syria. But as you said at the time, this could happen—the principle of the same issues could be raised in relation to somebody targeted to be killed in Yemen, Libya or some other place where somebody is threatening us and where we cannot apprehend them.

The first thing is, this is a serious issue—you've acknowledged that. It does not seem too much to ask, instead of us trying to piece it together ourselves, by putting together what you said and the Secretary of State said and, for example, our own inquiries—the Select Committee went to RAF Waddington, and they were very helpful about giving us information about the operational framework.

But actually that is not good enough, I don't think. I would like to put to you that you could easily resolve this by having a policy, which would deal, for example, among other things, with the following. We have worked out that there are people who are targeted to be

killed, on the one hand, and that there are people you do not want to kill, on the other hand. But there seems to be a grey area of people who are not the target but, if they are killed, that's all right, like the two other people who were killed at the time on 21 August. I think we should know who is in this grey area. For example, we have seen Daesh using young children. If there was a young child there who had been involved in Daesh videos, would they be an innocent civilian or would it be all right for them to be collaterally killed during this. What if there was some—sorry—*[Interruption.]* Will you publish—

Mr Cameron: I get that. This is fascinating and very interesting. I don't have an absolutely straightforward answer, because, you know, my view is—

Chair: It has to be shorter.

Mr Cameron: I promise that I will do my best. My argument would be—I set out very clearly in the House of Commons the approach that we would take. I explained the legal basis for the approach that we would take. We don't publish legal advice for well known reasons that you will be familiar with. I feel that there is a clear policy there. You say, "Why not set it out in the same way that the Americans do?", but the Americans have a far larger and more extensive programme that has ranged across Afghanistan and elsewhere, so I don't think that the two situations are comparable. What I said was that I always reserve the right as Prime Minister to take action to protect our country without asking the House of Commons in advance, but reporting back afterwards, which is exactly what I did, and then I set out the reasons and the legal advice.

As the question you were asking went on, I was slightly thinking, "It would be quite difficult to write all these things down in a policy statement that answered every question that you were putting in your question, and it might get us into more difficulty." The principle is simple: that we would take this action only in the most extreme circumstances where no other options are available and when we're acting legally. I also set out very clearly the processes that we follow. So I am not inclined to try and write some policy statement along the lines that you suggest. I think that would be quite difficult to do. I think what I have said in the House of Commons is sufficient, but I am happy to go away and think about it. I could see some disadvantages in what you're saying, because we could potentially write something out that doesn't envisage all the circumstances that you're talking about and then potentially either misleads the British public in some way, because we haven't thought of a circumstance that could occur, or gives vital intelligence to the people who might seek to do us harm. They would know how to avoid becoming at risk themselves, if that makes sense.

Q28 Ms Harman: I do not think there is any suggestion that this should be legislated, nor that it should be done in such a way that it gives intelligence information away. I hear what you say, that you're going to think about it, but I would say that a statement to the House on an issue as important as this is not good enough in terms of the information that needs to be there.

My second question that I would like to ask you, which the Chair of this Committee has also written to you about, is about independent accountability for this action once it has actually been taken. If the police kill somebody in the line of their activity, it is automatically reviewed by the IPCC. It is a serious issue—the taking of a life—and someone independently

looks at it retrospectively and says, “Was this justified?” Now, don’t you think that there should be some independent oversight after a targeted killing to ask, “Was there a sufficiency of evidence that this person was a dangerous person? Was it the right person in this case? Was there sufficient avoidance of collateral damage?” so that instead of it just being done and you coming to the House and saying, “We’ve done it,” there was actually some independent oversight?

Obviously, if you’re looking at the sufficiency of evidence, it would need to be people—sorry, it’s another long question. It would have to be somebody who is security cleared, but we have the Intelligence and Security Committee. Why can’t you let them do that? Then, there is some accountability and you know that there is a proper accountability framework for this.

Mr Cameron: I don’t mean to be difficult, but the ISC are looking at the intelligence around the particular British-ordered strike that I mentioned, and that is all to the good. Since I have become Prime Minister, they are a lot stronger. They are a Committee of the House; they are more powerful and more independent than they have been before. I shouldn’t determine what their investigations are. If they want to make those sorts of investigations, they should.

The only thing that I would say is that what they cannot do is look at current operations, because sometimes these things are part of a current operation—a set of potential operations—and I want to be very careful not to hamper the work that is necessary to keep the country safe. On this occasion, though, they are looking at it, and I think that’s right, and I am sure that they will be able to on future occasions. I am sure that we can find a way through this, but I just want to make the reservation that sometimes it could be a current operation that could include other people, so there would be a danger of an investigation going on while you are still effectively trying to take action to keep the country safe.

Q29 Ms Harman: I think they are not looking at it yet. They asked in November to look at it and they are still not looking at it. The thing about current operations is we could get into a sort of Chilcot scenario there. These current operations might go on for many, many years. The point is to have a quick look by people who are security cleared who can give independent oversight. Requests for you to publish the policy where somebody’s life has been taken and to have independent oversight afterwards seem like easy things for you to be able to say yes to. Bearing in mind the progress that you might find it difficult to make with a lot of these other questions, I think it would make sense to agree to the second one, on oversight. The ISC are not looking at it yet. It might be your impression that they are, but they are not being allowed to yet. They want to but they are not being allowed to.

Mr Cameron: They are. Let’s be fair. The ISC are looking at the intelligence. We have agreed that. I have written to Dominic Grieve to say just that.

I would make one additional point, which is that these decisions are in no way made lightly. It is one of the most difficult decisions that any Prime Minister has to make. You have important legal advice, and that legal advice and the legality of the actions that we take have to be confirmed the whole way through the process. It is not just a bit of legal advice that is given and then that’s that. It would be unthinkable to previous generations, the extent

of legal oversight of these sorts of actions, but that is what takes place, and rightly so, because these are very important decisions.

Q30 Chair: I wrote to you in November and got a reply a day or so ago. It is amazing the effect these hearings can have on replies to correspondence.

Mr Cameron: I didn't want to spoil anyone's Christmas.

Chair: So kind of you. You could have got it in before Christmas, since I wrote to you in November. What I divine from the answer is that you are not actually giving the ISC what they need to do their job properly. I want to go through what I think that might consist of. This was a military operation, wasn't it, Prime Minister, this drone attack?

Mr Cameron: It was an operation in defence of the United Kingdom to protect us against attack using a military asset. If you want to call that military—you can put whatever label on it you like.

Q31 Chair: But you have excluded the circumstances surrounding the use of that military asset, the military operation, from scrutiny by the ISC, haven't you?

Mr Cameron: No, I haven't. I have said that they can look at the intelligence around it, but we are still—

Chair: Okay, in your letter to me—

Mr Cameron: Hold on a second—hang on. We are currently engaged in an operation to defeat a terrorist organisation that intends to blow up, kill and maim our citizens. That is what is going on. That is what those people in Waddington are doing. That is what the Government are doing. We have to focus on that and think about how we keep this country safe.

Q32 Chair: We are back to the current operations point.

Mr Cameron: It is a current operation. If you don't think there is a cell of people sitting in Raqqa who are planning to try to do damage to this country, then you don't know what you are talking about.

Q33 Chair: Prime Minister, I am asking you whether you have excluded the military aspects of this operation from the ISC's inquiry. You have just said that you have not, but if you look at the memorandum of understanding that you asked me to refer to in the letter you sent me a day or so ago, you will see clearly—although I have to admit that the font size makes it pretty difficult to read—in footnote 9 it says: "General military operations conducted by the MOD are not part of the ISC's oversight responsibilities." So you are clearly telling me that that is not part of their work. How can they do their job and examine

that specific strike if they are not able to look at the military aspects of this intelligence operation?

