



Oral evidence: [Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK's future policy options](#),

HC 520

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Members present:

Crispin Blunt (Chair); Mr John Baron; Mr Mark Hendrick; Daniel Kawczynski; Yasmin Qureshi

Questions 233-313

Examination of Witness

Rt Hon Dr Liam Fox MP gave evidence.

Q233 Chair: Welcome to this resumed session of the Foreign Affairs Committee's examination of the UK's intervention and the collapse in Libya, and our future policy options there. Dr Fox, thank you so much for coming back. Our last session was interrupted by a series of Divisions, so this is an opportunity to finish off and focus on your responsibilities with defence.

At our session in December you had just begun to discuss the arguments advanced in the National Security Council in February 2011 in support of the proposition that a military intervention in Libya was in the UK national interest. Can you go back to that point and summarise the arguments that it was in the national interest? We know that was probably the conclusion of the National Security Council, given what we did. Can you also tell us what your view was in those discussions?

Dr Fox: Very briefly, to recap, the view was taken that the potential threat to civilians in Benghazi warranted a UN resolution. When that resolution was passed, it was felt that the UK should be playing a full role, along with our allies, in implementing that UN resolution.

I think it is fair to say that, in terms of the political momentum for that, a lot of it came from Paris, rather than from London. That is shown by the facts of Saturday 19 March after the Paris conference. I think I mentioned last time that the conference finished mid-afternoon and the first French sorties took place at 16.45 GMT, so there was a lot of political momentum in that.

There were different views about the level at which we should be conducting our military contribution. It is no secret that the US were quite reticent about getting involved militarily and tying up assets in a Libyan campaign. President Obama, of course, famously said that America was going to lead from behind in this particular campaign. The rationale for that was very much that, with trouble brewing in the Gulf, the Americans did not want to tie up further assets or move assets out of the Gulf back into the Mediterranean, which was a position that we understood.

It is also fair to say that the MOD and the military were less keen on large-scale military involvement. In fact, at one point there was a proposal to look at the potential partitioning of Libya as one of the options, rather than a full-scale move towards Tripoli, as happened. My personal view on that was that time could be taken to strengthen the rebel forces in the east, and then through other methods, including economic sanctions if necessary, bring the Gaddafi regime to its senses. But the events really took control because the mandate, of course, was to protect civilians and the regime continued to attack civilian populations, even including areas such as Misrata and the hospital there, which I visited myself. So we continued with that.

The other element that is probably worth bringing up at this point was that there was a lot of debate about SDSR 10 and whether that had had an impact on our ability to carry out some of the military actions that were required. In particular, there was a long-standing argument about Harrier and Tornado/Typhoon, and what we were able to do.

My view was that, as we went further into that campaign, we were vindicated in the decision that we had taken, because taking Harrier out and leaving us with Tornado and Typhoon was quite advantageous, because Tornado gave us capabilities that Harrier did not. Although both could use Paveway laser-guided bombs, Harrier could not carry dual-mode Brimstone or Storm Shadow, which we did use on a regular basis in the campaign, because it was too heavy. Harrier did not have a gun; Tornado has a gun. Tornado has two-man crew, which allows us to have better control in the air. I think that was a vindication of that particular decision, though we looked constantly at that as we went on.

The other thing to say, as a prelude, is that we took extraordinary care, perhaps historically unparalleled, in terms of our targeting policy.

Q234 Chair: Just before we get into the other details, if we have time, on targeting policy and the rest, that initial discussion in February 2011, in advance of the strikes on 19 March and the French commencing operations—we will come to the French behaviour shortly—the assessment of the British national interest in the National Security Council as to why we should be in this with the Americans, with the background of the Americans being reticent about getting engaged, what was the Defence view about our national interest? You have given us some illustrations as to how this played into SDSR 10. What was your view and the view of the Chief of the Defence Staff coming to you and the Chiefs of Staff and that expressed in the National Security Council as well? Can you give us a flavour of the discussion?

Dr Fox: The best way I could sum that up is to say that the military were not looking for a conflict to get involved in. With Iraq and Afghanistan—

Q235 Chair: Unlike Afghanistan in 2005—

Dr Fox: Afghanistan ongoing. There was already a fair amount of stretch there so there was no real appetite to get involved in something that was unnecessary.

Q236 Chair: Are you contrasting that with the military's attitude to Afghanistan in 2005? Would that be your point of reference?

Dr Fox: Well, not having had responsibility in 2005, I couldn't make a direct comparison; that would be guesswork. But I think it is fair to say that there was a careful reticence about involvement. I think until late in the day there was a view that if conflict could be avoided, and if Gaddafi could be persuaded to pull his forces back west and not threaten Benghazi, then that would be the preferable course.

I think I said last time that Gaddafi was the architect of his own downfall in that, despite the fact that there was huge international pressure, he continued to threaten the population. Had he not done so and had he pulled back, I think not only would there have been no conflict, but there would have been no UN resolution.

Q237 Chair: In our previous session you said that the protection of civilian life was the main motivation for military intervention. You have explained about the care taken with targeting. Were British forces embedded with the NTC forces in order to direct the air strikes?

Dr Fox: There were mentoring teams on the ground.

Q238 Chair: Mentoring, or directing air strikes?

Dr Fox: We had Sentinel and Century to help us direct on the ground.

Q239 Chair: But you are saying that the UK was disinterested in the political outcome of the Libyan civil war, as long as civilians were protected in the areas threatened by Gaddafi?

Dr Fox: If I interpret the subtext of your question, the aim was not to produce a defined political outcome, regime change or otherwise, but to make sure that we protected the civilian population.

Q240 Chair: But surely, Sarkozy, Obama and our Prime Minister put their names to an article in the *New York Times* in April making it clear that regime change was an objective.

Dr Fox: Regime change was never the objective, but it became very clear that at every opportunity the Gaddafi regime would continue to attack civilian targets, as they did to the very end.

Q241 Chair: So were you planning on the basis that protecting civilians through air power would lead to regime change?

Dr Fox: No. There was no plan for regime change.

Q242 Chair: But in April, the Prime Minister, the President and the President of France are saying that Gaddafi has got to go, so they can't protect civilians unless he goes.

Dr Fox: It became clear that Gaddafi himself was posing a threat to civilians. I think the political view was taken that somebody else had to be in charge. But there was never a plan for regime change as such. It was becoming clear that despite the destruction of command and control, despite repeated degradation of his military capabilities, Gaddafi did pose a threat to civilians. The UN mandate was very clear that we were there to protect civilians. Had Gaddafi stopped attacking civilians at any point and said, "That's it; we are going to have a peaceful transition of power", I think that would have been politically acceptable.

Q243 Chair: So you are telling us that it was a surprise when the Gaddafi regime collapsed and that we had no plans to address that outcome.

Dr Fox: The military element of that was to continue to pursue military elements of the Gaddafi regime that threatened the civilian population.

Q244 Mr Baron: Those critical at the time of intervention pointed to the fact that there was insufficient understanding of nuances, forces at play and events on the ground. Before and during the Libyan civil war, was there an assessment within the Government of the extent to which the anti-Gaddafi rebels were associated with militant Islam?

Dr Fox: I do not recall reading anything of that nature. That is not to say it would not have been done, but I don't recall reading such material.

Q245 Mr Baron: So as far as you are concerned, there was no assessment. For example, you presumably were not aware that Abdelhakim Belhadj and other members of the Libyan Islamic fighting force were participating in the rebellion.

Dr Fox: I do not recall reading any reports that set out the background of any Islamist activity to specific rebel groups. What was clear was that we were dealing with a relatively disparate force and that there were a number of different groups. That is a question you might want to direct to the former Foreign Secretary.

Q246 Mr Baron: You might not have read any reports, but were you aware of any accumulation of intelligence within the British Government or indeed the west generally about the link between the rebel forces and Islamic fundamentalism?

Dr Fox: I think there was a view that they were such a disparate grouping that it was likely you would get some extremist elements in there, but I don't recall reading about any specific links to any specific groups.

Q247 Mr Baron: Some commentators have argued that military intervention in Libya empowered ISIL by removing an important barrier to the growth of militant Islam in north Africa. Would you support that view?

Dr Fox: It is always true that where a power vacuum is created, forces of insurgency are likely to be drawn into it. We carried out what we are asked to do under the UN resolution

in terms of protecting civilians. Whether or not there was a sufficient international plan to support the reconstruction or to put an alternative civil Administration in place is debatable.

I remember having a discussion with Mr Jalil in Tripoli—that would have been as late as October of that year—and being made acutely aware of the lack of planning for how the armed forces would be dealt with and how the various militias might be brought together. In particular, we made an offer to the Government at that point. I was very concerned about the different militias. There were, as the Committee will remember, completely different groups operating in different parts of Libya, and my worry was that afterwards, whatever new Government came into being, there might be no central control of those militias and that there would effectively be guerrilla forces throughout the country.

In the meeting with Mr Jalil, we specifically offered Ministry of Defence help to produce the legislation equivalent to our Armed Forces Act to give control over all armed groups and put them under central Government control. But nothing ever came of it, which was a big mistake.

Q248 Mr Baron: Putting your own concerns to one side, were you aware of any work, whether within the UK Government or the west generally, as to the implications of creating a vacuum, particularly once you knew that regime change and removal of Gaddafi was perhaps a necessity?

Dr Fox: There was certainly widespread debate about what Libya might look like. Views ranged from those who believed in the necessity of an integral state, keeping it as it was, and there were those who believed that you could have some sort of federation, going back to Libya's previous history, and pretty much everything in between. Worries were expressed about what would happen if no unifying Government came out the other end.

Q249 Mr Baron: Okay. May I turn to the military campaign? You made reference earlier to the French strikes happening hours after the agreed meeting in March. There was not only a short timeframe, but the French aircraft struck before the cruise missiles. My understanding is that they had actually taken out Libyan air defences. First, did the French make you aware before the meeting—hours before—that they were going to do this?

Dr Fox: I was not at the Paris conference. The Foreign Secretary was there.

Q250 Mr Baron: You might not have been there, but you were the Defence Secretary at the time for the United Kingdom. Were you aware of any communication by the French that they were intending to do this before that meeting took place?

Dr Fox: I recall being aware that the French were very keen to begin this military action as soon as agreement had been reached to do so. We followed relatively quickly behind them.

Chair: But they jumped the gun and did not tell us.

Q251 Mr Baron: That is the point. We all know that they were very keen, but the specific question I am asking you, Dr Fox, is: before the meeting, had they informed you—not you personally; I am talking about the UK as allies in the west—that this was their intention if the agreement had been reached earlier that day?