Mr Cameron: Because their job is to look at the question, which is: was this a justified decision? That is the question you want asked. Whether it is a justified decision depends on the intelligence that we had about this individual and what their intentions were. That information will be given to the ISC and they will be able to come to their own conclusions.

Q34 Chair: Okay. It also depends on whether the use of the force that was deployed was necessary and proportionate. In order to do that they need to look at the specifics of the military operation, don't they?

Mr Cameron: No, they should look at the intelligence around the operation.

Q35 Chair: How can they divine whether it is—

Mr Cameron: You can ask me. I am sitting here, why don't you ask me whether it is proportionate to use a—? I am responsible for this; it was my decision. You can ask me whether I think it was proportionate.

Q36 Chair: Prime Minister, we have already asked you on the Floor of the House and you have said that if we want reassurance that what you are saying is a correct judgment, we should not rely on what you have said in the House—

Mr Cameron: That is not what I said at all—I certainly did not say that. I said you should rely on what I said in the House. I appeared in front of the House of Commons and said, “We have taken this very important and significant decision. I am here to explain it,” and I gave the detail that I thought was possible, under advice, in order not to give away our capabilities. I am very happy to give further answers to questions about whether it was necessary and proportionate. My answer will be “Yes, it was,” because of course if it were not proportionate, it would not have been given the legal sanction that it was. That is the key test in terms of the legality.

Q37 Chair: I think we have agreed that you have asked the ISC to look at this, because we need to know whether we should rely on the judgment that you made. That is what you are giving a public reassurance about, isn't it, Prime Minister?

Mr Cameron: I think the reason for the ISC to do the work is, of course, that I cannot and should not reveal the intelligence that we have about these individual people. That would go against common sense, good practice and everything else we can think of. Therefore, because I cannot do that, we have an ISC—the Intelligence and Security Committee—that looks at the intelligence. These people are trusted Members of Parliament who are not going to reveal that information publicly. They can look at that intelligence and come to the decision on whether the Government did or did not make the right decision based on that

intelligence. That is their job. That is why we have them, and they have become a lot stronger since I have become Prime Minister.

Q38 Chair: But it must cross your mind, Prime Minister, that even a sympathetic observer will conclude that if they cannot look at the specific military aspects of this operation in order to judge the proportionality—

Mr Cameron: But that's not their job.

Chair: Hang on a minute, Prime Minister—in order to judge the proportionality of the use of force in this case, that sympathetic member of the public will conclude that the ISC's work is incomplete, and somebody who is less sympathetic will conclude that their work could be rendered meaningless by their inability to look at the military operation.

Mr Cameron: I do not agree with that for a moment. The military operation has been described on the Floor of the House of Commons. You can ask me questions about it now, and you can come to your own conclusion about whether it was necessary or proportionate. I argue that it was.

Q39 Chair: We have the ISC—

Mr Cameron: The ISC is the Intelligence and Security Committee. They look at intelligence.

Chair —to look at exactly these questions.

Mr Cameron: No, it isn't. I think you're wrong. They are not the intelligence and defence Committee; they are not responsible for looking at military assets and their use. They are responsible for looking at intelligence, and that is what they are going to do.

Q40 Chair: There are provisions to enable you to authorise them to look at this sort of information, but you have not yet acted on it under the legislation. That is what I am asking you to do by re-examining that MOU, in order to give the public the reassurance that you and I both agree they need.

Mr Cameron: No, I don't agree. I think the public, by and large, understand the threat that we face. I think the public understand that this is an ongoing operation and that it is a threat we still face. I think, by and large, that they probably support the action that we took, because they can see that it is necessary and proportionate when you are dealing with people like Hussain, Khan, Emwazi or whoever else. Of course they want to know that the Government does not do these things without thinking hard. That is why we have an Attorney General, that is why we listen to legal advice, and that is why the intelligence is examined by the Intelligence and Security Committee, and I think that is the right way to go about it.

Q41 Chair: Another aspect of the work of the ISC could also be imperilled by the fact that under the legislation, the somewhat more powerful ISC—many would argue, as I certainly would, that it is not yet powerful enough—has to rely on what is authorised for release to it by Secretaries of State. All the information they get is authorised by Secretaries of State, who can withhold information. Will you now agree that all information relevant to this held by your Secretaries of State will be released, and that therefore the power to withhold information under schedule 1, paragraph 4, of the Justice and Security Act will not be exercised in this case?

Mr Cameron: I am happy to look at the detailed question you ask, but I would not be inclined to say that that is necessarily an easy thing to say yes to. The protection—

Q42 Chair: None of these questions is easy.

Mr Cameron: No, but that is why I am trying to be frank with you. I will look in detail at the question you asked, but my instinctive answer, so you know how I approach this, would be no.

Q43 Chair: We have this Committee, full of intelligence-cleared people, in order to be able to do just this kind of highly sensitive work—

Mr Cameron: Hold on. Let me explain why my instinctive answer—

Chair: —and we can rely on their assurances—

Mr Cameron: That is all well and good, but you asked me a question—

Chair: —and that is why you instructed them to do this work in the beginning, isn't it?

Mr Cameron: Yes, of course. Let me explain why my instinct would be to be worried about this. You are absolutely right: that is what the Intelligence and Security Committee is there for, to look at the intelligence. But you have to be incredibly careful with highly sensitive information—information that, if revealed, could result in somebody's death. The source that gave you that information could be at risk—

Q44 Chair: You don't trust the ISC?

Mr Cameron: You asked me a question. Let me answer it. You are asking me whether the Government should have no holdback on the intelligence that it gives to the ISC. Instinctively, I would be very worried about that, because there might be a piece of intelligence so sensitive that its release in any way could endanger the source of that intelligence. In that case, the Government should keep that intelligence as tightly held as possible. There may be occasions where you cannot share that with the Committee of MPs—

Q45 Chair: That may be true, but—

Mr Cameron: That is my instinctive answer. I will give you an answer before Christmas this year—

Chair: —but barring the discovery of a case of that type, will you release the rest of the information?

Mr Cameron: I am not going to give you that blanket guarantee.

Q46 Chair: Not that either? No.

Mr Cameron: No. I have given you the reason for being sceptical. Frankly, I think it is part of my job to be sceptical. It is the easiest thing in the world to come along to a Committee such as this and say, “Yes, you can have this information, we can have that document, we can set out this policy,” and all the rest of it, and suddenly you find that actually as Prime Minister you cannot take action to keep your country safe. I would rather give you a difficult answer now and have a safer country, than give you an easier answer and find out that actually we had layered ourselves in bureaucracy and processes and procedures so we couldn’t take the necessary action to protect our own citizens.

Chair: All right, Prime Minister. You have agreed to look at it again, and that is good enough for me.

Q47 Keith Vaz: I am going to say something nice, because home affairs is a nice area. I congratulate you on reaching your target of 1,000 Syrian refugees by Christmas. How did the target jump so rapidly between 26 November, when it was 252, to 1,000 by Christmas?

Mr Cameron: I would love to say that it was because of the intervention of an activist Prime Minister, who just waved a wand and it all happened. The truth is that these things take time to ramp up. The Minister I appointed, the hon. Member for Watford, has done a very good job. I pay tribute to the local authorities right around the country who came forward with offers of help, and to the UNHCR which did a huge amount of work in processing these people. There was quite a lot of drive to try to demonstrate that when we said 2,000, including 1,000 before Christmas, we really meant it. I am delighted that we met that target, but full credit to the local authorities who have taken these people on.