Dr Fox: I was not aware of the French air strikes until I heard that they had happened. Other parts of Government may have known—that is not for me to answer—but that was the first I remember being told that the French had already carried out air strikes.

Q252 Mr Baron: Okay. Without getting too pedantic—that is a very good answer, but it does not quite answer my question—were you aware of anyone in Government in the UK or in the west generally who had been informed by the French prior to that meeting that they were going to conduct these air strikes?

Dr Fox: I was not. As I said, the first I knew was when the French carried out air strikes on the afternoon of Saturday 19 March.

Q253 Mr Baron: Some, perhaps unfairly—I am interested in your views—suggest that the French were demonstrating the stealth capability of the Rafale fighter, particularly to potential foreign buyers, rather than participating in a joined-up strategy. Would that be unfair in your view, Dr Fox?

Dr Fox: I am sure it would be unfair.

Q254 Mr Baron: No, I am asking you whether you think it is unfair.

Dr Fox: I think it is unfair to categorise it in that way. I think that from the top of the French Government there was a keenness to be at the forefront of the NATO part of the activity, given the reticence of the United States. I think there was something of a political driver, if that is the question. If there was a driving force, it was to show that France under the Sarkozy Government, having come back into NATO, was a serious player, and when the United States was not taking a primary role, France was capable of doing so. It is a personal guess, but I think that would probably be a better motivation than simply defence sales.

Q255 Daniel Kawczynski: Thank you again for coming in, Dr Fox. In 2011, was there a discussion in Government about sending British ground troops to Libya following the fall of Gaddafi to secure the country?

Dr Fox: No. There was discussion, but, as you will remember, there was absolutely no appetite in Government to have combat troops in Libya, not least because, again, we were still suffering from the stretch that Afghanistan was providing. Nor was there any political appetite, nor any public appetite, for it. The view was taken that we could implement the UN resolution by means of air power and by helping the rebel forces in Libya to better organise and better use the capabilities they had.

Q256 Daniel Kawczynski: Was there a request from the NTC for deployment of such a stabilisation force?

Dr Fox: Not that I recall, because I think we had made it very clear that that would not happen.

Q257 Daniel Kawczynski: Finally on this point, in terms of the Libyan army's stockpile of weapons after the fall of Gaddafi, despite our considerable degrading of his capabilities there

were a lot of weapons left, accumulated over many decades. What process did you and others engage in to ensure that those weapons were secured? Obviously, we have seen subsequently that a lot of those weapons have been moved to neighbouring countries such as Niger and Mali, where they have been used for nefarious purposes.

Dr Fox: It was and is always an unavoidable consequence of not having ground forces that you can have leakage of weapons of that nature. We were aware of convoys leaving Libya and heading south, and yet because of the possibility that there could be trucks with civilians in them, they were not assessed as legitimate targets. If you limit your involvement purely to air power, in any conflict there will be a limit to what you can do in terms of interdiction of weaponry in that way.

It was seen as a risk but an unavoidable one, unless we were actually going to put forces on the ground that could stop and search these convoys. There was some ability later on for the Libyan forces themselves to do that, but clearly there was leakage. Various assessments were made about the type of weaponry that may be leaving the country, the quantity of it, where it might be going and the risks of future use, particularly of anti-aircraft weaponry.

Q258 Chair: I recall a great deal being made of the fact that we were going to set up areas where weapons were going to be bought out of use from the various parties to the conflict afterwards, and that that was a primary aim of what we were seeking to do. You seem to be telling us that that was over before it had started, because the weapons were already disappearing off south and in other directions.

Dr Fox: Until it was possible to get some of the Libyan forces themselves to secure the country, it was obvious that weapons would leak out. I don't think there was any way that that could be prevented, unless we were willing to put forces on the ground, which we were not. That is an inevitable consequence once you take that decision.

Q259 Chair: But this process took six months. You told us at the beginning that this started off being about civilian protection. There was no contemplation of it being about regime change and therefore of the consequences of managing regime change. As this developed over the course of six months—with the stated position of France, the UK and the United States in the middle of April 2011 that this was about the removal of Gaddafi—what plans were you seeing that satisfied you that Libya would not end up in the condition it is in now, given what was happening at the time?

Dr Fox: When I left the Cabinet on 14 October, I had just spent the previous weekend in Tripoli for the first time, talking to the Libyan leadership about how they might progress. Gaddafi was still alive at that point. I was concerned then that there was not a holistic view being taken by the leadership of Libya of how government would progress, nor was I clear how they saw reconciliation between different rebel factions taking place. As I mentioned, I was particularly concerned that the large amount of weaponry that the militia still possessed might not come under a single command afterwards, and that that in itself posed risks for the stability of the country.

Q260 Chair: Over the course of the summer, in June and July, what view did you take on the quality of the product you were getting from the Stabilisation Unit about the stabilisation of Libya post conflict?

Dr Fox: Throughout the summer months, particularly July, the MOD was still primarily focused on the military elements of the campaign, and the fact that the Gaddafi regime was still attacking civilians and other forces across the country. In terms of the planning for post-conflict, it wasn't clear by that summer what post-conflict was going to look like.

Q261 Mr Hendrick: Dr Fox, some people would say that today Libya is close to being a failed state. Do you take any responsibility for that situation?