Q48 Keith Vaz: The offers of people such as the Archbishop of Canterbury, Yvette Cooper and others to house refugees have been turned down because they have not been, in a sense, cleared. These offers remain on the table, not just from those high-profile individuals but from thousands of British citizens. Will you look again at these offers that have been made by those who wish to be part of the solution to this problem?

Mr Cameron: Yes, I am happy to do that. I think that, to get this off to a good start, asking local authorities which could provide either public or private rented housing and put in

place all the procedures and everything that was necessary was the right way to do it. Can we now try to open it up a bit more? I am very happy to do that. I think that if people make offers, and the Churches have made offers, we should try to take them on. I am happy to look at that.

Q49 Keith Vaz: Bearing in mind what has happened in Cologne recently, do you think that Angela Merkel went too far in making the offer that she did to those who were coming into Europe?

Mr Cameron: Continental European powers face a very difficult situation because people are coming into Europe in large numbers. We can have a discussion about doing more at the border, and we should. We can have a discussion about other European countries being as generous as Britain has been in supporting refugee camps and helping people to stay in the region. Germany has been a very popular destination. I will leave the German politicians to the German people. *[Interruption.]*

Chair: Prime Minister, we will suspend for 15 minutes. We are very much hoping to see you again.

Mr Cameron: I will come back. I look forward to it.

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

On resuming—

Q50 Chair: If you are ready, Prime Minister.

Mr Cameron: Are we quorate?

Chair: Whether we are quorate or not, we are going to begin.

Q51 Keith Vaz: One of the effects of people coming into this country as migrants, one of the concerns, has been the number of terrorists who may have been masquerading as refugees. One of the Paris attackers, of course, crossed the Greek border with a fake Syrian passport. Recently, 10,000 fake Syrian passports, manufactured in Bulgaria, have been seized. What are we doing to help other countries in the EU to deal with this very important subject?

Mr Cameron: We are doing everything we can to make sure that the border information is robust. It is very important. We have our own borders; we can stop anyone coming in to our country and question them. I have given the figures before. We have turned away 93,000 foreign nationals since I became Prime Minister and 6,000 EU nationals, but obviously it helps if there are good and robust border controls in other European countries, particularly at Europe's external border. My sense is that they are improving. The Schengen

information system that we are a member of gives us vital information. When we can match up with our data, we can spot when people who might be a risk are travelling.

However, I think there is enormous impetus within the European Union to do more on this. The fact that in the last month we have had this breakthrough on passenger name records speaks volumes. There is this security argument about how the EU can work together to try to keep the various countries safe. There is a lot more to be done.

Q52 Keith Vaz: I know you cannot comment on individual cases, but there are concerns that one of the Paris attackers—the leader, in fact—came into the country, went to Birmingham through Dover and returned to Paris. What are we doing to ensure that when people enter the country—I know we have 100% exit checks and checks on entry, but in this kind of case it just takes one person doing this to cause a lot of concern.

Mr Cameron: We are trying to do everything we can to marry up the data we have about people who are a risk with our border data, to work with European partners to make sure they are doing the same thing and to share that information. That is one reason why we never joined Schengen and never took down our borders. We think it is very important that we do that work ourselves and do not rely on others, but I want us, frankly, to have the best of both worlds, where we use our own border information, our own systems, but we get better approaches in right across Europe as well, so we have that information as well.

Will you always stop people who want to do harm? It is very difficult to give that guarantee, because, of course, some of the people we have been talking about are foreign nationals and some of them are European nationals. I have been to a number of European Councils about this and I think there is a real impetus for Europe to improve its systems and practices.

The passenger name records is worth spending a second on. People think that that is just exchanging passenger information, but for years it was impossible to get this agreement inside Europe. It is not just information about passenger names, it is the data about where someone bought their ticket, what credit card they used, and that information can be vital in finding out whether someone is a risk. Your Committee has done good work on this. I think this is an area of progress, an area where we need to do more, an area where the Home Secretary is very much leading the charge and I think we can end up with the best of both worlds, with Europe doing more and us doing more on our own borders and benefiting from that.

Q53 Keith Vaz: I agree with all that; it is going to be very helpful. In the case of Siddhartha Dar, he had been on television supporting Daesh, he had mentored one of Lee Rigby's killers, Michael Adebolajo, and was a member of al-Muhajiroun. He was then arrested on terrorism charges, taken to a police station and bailed before he gave up his passport. By the time the Metropolitan Police wrote to him on 7 November it was 36 days since he was asked to give up his passport on 3 October. These are letters in the public domain.

I know you cannot talk about the individual case, but the principle here is the need to seize passports and to give the police powers to take passports when they are giving police bail. I appreciate that you have had other things to do, but Mark Rowley, the head of counter-terrorism has just given evidence to the Home Affairs Committee in which he refers to the bail powers we have at the moment as “toothless”, he says they need to be tougher and that this must include making immediate hand-over of passports a condition of bail. It must also include making breach of bail a criminal offence and it should be standard practice to notify other agencies immediately. Would you support the change in the law that would allow the police to seize those passports when giving bail?

Mr Cameron: I am very happy to look carefully at that. I knew that Mark Rowley was likely to make remarks like that at your Committee because, frankly, there is more we need to do here. I think that in this individual case the passport was not on him when he was arrested, and he was already at the limit of how long he could be detained under the PACE powers, so the police could not legally hold him while his passport was sought. His home address was searched, and had the passport been found it could have been seized. But it was not found.

All of that is an explanation of this individual case, but I think that the point you are making, about determining nationality—seizing passports—being done more quickly is a very good idea, so I will happily look at those powers. I have just come from a meeting of the National Security Council, where we are looking at deporting foreign national offenders and also illegal overstayers, and again the question comes up about why we cannot determine nationality, and sometimes get hold of papers, faster. So in all those areas we need to do that. I also think that there is another thing, which is making sure that information about those on bail is automatically put on to the warnings index and checklists and all the rest of it. I think that there is more that the police can do there.

Q54 Keith Vaz: Finally, on radicalisation, I know that you feel that more should be done to take down Jihadist sites from the internet. Do you support the work of groups such as Anonymous and the Ghost Security Group, which have taken down 2,255 websites and 19,000 Twitter pages that encourage young people to go and fight in Syria? Do you think that we should encourage the taking down of more of that material?

Mr Cameron: I certainly encourage the taking down of sites. I do not know enough about Anonymous to comment on whether it is doing the right thing or the wrong thing, but what I can say is that we, as the Government, do take a lot of action to take down sites. We have taken down thousands of pages. We are also working a lot with the internet companies, and have made major breakthroughs on child pornography and child images, and searching for indecent terms. If you remember, to start with they said, “No, we can’t deal with this, it’s free speech”, and then they realised that they could and they should. Now we need to have the same conversation with them. We are already starting on extremism, to make sure that these sorts of things are removed. So we are going to keep going on that.

Chair: We can ignore the bell when it rings for the suspension of the sitting. It will not be a vote.

Q55 Mr Betts: Prime Minister, I am sure we can all agree that when refugees come from Syria, having been through trauma, and come into our communities, we want them to be well received. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, when he came to our Select Committee back in September, said that he was trying to find a way of ensuring that any net costs to local councils of taking refugees into their communities would be supported by the Government, and the Chancellor in his autumn statement said that extra money was being found for the resettlement of refugees, including £130 million for local councils, to help with their additional costs.

Is it now the Government's clear position that when refugees come into our local communities councils should be fully recompensed for any additional costs of housing refugees and for all the other associated costs they may incur?

Mr Cameron: Our policy isn't quite that. What it is is to say that the full first-year costs are met by the DFID budget, as is allowed for under the rules, and from then there is a tariff basis over four years, tapering from £5,000 per person in year two to £1,000 in year five.

I think the point to make is that that is as generous a system as you will find anywhere in the world. We have done very well getting 1,000 people in before Christmas. That stands in very stark contrast to what has been managed under the entire EU relocation and resettlement scheme, as I said in the House the other day.

But I would encourage the councils that are welcoming these people to encourage them to start to build a life for themselves here. They have the right to work. They have the status that enables them to work, so the faster they can become fully integrated into the community and seek a life and a job and all the rest of it the better.

Q56 Mr Betts: Perhaps we could all agree with that as well, but isn't the reality that if people are going to be welcomed into communities—and they often go to live in quite deprived communities—the long-term residents of those communities don't want to see their public services cut? That can lead to friction, which we don't want to see. While some money has been identified for local councils, I am not aware yet that there has been any money identified for health services in those communities specifically, or for schools. Many of these refugees are going to come with health problems, very obviously, given the circumstances they have been through. Children are going to be coming into the education system who do not speak English or who have not been in education for quite a long time. These are real additional costs. Are Government going to meet them?

Mr Cameron: As I said, what we are going to do is fully fund year one, and then have this tariff for future years. I think the idea that central Government can say to local authorities, "We're going to reimburse you for any and every cost that might arise," would not be the right approach. If you like, we are sharing the burden. Local authorities came forward and said, "We want to help." Government is playing its part, and local authorities will play their part. I think the idea that you would simply say, "We're going to fund every single element of what this family does," would be very hard to arrange. I think local people might feel it is actually rather unfair. I think this sort of tariff system is a fair approach.

Q57 Mr Betts: I think local people might also feel it is unfair if they are the ones who end up with longer waits at their doctors' practices and their children are displaced from local schools because additional places have not been funded. I come back to the point that you mention local authorities, but many of these costs will fall on the health service, which is not local government. Many of them will fall on the school system, most of which is outside the control of local government. There will be a need for English classes, so that people who come over here not speaking English can get into the jobs you mentioned. How are those costs going to be funded? You mentioned the taper for councils, but you have not mentioned any money for any of the other public bodies involved.

Mr Cameron: We have a well-funded health service with a rising budget. We have well-funded schools with protection per pupil that reflects what happens if pupil numbers go up. I think we have a system and a country that are capable of welcoming 20,000; that is one of the reasons why I thought 20,000 was a reasonable number over this Parliament. I think we are more than capable of delivering that sort of help. If you think about how many people come to Britain as refugees in a normal year, we manage—

Q58 Mr Betts: Perhaps this is a little bit about how we don't fund the areas which receive those refugees. When we look at where the Syrian refugees go, can we have some reflection on the general dispersal of refugees? I was just looking at the figures. Currently, in terms of asylum seekers who are supported, the latest figures available show that there are three in the local authority covered by the Home Secretary's constituency and none in the local authority covered by your constituency, while my own local authority has 718. Shouldn't we give a little bit of thought to spreading the refugees around in such a way that they are properly supported, so that the burden does not fall on just a handful of local authorities?

Mr Cameron: In the case of the Syrian refugees, we are keen to encourage local authorities to come forward, and my understanding is that they did. We have a pretty good pattern of local authorities coming forward. There is always the question of where housing and capacity are most available. There is a danger sometimes of alienation or isolation, particularly in some very rural communities. We inherited the system from the Government that you were part of, and we have been operating it, but as I said, with the Syrian refugees, we are keen for councils to come forward.

Q59 Mr Betts: But no look at how refugees are funded, in terms of these demands on health and schools?

Mr Cameron: No. As I said, I think we have set out one of the most generous systems anywhere. I think it sounds reasonable and fair. This is burden sharing, which is what it should be, and I am confident it will work well.

Mr Betts: Prime Minister, I think there is still an issue that in those communities that receive refugees in the end, if additional money is not put into health services and schools specifically to support refugees, who often have very complex and real needs, then other

people in those communities will find their services worsening. I do not think that is the best way to encourage the welcoming of those refugees and real community cohesion. I think it could actually militate against it in a way that none of us would want to see.

Q60 Chair: Is there anything you want to say in response to that, Prime Minister?

Mr Cameron: No.

Q61 Huw Irranca-Davies: Prime Minister, I was in Paris with the Environmental Audit Committee as part of GLOBE International, a group of the legislators who will put into practice the outcomes of the Paris COP21 negotiations and agreements. I have to pass on my congratulations not only to those who were at that conference but to those who did so much work in the years running up to it to achieve what can be broadly welcomed. You will know, as I do, that it is actually as nothing unless it is now implemented and ratcheted up year on year, domestically and internationally. What do you feel about the outcome of COP21?

Mr Cameron: I thought it was pretty good, given that, in the weeks running up to it, it was looking like 2° would slip beyond our grasp, it was looking like there would be no review mechanism, and it was looking like any reference to progressive increases in ambition would be struck out. It was also looking like the climate finance numbers wouldn't come together. There were quite a lot of things in the run-up that I thought really didn't look that good. I was always confident that there would be a deal, because China and America decided to come on board this time, so there was always going to be a positive outcome. That is better than Kyoto, because they weren't there. I was pleasantly surprised that, because of the hard work of people such as the Climate Change Secretary, who was there pretty much throughout and became the key negotiator, we got that review mechanism and agreed that 2° is to be kept in touch with and that further ambition is necessary. I think it was a good, comprehensive deal that includes all the countries, but, as you say, now it is about implementation.

Q62 Huw Irranca-Davies: Which I will come to in a moment. What do you draw from the experience of actually working out there with and through the European Union, particularly with the work that was done around the High Ambition Coalition? That was a cracking example of not only UK leadership but EU leadership. Do you agree?

Mr Cameron: I do agree with that. I think the UK played a key role in getting the EU to a high ambition, and the EU was able to say to the rest of the world, "Look, we've really got a big ambition, in terms of the greenhouse gas reduction targets we are prepared to sign up to." Also, because Europe has other mechanisms, in terms of carbon pricing, targets on renewable energy and all the rest of it, I think no one can point to the European nations and say, "You're not doing enough." Within that, if you look at what Britain did on climate finance, we were very much leaders of the pack. My impression in the run-up to Paris, particularly with the meeting I went to at the UN in September and then the Commonwealth conference, was that climate finance is essential because you weren't going to get the small island states and developing nations to sign up to an ambitious deal unless they felt that the

wealthier countries were going to support them in mitigating and addressing the problems of climate change.

Q63 Huw Irranca-Davies: There will be questions, I am sure, about how we deal with international climate finance, where that links into the ODA and where else it will come from, but can I ask you this question? There was really good British leadership over a prolonged period, really good European leadership and broadly speaking a good outcome. Does that make you reflect at all on an in-out referendum?

Mr Cameron: I think that Britain's membership of the European Union has benefits when we work together for common goals that we share.

Q64 Huw Irranca-Davies: Including within climate change and sustainable development?