Dr Fox: As I said earlier, I think that the conflict in Libya would have been avoidable if Gaddafi had not threatened his own people. There was a UN resolution, on which the Chinese and the Russians of course abstained, on the basis that nobody wanted to see another Srebrenica, which at the time was what people thought they might see in Benghazi. I think that we carried out what the UN resolution asked us to do.

My view was always that we should want to see the Libyan people determine their own destiny, and that we should give them any help and expertise that we were asked for. I mentioned the specific example from our own Department, the Ministry of Defence. We offered help about how we thought control over the armed forces should be exercised and the legal basis on which it should happen. As I said, we even offered to help draft the legislation for them. But despite making that offer, it was never taken up.

Q262 Mr Hendrick: In 2010 the IMF estimated that Libya would have growth of over 7% in 2014. That would have been the highest in the Middle East. The reality was minus 24%, the worst GDP figure in the world. Are you saying that we were driven purely and simply by the events that were taking place in Benghazi, and that we did not take a medium to long-term view about what might happen in Libya post conflict?

Dr Fox: I very strongly took the view that if conflict could be avoided then so much the better, if the situation in Libya could be sorted out politically by the Libyans themselves. I remember very clearly, in discussions with my counterpart in the United States, that whatever our reservations, it was becoming increasingly clear that there may well be a slaughter of civilians. We could not stand back and allow that to happen. It was not our choice to have the conflict in Libya; that was brought about by the behaviour of Gaddafi.

Q263 Mr Hendrick: You mentioned earlier what you saw as the gung-ho nature of the French use of Rafale. Could we not be accused of being the same way about Typhoon?

Dr Fox: No. In fact, most of our attacks were carried out by Tornado, because Tornado was able to carry dual-mode Brimstone and Storm Shadow. Although, what did become very clear to us was what a good product Typhoon was. If I remember correctly—if I get these figures wrong I am sure that the Ministry of Defence will tell me, and I will write to the Committee to correct them—in order to have five Tornados available at all times, we needed to have 12. In order to have five Typhoons available, we needed to have seven, such was its reliability.

Q264 Mr Hendrick: I have no doubts about the quality of the Typhoon; many of my constituents are concerned with building them. I am just saying that, as Defence Secretary, you pointed out how keen the French were to try out their weapons. Wasn't there an element of that with us?

Dr Fox: With all due respect, I think Mr Baron made that suggestion about the French, not me. And no, not at any point was it seen as an opportunity to display our military hardware, but it did show what an excellent engineering system we had.

Q265 Mr Hendrick: If it wasn't a rush—a quite justifiable rush, in the view of some—to save the people in Benghazi, why do you think there was no proper post-conflict planning? We had had the experience of Iraq, we knew what could go wrong and, unlike Iraq, we did not have boots on the ground to provide any sort of security force. What did we honestly expect to happen once the airstrikes had finished and the battle had taken place on the ground?

Dr Fox: The aim was for the people of Libya to determine their own future Government and their own system of government. As I said, certainly the United Kingdom was willing to put at the disposal of the Libyan Government any expertise that we had to help them do that.

Q266 Mr Hendrick: You said yourself that the Libyan Government, as such, were not effective. What you effectively had on the ground was just a disparate collection of militias distributed all over the country.

Dr Fox: And we said to them that this would be a problem afterwards unless they got control of them and unless there was proper control from the centre. As I said, our very strong advice to them was to have parliamentary control from Tripoli and authority over these different groupings, and that the risk of not doing so would be to have, as we had seen in Iraq, large numbers of young men with no overarching authority with large numbers of weapons, which were available.

Q267 Chair: Sadly, time is slightly against us, because there are obviously a lot of issues that we want to pursue. Given your experience, do you have any recommendations for future UK policy in relation to Libya?

Dr Fox: My general advice before any conflict is, No. 1: what does a good outcome look like? No. 2: is such an outcome engineerable? No. 3: do we have to be part of the engineering? No. 4: how much of the aftermath would you like to own? I think that there is, and has been in our history, a tendency to answer No. 1 without answering the rest of the questions. I think it is not responsible for any Government at any time to go into any conflict and to deploy our armed forces without answering all four questions.

Q268 Chair: Did you believe that before 2011?

Dr Fox: As you said, experience does add a great deal. I think that perhaps I did not have that view so clearly in my mind. As I think I said last time, in medicine we used to say

that the retrospectroscope was the most useful instrument, and that applies politically. I would now give that advice very strongly to anyone in a pre-conflict period.

Q269 Chair: The suggestion in Anthony Seldon's book, and perhaps in other accounts of the debates at the time in the National Security Council, is that the senior officials were actually making points similar to the ones you have just made as the questions that needed to be answered, and that they were ignored by the Prime Minister, and presumably therefore by his political colleagues on the National Security Council, and their concerns were overridden. Given that you may have seen press accounts of the books, and that you may even have read them or been interviewed for them, are we entitled to come to that conclusion?

Dr Fox: Before coming to this Committee, I went back to the Ministry of Defence to read all my documents relating to the months leading up to and during this Libyan conflict. There was a constant feed from the military, in particular, about the need to be able to plan subsequently and what the risks may be if the Libyan authorities did not take shape in the way that we had wanted. But I think the driver—and I go back to this point—was the fear of a civilian slaughter of the sort we had seen in the Balkans. That was a huge driver for Government decision making. I understand entirely why; I just think that when we are faced with this in future we need to be making full planning for all those four questions. Before action is taken, we need to be very clear what the consequences in answering all those four questions are.