Mr Cameron: On this area, where we have been in the lead, yes, Britain takes a very strong view about sustainable development. We are the only G7 country that has met its 0.7% target. We take a very strong view on climate change. We have legislation, put in place by the previous Government but supported by me in opposition, on climate change. Since then, we have had this absolute revolution, which the last Government backed and financed, in renewable energy, so we are able to lead by example in these forums, including in the European Union. Sometimes the European Union can be—

Q65 Huw Irranca-Davies: Can I turn it back a little bit? With that note of optimism at that high level, what you have faced over the past year and more—but particularly over the past year—is concerted criticism across a range of sectors, not just renewable energy, about short-termism and uncertainty. You had criticism straight off from the then leader of the CBI, John Cridland. You have had criticism from Al Gore who said, on a range of issues, at a Green Alliance conference, “I'm puzzled, I'm puzzled, I'm puzzled”, although he commended the outcome at Paris. All those things suggest that there is a real disconnect between the high-level engagement and what is going on in the UK. What is your response to that?

Mr Cameron: I completely disagree. I couldn't disagree more fundamentally.

Q66 Huw Irranca-Davies: With the CBI director?

Mr Cameron: With all of those people who say that somehow—

Q67 Huw Irranca-Davies: Hundreds of billions of pounds lost—

Mr Cameron: I totally disagree with anyone who says that on the one hand Britain helped to pioneer this climate change agreement, and on the other hand that it is somehow

backsliding on its green commitments. That is total and utter nonsense, and I will go through it if you like.

Huw Irranca-Davies: No, no, just for a moment—

Mr Cameron: Well, it's quite important, because I want to explain the profundity of my disagreement.

Q68 Huw Irranca-Davies: You disagree with the CBI director and you disagree with Al Gore, even though he commended the outcome at Paris. Do you disagree with the statistical analysis of Ernst & Young, which shows that the UK, on just one issue—I could pick others—is tumbling down the rankings of the countries that are attractive for inward investment in renewables?

Mr Cameron: Tell me which issue.

Huw Irranca-Davies: Inward investment in renewables.

Mr Cameron: Shall we take one example? Solar?

Huw Irranca-Davies: Ernst & Young.

Mr Cameron: Why don't we do solar? Let's take one example. Is Britain doing its bit?

Huw Irranca-Davies: Well—

Mr Cameron: You've talked a lot. Let me have a go. Let us take one example of whether Britain is backsliding on—

Chair: The question is about Ernst & Young, Prime Minister.

Mr Cameron: You said they picked up one sector. Which sector did they pick up?

Huw Irranca-Davies: Ernst & Young. International investment in renewables. The UK has tumbled down the rankings of where to invest. How do you respond to that?

Mr Cameron: I will tell you how I respond to it. First, the international Green Group, which looks at countries and their commitment to climate change, says that Britain is the second best in the world after Denmark. That is the first thing. The plucky Danes have beaten us to it, but we are the second best country in the world. If you actually want to look at what is happening in terms of the deployment of wind, biomass and solar, I gave the figures in the House of Commons the other day: 98% of the solar panels installed in Britain have been installed since I became Prime Minister. If you want to know what is going to happen to the cost of solar, in this Parliament our investment is going to be double what it was in the last Parliament. Whether you look at solar, offshore wind—incidentally, we have the biggest offshore wind market anywhere in the world—or the Green Investment Bank, which is the first in the world; whether you look at the fact that we are reinvesting in our nuclear programme, or at the fact that we are the first developed country to say that we are going to

phase out coal-fired power stations, on any reasonable assessment you would say that Britain is more than fulfilling its green commitments. That is why, in the last year, UK greenhouse gases fell by 15%. This is the biggest reduction ever in a single Parliament. The current estimate of an 8% reduction for the previous year is one of the biggest on record for a single year, so we are over-delivering against our first three carbon budgets.

Q69 Huw Irranca-Davies: Prime Minister, you've come well prepared to defend your record. All of those people are wrong, and I can see that. Can I just ask you something on a related issue? Last week, the newly appointed chair of the Natural Capital Committee, Dieter Helm—well done on reappointing him, by the way—wrote “Our current approach to flooding was not only inadequate but has no likelihood of ever being adequate.” Do you agree with that?

Mr Cameron: On flooding, there is no doubt that we need to do more. We have seen what are called one-in-100-year events or one-in-200-year events, and they happened in 2007, 2013 and 2015. The country wants us to do more, and we will do more. I gave the figures for investment in terms of capital.

Q70 Huw Irranca-Davies: Yes, but they are not adequate. Your own recently appointed adviser on the Natural Capital Committee said that what is on the table is not only inadequate but will never be adequate. His point was that we cannot do more of the same.

Mr Cameron: We need to do more of everything. We need to build more flood defences. We need to get better at river management. We need to look at the way whole drainage and area systems work. We had a Cabinet meeting this morning where we discussed this extensively, and I think you've got a team of Ministers who are absolutely on that. If you look at the response to the floods this time, the military came in more quickly, the money was disbursed more rapidly, and the flood prevention that we have put in place protected something like 20,000 homes; but if you are asking whether we can do more and whether we need to do more, yes, we absolutely do. You have seen, if you like, quite an attitudinal change in the Environment Agency, which in years gone past was trying to balance the effect on nature on the one hand and protecting property on the other hand. We said to them, “The time for that is over. This is about protecting human lives. This is about protecting our homes.” I want to see that continued shift, and you saw it very directly in Somerset. That is a man-made environment, and it was ridiculous that those rivers weren't being dredged—I threatened to go and drive the dredger myself. Those rivers have now been dredged. Do we need an attitudinal change in the way we approach flooding? Yes, we absolutely do.

Q71 Huw Irranca-Davies: Do we need, on all of these issues, a more fundamental change? Let me ask you a direct question. As a Prime Minister who is overtly committed to dealing with climate change and doing the right environmental things, do you feel that your hands are tied by short-termism and by financial decisions in the Treasury? Have we got a Prime Minister whose hands are tied behind his back by the Treasury?

Mr Cameron: I don't think that at all. Look, we came into government having to make difficult decisions. Obviously, a lot of Departments that were established by the previous Labour Government were sort of unprotected and were due for very major spending reductions in the so-called Darling plan. The Darling plan was for a 50% cut in capital spending, but when it came to the DEFRA budget we decided no, that's not right. Flood defence spending needs to be protected. In fact, over the subsequent years we have increased that flood defence spending.

In answer to the question about whether we need to look at whether more needs to be done, of course we do, because these are very serious events that are terrible for the people who are affected. I have seen that for myself in my own constituency. It is not just about flood defences; it is about all the other things as well, but I certainly don't rule out taking more action. That is what our reviews are going to be all about.

Q72 Mr MacNeil: Before continuing with climate, I want to take you back to Syria, if I may, Prime Minister. It is worth noting that 40% of the refugees coming to the UK are in Scotland. It is worth noting that the Isle of Bute has been especially welcoming to refugees, particularly the editor of *The Buteman*, who said that he wanted Bute to be known for its "warmth, and humanity, and willingness to help people". That is an inspiration for many communities and something for many of us to aspire to up and down the country.

On a related aspect, one of the cases you made, Prime Minister, before the action in Syria was voted on, was that there were 70,000 fighters. The impression I had at the time was that there were going to be 70,000 new fighters. Were you talking about new fighters or existing fighters before the vote?

Mr Cameron: The 70,000 people I was talking about was the best estimate by the Joint Intelligence Committee of the non-extremist opposition who were fighting largely against Assad, although some were also fighting against Daesh. To the question very properly set out by the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, which was, "What ground troops are available in Syria for you to co-ordinate with in this campaign against Daesh?" to which they wanted an answer, that was the best answer that I could provide.

Q73 Mr MacNeil: So when you spoke in the Chamber on the day of the debate and talked about 70,000 fighters, were they new fighters or existing fighters?