Chair: Thank you. I would now like to invite Lord Hague to join us.

Examination of Witness

Witness: **Lord Hague of Richmond** gave evidence.

Chair: Lord Hague, thank you very much for returning to rejoin us after our attenuated session before Christmas.

Lord Hague: Not at all.

Q270 Chair: I would like to start with international diplomacy in relation to the Libyan intervention. In February 2011, Britain followed France in asking the UN to impose a no-fly zone over Libya. Was Libyan intervention really a function of French leadership?

Lord Hague: President Sarkozy and his Government were very determined about this from the outset, and I think we were not far behind them in the thinking about this. There was, in the run-up to the intervention, a clear UK-French alliance—concert-- on this subject. That is how it was seen within Europe, and I think it made an impact on the thinking in the United States. You could say that President Sarkozy was clear, particularly from the outset, that it needed an intervention by Britain, France and others.

Some thinking went on, as you know, within the British Government—within the National Security Council—as to whether that was the right thing to do. Our processes are different from the French processes, which are much more presidential in every way. After that deliberation within the British Government, Britain and France were of the same mind.

Q271 Chair: How much debate was going on inside the National Security Council? You heard my question to Dr Fox.

Lord Hague: Quite a bit. Certainly, there was caution expressed—

Q272 Chair: The officials may have been at odds with the politicians.

Lord Hague: It is rarely as simple as that—that officials are saying this and politicians decide. Actually, as on most subjects, there is a mixture of views among officials and among politicians. There would be something wrong with a National Security Council system where you contemplate military action and officials do not point out downsides or express whatever their concerns are, because that is their job; their whole lifelong training is to express concerns to politicians. Politicians then have to decide, which is an entirely different responsibility.

Q273 Chair: What was the American attitude to military intervention in Libya at the time?

Lord Hague: I think it is accurately portrayed in most of the memoirs and books—that I have seen, anyway—about this. I have even taken the precaution now of reading Anthony Seldon's chapter on this, since you referred to it, Mr Chairman, at the end of our previous session.

Chair: Sir Anthony will be delighted.

Lord Hague: Absolutely. Well, I don't know if he will be delighted or not, but I have read it. There were divisions in the American Government. I think Hillary Clinton, as Secretary of State, deciding after the meeting that I attended of the G8 Foreign Ministers in Paris that it was right to make an intervention was one of the swing factors. I think in the UK and France we did influence the United States on this subject where there were divisions, with the Pentagon less keen on a military intervention.

Q274 Chair: The Italians are the European power literally closest to Libya—geographically, and in many other ways as well. What was their view? Did we seek it?

Lord Hague: Whether we sought views or not, we always got them, because of course these matters were discussed among the EU Foreign Ministers. I do not recall Italy taking a very strong line, in the sense that Italy was not leading the cause for military intervention. They were supportive of the action when it took place, and indeed they hosted the Libya contact group that we established, which is relevant to the questions you were asking Dr Fox earlier about planning for the aftermath of intervention. I hosted the first Libya contact group in London at the end of March 2011, and then there were subsequent meetings in Doha and Rome over the following couple of months, which I attended. In hosting the Rome meeting, Italy was showing that it was ready to play a big role in the stabilisation of Libya afterwards, but not so much in the military intervention. In practice, in European politics, when there is an issue about military intervention, it is in London and Paris that those decisions are made, because those are the two countries that have the capability to make an intervention outside Europe.

Q275 Mr Baron: In the UN negotiations, did the UK press for a resolution that specifically addressed regime change? Or did the UK simply argue for civilian protection? You will be

well aware that there is a view that the intervention was as much about regime change as it was about protecting civilians. Within the negotiations, what was the British approach? Did we try to address that specific issue of regime change?

Lord Hague: No. A UN resolution, specifically addressing regime change, would not be successful. We were very much supportive of, and I was very active in securing support for, a resolution that authorised all necessary measures.

The key decision was in the United States and this debate in the US Administration that I referred to. Eventually, the US decided, in the days before the resolution was passed, that if there was going to be a resolution at all, it had to be one that had some chance of being effective, which was very good logic.

Previous discussion had been about whether a no-fly zone could be established by a resolution. The United States came back after it had deliberated to say, “Actually, what we need is a resolution that authorises all necessary measures to protect the civilian population,” going well beyond a no-fly zone, because a no-fly zone would not have been effective in protecting the civilian population. That was the resolution that we then all got behind, those of us who were supporting it and, somewhat to the astonishment of many observers, carried it.

In fact, I was told in this Committee, not by its current members, that that was impossible. I remember a member of this Committee saying, “Your chances of getting this resolution are”—and he held up his fingers like this—“zero.” A few days later, we had the resolution.

Q276 Chair: Is that because you had given a private assurance to the Russians that the terms of the resolution would exclude regime change?

Lord Hague: Well, we would not have been discussing with the Russians or anyone that we would not have regime change in the resolution, because as I mentioned to Mr Baron—

Q277 Chair: You would not have got the resolution.

Lord Hague: We would not have got that resolution.

Q278 Chair: But the Russians then acceded to a resolution, which you are claiming had our leaders saying by the middle of April, “Gaddafi’s got to go in order to protect civilians.” Yet, that is a resolution that you could not have got in terms a month earlier. So was something privately said to the Russians to get them to accede to that resolution?