Mr Cameron: I don't quite follow the question. They were existing fighters.

Q74 Mr MacNeil: Thank you. The impression I had at the time was that there were 70,000 new fighters.

Mr Cameron: No, no, these were people who were already in the battle space, as it were. It didn't include the 20,000 additional Kurdish fighters in Syria, but they were people who were on the ground. It was a very direct answer to the question by the Foreign Affairs Select Committee about what ground troops were available.

Q75 Mr MacNeil: Okay, so UK action wasn't inspiring any new fighters. That's fine.

The second point I want to raise about the Middle East is about a report in the *Sunday Herald* two days ago that said that the Ministry of Defence is refusing to investigate claims from independent monitoring groups that British airstrikes have directly resulted in the deaths of between 72 and 81 civilians in Iraq. The MOD has said that it will investigate reports of civilian deaths only when the MOD itself has reported them. Isn't that a strange state of affairs, Prime Minister?

Mr Cameron: The information I have—I remember this, but I will correct myself if I get it wrong—is that at the time we held the debate, after all that action by the RAF in Iraq, we didn't believe that there had been any civilian casualties, because obviously we take a very careful approach to minimise and eradicate civilian casualties wherever we can. But obviously if people make allegations we must look at them.

Q76 Mr MacNeil: So you will look at the report of the 72 to 81 deaths that these independent monitoring groups have mentioned.

Mr Cameron: Of course we will look at it. If people make points to us, we will take them away and look at them, but, as I say, we've been very, very careful.

Q77 Mr MacNeil: Thank you very much, Prime Minister.

Returning to climate, which Huw Irranca-Davies was asking about earlier, congratulations on securing the deal at COP and on your and your Government's role in that. Can you explain how your domestic energy policies will contribute towards the overall objectives of COP21?

Mr Cameron: Well, they're making a massive contribution. First of all, Britain has probably some of the most advanced climate change legislation and targets and system of climate change carbon budgeting of any country anywhere in the world. We have made good on not only having those things but actually meeting the budgets time after time. As I say, we have reduced greenhouse gases by 15% since 2010 and we are over-delivering against the budgets. If you look at what we have done on low-carbon energy, under this Government, in this Parliament, we are going to be doubling our investment in low-carbon energy to £11 billion. We have one of the largest solar installations for almost any country and we have the largest offshore wind market.

We have been good at doing what we said we'd do. We said we wanted to invest in these renewable technologies to give them a chance to get going, because at the end of the day if you are going to meet climate change targets, you have to have renewable energy; in my view, you have to have nuclear, because it is base-load carbon-free electricity, and you also have to have some gas as well. We are well on the way to delivering that sort of energy outcome. So whether it is the first Green Investment Bank, the massive commitment we made to climate finance, the legislation and the action that we have taken in our own country, or the fact that we have been recognised by this international body that we're the second most

effective country in the world for taking action on climate, I think we've got a very good record to speak of.

Q78 Mr MacNeil: Thank you. Your Energy Secretary told my Committee that she was concerned about the work that has been done or not been done on transport and heat to meet the 2020 target. What is your role in providing leadership across Government to ensure that the 2020 targets are met by the Department for Transport and other areas in Government?

Mr Cameron: I think she is making an important point. To answer your question directly, my role is to ensure that we are taking action across Government to meet these targets and to deliver low carbon at the lowest cost. That's our aim. Her point is that we made some important interventions in heating and transport, such as the approach we are taking with low-emission vehicles and the electric vehicles that we have been subsidising. I was in Munich last week and BMW were saying that they think we are taking absolutely the right approach and that it will increase investment into our country and all the rest of it. We are putting, I think, £1.2 billion into renewable heat in this Parliament—*[Interruption.]* I'm going to answer your question.

The problem is that we have the different sectors—transport, housing, heating, electricity generation—and what you are seeing is that we are over-performing in some sectors. In electricity generation, for example, we're actually going to meet our targets and more. In some areas, it is less easy, sometimes because markets aren't developing in the way that you would like them to. Frankly, I wish that renewable heat for housing was going a bit faster, but it's taking some time. I wish that the price of electric cars was coming down so that people on more modest incomes could afford them and cut their motoring bills. So you have to adjust for what's happening in the market.

I think that this is a question for how we make the carbon budgets work. What matters is the reduction in the carbon, not exactly where it comes from, so we should be looking at the question of whether these work in the right way. I think that's what she was talking about.

Q79 Mr MacNeil: Moving on to carbon capture and storage, which is linked, the DECC submission to my Committee, which we received in October, on investor confidence cited the CCS competition as an example of where they are trying to provide investor confidence. They said that the Government were continuing to promote investor confidence across a range of technologies and were supporting a competition, with up £1 billion to bring forward commercial-scale carbon capture and storage. But a month later, it was scrapped. Prime Minister, it looks as though one arm of Government doesn't know what the other arm is doing. Who was pulling the strings to scrap that, despite what DECC had said a month earlier?

Mr Cameron: That decision was made collectively by the Cabinet. I was—

Q80 Mr MacNeil: It was in the party manifesto.

Mr Cameron: Let me explain. When we look at all this renewable energy stuff, there is always criticism, as Huw was saying. You can always criticise and people might say, “Why aren’t you doing even more?” I would argue that if you look at solar, wind, biomass or carbon capture and storage, the last Government—2010 to 2015—and this Government have poured money into these technologies and we’ve made some big advances. However, as Prime Minister, you do have to think, “Every penny that I put into these technologies is a penny that goes on someone’s electricity bill.”

Q81 Mr MacNeil: You promised this eight months ago.

Mr Cameron: Hang on. I’m now going to explain. You get to the spending review and you have to look across the piece at what we are committed to spend our money on. While I completely believe in the idea, because if you can take the carbon out of gas, you can have relatively cheap gas plants, it seemed to me that the economics of carbon capture and storage really aren’t working at the moment. Carbon capture and storage is £1 billion of capital expenditure—£1 billion that we could spend on flood defences, schools or the health service—but even after you’ve spent that £1 billion, that doesn’t give you carbon capture and storage that is competitive in the market. Here’s the crucial point: I looked into this—

Q82 Mr MacNeil: How have the economics changed over the last eight months since you had this in your manifesto?

Mr Cameron: The point is that they haven’t been improving, and we hoped that the cost—

Q83 Mr MacNeil: So why did you have it in your manifesto?

Mr Cameron: Well, we hoped that the cost would come down. Here are the costs—it might help the Committee to understand this. So you spend £1 billion on carbon capture and storage, you get some carbon capture and storage capacity and it would cost you, at the current estimate, something like £170 per megawatt-hour. Hold that £170 in your head. That compares with unabated gas costing £65, onshore wind perhaps costing £70 and nuclear costing, say, £90. As things stand, you put the £1 billion in that you can’t spend on the flood defences, and then you have to pay £170 per megawatt-hour—a full £80 more than nuclear, and more than twice as much as gas—and that money will go on bill payers’ bills. Governing is about making decisions, and it seemed to me that the right decision was to say that we would not go ahead with the £1 billion, because that is £1 billion that we can spend on other capital investment projects, including energy projects such as making progress on energy storage or modular reactors.

Q84 Mr MacNeil: The figures you’ve just given show that onshore wind was one of the cheapest, and you cut that as well. By your own figures you have cut carbon capture and storage at one end—you promised that investment twice, in your manifesto and before the referendum in Scotland. In fact, a further promise to Scotland was, “If Scotland says it does

want to stay inside the United Kingdom, then all the options for devolution are there and all are possible.” Do you still stand by that?

Mr Cameron: Just let me answer on onshore wind. With onshore wind, the cost has come down, so in my view it does not need to have the expensive subsidy. If you actually look at what the deployment of onshore wind is likely to be in this Parliament, it is going to go from 9 GW in 2015 to 13 GW in 2020, so there is still going to be an increase. As I have said, all these decisions are decisions that put money on bill payers’ bills. The criticism that all Governments will get—it is part of life—is, “Why don’t you do more on this and more on that?” At some stage, you have to say, “What is the cost and what is the benefit?”

Q85 Mr MacNeil: But moving from onshore wind puts more on to bills, because it is the cheapest. If you are going to meet the carbon targets, you have to find something else.

Mr Cameron: Onshore wind is not the cheapest. The cheapest is gas, at £65 per megawatt-hour. Onshore wind is £70. Solar is £80—

Q86 Mr MacNeil: You’re not going to meet your targets with gas, Prime Minister.

Mr Cameron: Well, we are more than meeting our targets. That is the whole point.

Q87 Mr MacNeil: The target is 100g of carbon per kilowatt-hour. You will get that with wind or carbon capture and storage. With gas, that figure is 450g per kilowatt-hour. You need to get to 100g, so you are four and a half times above that, Prime Minister. You will not get there unless you use carbon capture and storage or more onshore wind.

Mr Cameron: That is not true. We are confident that the energy mix that is emerging of nuclear, renewables and gas will more than meet the targets that we are committed to.

Mr MacNeil: Finally, will you—

Chair: We had better make this a very quick “Finally”.

Q88 Mr MacNeil: Prime Minister, will you keep the promise you made to Scotland a week before the referendum, when you said on “Channel 4 News”, “If Scotland says it does want to stay inside the United Kingdom then all the options of devolution are there and are possible”? You said that on 10 September.

Mr Cameron: And we delivered on that with the Smith review, and that is exactly what the process after the referendum has helped to deliver.

Q89 Mr MacNeil: None of the amendments from Scotland’s MPs were accepted by you.

Mr Cameron: Smith said that Smith was delivered, and I think it is worth listening to him.

Mr MacNeil: All—

Chair: Order. I call Neil Parish.

Q90 Neil Parish: Putting my EFRA hat on, I would suggest on renewable energy that a lot of land is being used for solar farms, especially if you take the county of Devon, part of which I represent. I think we have done our fair share.

Mr Cameron: I would agree with that.

Q91 Neil Parish: Are you very keen on tidal power? We have the Bristol channel, which has the second highest rise and fall in the world. We could increase our amount of renewable energy without taking good quality land to put solar panels on it.

Mr Cameron: Instinctively, I can see the strength of the argument for tidal power, because one of the problems with renewables is whether they can provide base-load power. Nuclear can. Wind cannot, because it is intermittent. But tidal, because the tide is always going in or out, can provide base-load power. The problem with tidal power, simply put, is that at the moment we have not seen any ideas come forward that can hit a strike price in terms of pounds per megawatt-hour that is very attractive. That is the challenge for tidal. Maybe they can come up with something. They are very long-term schemes with big investments up front, and they can last for many, many years, but right now my enthusiasm is reduced slightly by the fact that the cost would be quite high.

Q92 Neil Parish: The tidal scheme in Swansea definitely has a very high capital cost, but if you put that over a great number of years you will find that the power is naturally limitless and the cost is inexpensive.

Mr Cameron: Obviously we have to look at the figures as they come out. As I have said, tidal power has got the permanence to it. There are important economic benefits in terms of urban renewal and all the rest of it. I totally see all those arguments and have seen some exciting prospects, but as I said, you have to come back to the question of what the action I take will do to the security of supply and the cost of supply. In all the arguments about renewables, you always have to ask yourself what that will put on a household bill.

Q93 Neil Parish: You answered Huw on flooding. May I congratulate you on the work you did in Somerset, because for years dredging the river and getting the water out to sea was always considered not the way forward by the Environment Agency? You came down as Prime Minister and unblocked that. You have now been up to the north of England and very much supported action there. I commend you for it.

If we look at successive Governments, they start off by having lower flood defences, then there is a lot of flooding and they go up—I think it happened between 2010 and 2015—but what we actually need is continual support. Perhaps you agree, but we also have to relook at exactly what we are doing with flooding—when the one-in-50-years flood and the one-in-100-years flood happen every six or seven years, we have to ask ourselves, “Have we got the mapping right?” It is no good for the Environment Agency to turn to percentages, because that is just dividing the years by 100, which does not work. What is your plan? What is your long-term vision? Like the long-term vision for the economy, what is the plan for flooding, because it seems to be happening more often? What is the plan?

Mr Cameron: The long-term plan is that we have seen, if we take this Parliament and the previous two, spending goes from £1.5 billion to £1.7 billion in the last Parliament, and then it will be over £2 billion. We have now set a six-year spending period, so we really can plan the investment that we are going to make.

A big part of the plan is building those capital schemes. Another part of the plan is making sure that it is not just Government money; you are actually getting partnership money in too, which has made a very big difference in many parts of the country. We have protected the vital maintenance spending in real terms, but I think that there needs to be a big effort right across Government to look at everything you can do, whether it is making sure that agriculture policy is consistent with flooding policy, or planning policy is consistent with flooding policy. As I said earlier in answer to questions, it is about that sort of attitudinal change.

When we were dealing with the Somerset Levels, we brought in the Dutch and said, “Look, you deal with these manmade environments all the time and you have a zero-tolerance, as it were, of flood. Tell us how we can do better.” They said, “You’ve got to get on with the dredging and all the rest of it.” So I think it is that attitudinal change, but it is difficult, because when people say, “Well, don’t build any more houses on a floodplain,” London is a floodplain, but we clearly need to build more houses in London. So some of the simplistic answers you hear about are not possible, but a big attitudinal change, a big investment programme, big partnership funding and a long-term commitment to do it are.

Q94 Neil Parish: In some areas the rivers need to be dredged in order to get the water out to sea faster. In other areas, perhaps upstream, you actually need to hang on to that water for longer. Therefore, perhaps planting trees or perhaps re-wetting that land—the farming practice—is necessary. At the moment, most of that compensation to farmers is for loss of profit, and it is not actually very much of an incentive for farmers, necessarily, to produce that land and use it for flooding. What I would like to see—I don’t know whether you would agree with me—is a much more proactive policy, where farmers are actually encouraged more to take on that water and manage it, and for that to be part of their farming practice, rather than being forced into it, so that we are using more of a carrot.

Mr Cameron: I think that makes very good sense. As I say, you have got to have plans for the whole catchment area. In some places, that will mean dredging and effectively speeding the water up, to take it away from dwellings; in other places, it is slowing the water down. So everything from upstream attenuation ponds and farming practices to try to hold on to the water, to better flood defences in urban areas—all those things need to work together.

Look, I would say the Environment Agency, in my experience over the past five to 10 years, has improved a lot. I think the early-warning systems are better; I think their action on the ground—they work around the clock on Christmas Day and Boxing Day—is much better; I think their attitude towards dredging has changed. We just need to encourage this.

Q95 Neil Parish: Are you absolutely convinced that their attitude towards dredging has changed? I rather fear that you go down there and make sure that dredging happens, but after a while it stops raining and the Environment Agency regroup. There are many rivers in Britain that do not all need to be dredged, but in many places you have got bridges, as at Burrowbridge, where we have the main bridge and the two pipes either side of it that are completely silted up. So therefore we have got to get that sorted throughout Britain through maintenance work. Are you convinced that we have changed our philosophy?