Lord Hague: No, we certainly did not say to the Russians, “We are not going to say that Gaddafi must go.” After all, it is highly likely that western democracies will say that, whatever is going on in UN resolutions or military action, a leader engaged in butchering his own people has to go. It would be quite surprising if we said anything else. We did not say to the Russians, “No, we are not going to call for Gaddafi to go.” We debated the terms of the resolution, and that a resolution authorising all necessary measures was necessary in such a

desperate situation. As you know, Russia decided to abstain, probably to their subsequent regret.

Chair: I apologise for interrupting, Mr Baron.

Q279 Mr Baron: Not at all. Would you accept, Lord Hague, that there were reservations expressed by the Russians, and perhaps others such as the African Union, that perhaps the terms of resolution 1973 had been exceeded? Were you aware of those concerns expressed at the time, during the course of our intervention?

Lord Hague: Oh yes. Certainly, concerns were expressed, including by members of the UN Security Council, that we were going beyond 1973. On the other hand, many members of the Security Council thought we were absolutely fulfilling our responsibilities in resolution 1973. There was an entirely understandable difference of view about that, but certainly the view of all of us on the National Security Council, based on legal advice from the Attorney General and others, was that we were within the terms of resolution 1973 in what we were doing.

Q280 Mr Baron: Moving on, do you think that because, in your words, the intervention was about protecting civilians and not about regime change, there was a lack of post-conflict reconstruction, planning, security and nation building afterwards?

Lord Hague: No, because I do not accept the premise of Mr Baron's question. In my view—the Committee may disagree—what has happened is quite different from Iraq. On Iraq, depending on what a long-awaited report eventually says, there is general consensus that there was a lack of post-conflict planning. Here, there was a lot of planning, but lack of ability to implement it because of the condition of Libya and the lack of stable institutions and capabilities there afterwards. I don't think in this case it would be fair to say that there was a lack of planning.

The prime concern of the meetings of the Libya Contact Group, which involved dozens of countries—it met in London, Doha and Rome and went on in official form for a long time—was planning for Libya afterwards. Those meetings were not supervising the military intervention. The stabilisation response team, in which DFID played such a leading role, was deployed into Libya while the fighting was still going on and coming up with recommendations. It was there in May 2011 and coming up with recommendations. I don't know whether the Committee has taken evidence from the then DFID Secretary of State, but it had a great deal of plans for what was going to happen in Libya after the conflict.

Q281 Mr Baron: Can I suggest, Lord Hague, that there is a difference between planning and actual implementation?

Lord Hague: Yes, that is my point.

Q282 Mr Baron: So why did it turn into such a mess? Did we simply not understand events on the ground? Planning in Whitehall might be one thing, but events on the ground must be understood. Why did it turn out to be such a mess?

Lord Hague: That must be a crucial question and is what former Ministers must turn their minds to. I think there were several things that did not work out as we hoped. First,

entirely legitimately and for good reasons, the world turned to Libyan leadership and UN conduct of the programme of assistance. On reflection, the UN programme was not prescriptive enough and I think the Committee has heard some evidence on this from Sir Dominic Asquith. I read it and very much agree with it. That UN assistance was very strong in some areas, such as holding elections, and weaker in other areas, such as policing, which turned out to be crucial. Again, there was a lot of planning, but the UN did not feel or did not have the capability to be forceful and prescriptive enough in implementing those plans.

The second thing, which is a major point for future interventions, is the leadership of the Opposition, the National Transitional Council, which was very experienced and respected—I certainly formed a very high opinion of them as I worked with them during the conflict—and included people such as Mahmoud Jibril and Abdul Jalil who was president of the NTC. These people disappeared from the scene very quickly.

Q283 Chair: It was our policy that they should. We set up a political process to change things in extremely short order, to the bemusement of the Libyan population about the democracy that was being thrust upon them, and then we saw this admirable leadership disappear, didn't we?

Lord Hague: Well, Mr Baron was asking me what might have gone wrong and I am telling you. By the way, I don't think—

Q284 Chair: I am pointing the finger. You are saying, "This went wrong," and I am saying that it was our fault.

Lord Hague: Well, on that, actually, it was a broader, collective one, because certainly the Libyan leaders thought to have those elections in 2012 was the right thing to do. There is a major issue, for interventions in the future where there has been a fall of a regime, as to how quickly elections are held. I think one of the lessons of this is not that there was a lack of planning. It is that a transition takes much longer than we tend to think in the 21st century.

Q285 Mr Baron: May I suggest that, with respect, there is more to it than that? I would be interested in your view, but I think it reveals a lack of understanding of events on the ground about how a coalition against a common enemy, once that enemy is removed, can splinter into 100 militias, which makes any post-conflict planning—let alone implementation—very difficult. I come back to the central point that I put to Dr Fox: did we really understand what was happening on the ground? Did we understand the extent to which Islamic extremists were on the rebels' side? Why did we not pick up on that more? That realisation that you were dealing with a very fragmented situation might have helped when it came to the implementation.

Lord Hague: I think we had a parallel exchange to this in my previous evidence to the Committee and my point then was that the Libyans themselves did not understand the situation on the ground. Colonel Gaddafi and his intelligence service had no idea what was about to happen. So they, with all their knowledge of every tribe, town and city, did not know what was about to hit them.

Q286 Mr Baron: Should that not have been a lesson to us that perhaps we should think twice before intervening?

Lord Hague: The choice on intervention is going back to the broader question. Foreign policy and decisions of this kind are a choice between unpalatable alternatives. Of course, when you start a military intervention, you are taking a step into the unknown. Very few military actions in history have had a certain course once embarked on. But, on the other hand, as we discussed when I came to the Committee before, we had to make a decision about what to do in the face of the threat to Benghazi, and the possibility—indeed, the stated intention—that the Gaddafi Government would kill large numbers of people.

Q287 Mr Baron: But, as Dr Fox said, one of the lessons surely has to be that you have got to focus on clearly defined and achievable objectives. If we are saying now that we had no idea how it was going to turn out because there were too many variables, that surely questions the initial intervention.

Lord Hague: No, I do not think it does. I have stood and placed wreaths at the Srebrenica memorial and at the Rwanda memorial, with thousands of dead bodies underneath me. When you do that, you have many thousands of bodies underneath your feet because in each case the world did nothing when thousands of people were being slaughtered—in Rwanda, hundreds of thousands.

When you are in office facing this situation, that is what you have to think about. Are you going to let that happen again? The Committee has heard from what I would think of as the armchair generals who say, “Actually, it wouldn’t have happened.” Well, what decision would they have made in this situation? It certainly looked like it was going to happen, and the Libyans and the Arab League thought it was going to happen.

Chair: We have a less than armchair general this afternoon—Lord Richards.

Q288 Daniel Kawczynski: Lord Hague, thank you for coming again before our Committee. In April 2015, you discussed Libya on the “Daily Politics”, when you said, “It’s in a terrible state today...I’m not arguing it’s a triumph of post-conflict planning.” Is that still your view? What went wrong?

Lord Hague: Yes, it is in a terrible state, although of course this very day a Government of national accord has finally been formed. Let’s hope it makes some progress. That is the news from Tripoli this morning.

Q289 Chair: The first Deputy Prime Minister has already resigned from the Government.

Lord Hague: It’s a rocky start. It’s some way further forward than yesterday is all that could modestly be said, I think. Of course, matters in Libya are in a terrible state, but the point I was making to Mr Baron is that we have to be careful not to think, “It’s another Iraq”. The problems are different from Iraq. The problem here is not that a lot of people did not think about the post-conflict at the time, it is that, unlike in Iraq, they did not have the power to implement what was decided, or what was planned for after the conflict. In Iraq, it seems that we did not have the plans, even though we had the power. In Libya, we had plenty of plans, but no power to implement them.

Q290 Daniel Kawczynski: Why was the post-conflict stabilisation and reconstruction process co-ordinated by the United Nations rather than those countries that had participated in the original bombing campaign? Do you think that the United Nations in its current structure and format would have had the adequate funding and skills to do this in Libya?

Lord Hague: This is a key point for the future. Why was the UN the place for this leadership? Well, there are many quite obvious arguments: the UN has the legitimacy; it has the involvement of the broadest possible range of nations; it has all the agencies that are responsible for so many different aspects of what needed doing in Libya. Of course, since there had been many controversies about the Libyan intervention, trying to get the whole world working together on Libya through a UN process has obvious attractions. The combination of democratically elected leadership in Libya and a UN-led programme of support has a legitimacy—it is hard to argue with on grounds of legitimacy—but, as I was starting to argue a few moments ago, it is a very important question for the future as to whether that is always the best route. It has the legitimacy but it does not necessarily have the best chance of success. It could be that a coalition of the willing working on Libyan stabilisation and reconstruction might have been more effective than a UN-led process. If we were doing this again, I think that would be a major point to consider.

Q291 Daniel Kawczynski: Turning to the UK response, what is your assessment of the effectiveness of the stabilisation unit in planning for post-conflict Libya?

Lord Hague: I think, as I said, that they did a lot of planning—they were there in May, when the conflict was still going on. I think I met some of them when I visited Benghazi in June 2011, and the conflict was still raging. I met some of them out there doing an excellent job. They were focused then on supporting civil society, on how security forces would be constructed in the future, and the plans that they produced ranged across police, technical expertise, mine clearance, public financial management, Government planning in general—the ministerial responsibility for this, as I say, was with DIFD, but all these things were part of their plans and work, and that is why I say, do not mistake the inability to implement plans with the absence of plans. Do not confuse those two things would be my advice to the Committee.

Q292 Daniel Kawczynski: Do you think that the stabilisation unit understood Libya effectively enough in terms of the nature of the country and its tribal society? It is a country I visited many times before the revolution and I was very conscious of its tribal nature, yet I heard from leading experts here that they perceived it not to be a tribal society. How would you respond to that?

Lord Hague: These would not be people who had spent years studying Libya and they would not, in general, have the knowledge of having travelled around Libya that Mr Kawczynski would have had. Their expertise is in stabilisation in many different situations around the world. Remember, they were working on the basis that the plans, the advice that they were working on could be implemented by an elected Libyan Government with UN support: that is the model that we are talking about here. It is therefore up to that Libyan Government to cope with the internal politics, the tribes, the different regions of Libya. They were working on what needed doing technically. My view—some years distant from it now and it wasn't my responsibility—and my general impression was that they did a good job.

Q293 Daniel Kawczynski: Finally, in terms of post-conflict reconstruction of Libya, it was a relatively well-off country before the revolution. Are there any lessons we can learn from the fact that it seemed to be quite difficult to help utilise some of those Libyan resources in those early vital stages of reconstruction?