Mr Cameron: I think it is changing. James Bevan, the new chief executive, is doing a very good job. Obviously we now need a new chairman—

Neil Parish: Perhaps a Dutch chairman.

Mr Cameron: We have many great Dutch businesspeople working in Britain.

My personal epiphany here was that I had a constituency case where some farmers dredged a stream in Kelmscott and they were being taken to court for destruction of wildlife. I said, “This is ridiculous”. I got everyone together—this was a couple of years ago—the Environment Agency, farmers and everyone else, and we stood by the banks outside the Plough pub in Kelmscott. We looked at this river and I said, “It doesn’t look to me like they’ve done anything wrong”, and the Environment Agency said, “Well, there’s real danger that they would have destroyed the habitats of water voles.” I am not making this up—at that moment, two water voles appeared on the river bank, almost in conversation, on film. In my mind, at that moment, the argument was settled.

Q96 Neil Parish: My final question is to make sure that that attitude is taken across the country, and that the Environment Agency passes powers down to drainage boards, local authorities, local farmers and local landowners, so that we can make the money go a lot further and be much more practical. If there is a tree in a river, or if there is a shopping trolley in a culvert, let’s have somebody who has got to come out locally and do the work.

Mr Cameron: I am very interested in that idea. There was a review that was done by Pitt. I don’t want us to go back over all of that and try to reinvent it. I think we implemented all of the Pitt review and I think that’s the right approach, but I will look carefully at what you said.

Chair: Thank you very much, and while you are looking at voles perhaps you would also look at bats, aphids, newts and snails, all of which seem to have slowed up work in my constituency at one time or another.

Before we finish, I’d just like to bring us back to foreign affairs briefly, with a rejoinder that Crispin Blunt wants to throw in.

Q97 Crispin Blunt: Prime Minister, I just wanted to recall that, along with the rest of the international community, we signed up to UN Security Council resolution 2249, which describes the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant as constituting “a global and unprecedented threat to international peace and security”. We have had a number of questions about trying to constitute a military force that might take ISIL on, and also initially about the politics of trying to put together the international agreement. But the bottom line is that ISIL has to be taken out of control of that part of Syria as well as Iraq.

Hamish de Bretton-Gordon is a former commanding officer of the Joint Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Regiment. He and others argued that if the region’s armies don’t succeed in this, then we must be prepared to commit our own tanks and infantry to this battle, with the Russians, Americans and others. If that was the case, he says that he expects that we could roll up ISIL in a matter of weeks. The planning for this eventuality needs to start forthwith, in order that it can be ready in six months’ time if required. Where are we on planning to make sure that the international community, in one form or other, defeats ISIL, meaning taking its territory away from it in Syria?

Mr Cameron: I do not agree with the person who you have quoted that this is the right approach. The strategy that we have may take longer, but I think it’s the right strategy. In Iraq, you can see the growing confidence of the Iraqi security forces, the fact that they took Ramadi and that 30% to 40% of the territory that ISIL—Daesh—had has now gone. In Syria, it’s going to take longer and it’s more difficult, but I think it would be counter-productive to deploy western troops’ boots on the ground in the way that you put forward, and so I do not think that is the right answer.

Even in Syria, if you take what has happened since September, the action that we became part of in December has taken out something like 25% of the oil revenues of Daesh; it has taken out 10% of their revenues overall, so I think there is growing confidence that we can push back Daesh, growing confidence in Iraq that there are forces we can work with on the ground, and then a political track in Syria that relies on the fact that, in the end, we need to build, as I said many times during the debate—there are the moderate opposition forces we can work with now, but in time what we want to work with is a Syrian transitional Government that can help us to squeeze Daesh out of existence. That will take longer than the sort of approach you take, but I think it will be a lot less counter-productive.

Q98 Chair: Thank you very much, Prime Minister. We have been going for almost 90 minutes.

I will just raise one point that Crispin and I are both concerned about. You will have heard of Iain Mansfield, the diplomat who wrote a first-rate description of what Brexit would look like. He wrote that in a personal capacity—

Mr Cameron: I don’t think I have seen that, actually; it’s news to me.

Q99 Chair: It won a prize.

Mr Cameron: Oh, the Wolfson prize.

Q100 Chair: Yes, that's the one. It was judged by the IEA. It is indeed a very good report. Both the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Treasury Committee would like to have a word with him, as you may imagine, since he has written such a good piece of work; but unfortunately, we have received a rather stiff letter quoting these recondite—

Mr Cameron: The Osmotherly rules. This is a frequent topic of conversation. I have to remind myself between meetings exactly what they are, and I am afraid I have omitted to do so on this occasion. I will do my best.

Q101 Chair: Well, don't worry; I will tell you what they are. There aren't any rules, actually.

Mr Cameron: They are what Osmotherly said, presumably.

Q102 Chair: They are what you feel they are at any particular time.

Mr Cameron: I like those sorts of rule.

Q103 Chair: So do we when we have got you before us, Prime Minister. In this case, this man wrote his report in a personal capacity, and we are being told that he is not permitted to give evidence in a personal capacity. We would like him to come along.

Mr Cameron: The problem with this is that the Government hopes to reach an agreed and recommended position, which I very much hope will be that Britain stays in a reformed European Union. That will be the position of the Government, and the civil service will work to that position. If, of course, we fail in our negotiation and reach a different position, the civil service will have to work for that position, but the principle—

Q104 Chair: But you have already let him have a say in a personal capacity, so why can't he have another say?

Mr Cameron: Well, there is a personal capacity for Ministers to be able to campaign against the agreed Government position, but there is one civil service, and the civil service will be working for our position.

Q105 Chair: You have already let Mr Mansfield—

Mr Cameron: A man of your great ability and genius could probably write the paper yourself, discuss it with yourself and come to your own conclusions. You don't need this poor civil servant to be arraigned before you.

Q106 Chair: Steady on, now. You have already let Mr Mansfield write a document in a personal capacity, publish it and win a prize. What we would like to do is take oral evidence from him, also in a personal capacity. We think that is reasonable. You are saying, "Well, he'll have to defend"—

Mr Cameron: We are going to have a look at it. I was not aware of this case, but there is a clear position here: the Government is going to have a recommended position to which the civil service works. That is the sort of principle and basis on which I make any decision, including this particular request.

Q107 Chair: We would be very grateful if you would take a look at that. It is also kind of you to agree that you will reflect on Harriet Harman's call for written guidelines governing drone attacks and look at whether all the relevant information held by Ministers will be released to the ISC to enable them to do a proper job, and to agree kindly with Keith Vaz that you will investigate making it easier for individuals and Churches offering to take refugees and toughening up the bail rules to ensure that passports are seized quickly from those on bail. You have also agreed that you will look at claims from independent monitoring bodies that UK airstrikes have caused between 70 and 80 civilian deaths in Syria; this was a point that Angus made. We are grateful to you for agreeing that at this meeting, and we will follow up on those points. Thank you very much for coming to give evidence.

Mr Cameron: Not at all. There will be a number of letters—

Q108 Chair: It has been quite a lively session, the first of many and, we are hoping, the first of many quite soon, given that we have a backlog—

Mr Cameron: I prefer to think about things in calendar years. For this calendar year, as I said, I am here now, at the beginning of the year. I think between Easter and summer I have another appearance, and then one in the autumn. I think in calendar years rather than Sessions. That is what I am planning, but if you want to ask me, I am always happy to entertain any suggestion.

Chair: We might have a further discussion about that. Thank you for coming to give evidence this afternoon. We very much appreciate it.