Lord Hague: Yes, there are. It is a naturally rich country, particularly given its small population, but you can only utilise those resources if you have a functioning state. Here we go back again to the very good evidence that Sir Dominic Asquith gave you. He was really experiencing this on the ground as the British ambassador—2012 was probably an important time in the security situation. The decision by Libyan leaders then—they probably felt they had no alternative—to involve militias in trying to stabilise the security of the state, rather than progressively exclude militias from one city and then another city, which would have been an alternative model, meant that the state's security in order to mobilise its resources was never there. That has been the problem.

Q294 Chair: Let us turn to the transition to democracy, 2011 to 2012. Was it conceivably reasonable to expect a country with no political experience, no politicians, no civil society—despite the help of the stabilisation unit focusing on it, perhaps unsurprising because they did not appear to understand the tribal nature of Libyan society at all—how on earth did we expect this place to become a functioning democracy in nine months? Surely it was a terrible misappreciation that we did.

Lord Hague: If it was a misappreciation, it was one shared by most of the Libyan leaders. While I have a lot of sympathy with your question, Mr Chairman, the previous question on this subject rather suggested that this was all foisted on them by democratic western politicians. I do not remember that being the atmosphere at all. They wanted to hold elections—they were under internal pressure to do so—understandably, because if there were many different factions that have come together in a revolution, they then want an election as soon as possible afterwards. This is the natural feeling, the natural mechanism. The talks in Syria now focus on elections taking place at an early stage. I think this is a key point, because—

Q295 Chair: But Syria is rather different to Libya, with respect, is it not?

Lord Hague: Well, it might be even more difficult to hold elections. This is my point.

Q296 Chair: The nature of Syrian society is different to Libyan society in terms of their experience of at least a nominal electoral process that runs around, obviously from time to time electing Ba'athist candidates in large numbers.

Lord Hague: I think very nominal.

Q297 Chair: But there is, at least, a process with which people are familiar, which was not exactly the case in Libya.

Lord Hague: I don't think Syrians have a lot more experience of democracy than Libyans, really. There was an expectation and a strong intention among the Libyan leaders to have elections as soon as they could. This Committee is presumably looking for what lessons

can be learned from events in Libya. One of the things I would do differently if I was doing it again, is not avoid the intervention, because I think that was the right thing to do, but my advice to those Libyan transitional leaders would be to take it longer. You have to have a slower process than you might be envisaging, or some of the world might be asking you for, before you have elections and a fresh Government.

Q298 Chair: Did you note the success of the radical Islamic candidates in those elections in 2012 out of the 120 supposedly independently selected?

Lord Hague: There was quite a mixture. Certainly, there was success for radical Islamist candidates, although it depends how you define those. As you know, Mr Chairman, there is a very wide range of definitions that can be given to different candidates in a country such as Libya. Some commentators suggested that there was a narrow majority for different liberal blocs, but in fact it proved very difficult to mobilise that majority, so stronger Islamist forces were able to assert themselves.

Q299 Chair: Isn't the danger that they might be the majority?

Lord Hague: Do we believe in democracy or not? I think that it is right that elections are held; my point is that, probably, elections should have been held on a longer timetable.

Q300 Mr Hendrick: Lord Hague, you will have heard me say earlier that Libya now is close to being a failed state, and large parts of its territory are controlled by ISIL. I asked Dr Fox if he felt any responsibility for that. I won't ask you the same question, because I heard you say earlier that you felt that there were unpalatable choices to be made between taking action and saving people in Benghazi; and hoping, as you and we hoped, that you could get stable government, albeit with partners who themselves are falsely under an impression that they can implement effective government. Given that choice and where we sit today, do you still feel that it is the right choice, given the probably thousands of people who have died since then and the mess that there is now in Libya?

Lord Hague: Yes, the answer is that I do think it was the right choice to make the military intervention—to pass the UN resolution and respond to that. I would make two points additional to what Dr Fox said. One is that the responsibility for the state of Libya today rests with Colonel Gaddafi, in power for 40 years with hollowed-out institutions, with no proper system of government and with a tyrannical dictatorship. That is what has caused the condition of Libya today. The longer that went on, the more there was going to be an explosion in the end. If he was still there today, well, then next year or the year after there would be the revolution in Libya. That is what has produced Libya's condition—an utter failure of government over four decades.

The other point I would add is that when it came to mid-March 2011, and we had to choose—indeed, the House of Commons chose by a large majority to intervene in Libya—we were not choosing then between a military intervention, with all its risks and pros and cons on one hand, and some stable, controlled Libya on the other hand. We were intervening because it was becoming a failed state, and because it already had a civil war going on. This is why I say that foreign policy is a choice between unpalatable alternatives. You do not know when you intervene what the outcome will be, but you do not know either what will

happen if you do not intervene, and that is why the House voted so overwhelmingly for action at that time.

Q301 Mr Hendrick: I was one of those who voted for action. Last week in the Liaison Committee, the Prime Minister said, “the Libyan people were given an opportunity” and that “that opportunity was not taken.” From what you have said today in terms of how out of touch what you call the Libyan leaders were at the time, were they really given an opportunity, or were they left to the devices and whims of foreign forces like ourselves and the French to throw everything up in the air and just hope things landed okay?

Lord Hague: I do not think I said the Libyan leaders were out of touch.

Mr Hendrick: You said that they were not as aware of—

Q302 Chair: They turned out to be out of touch. In a sense, they were recommending an enthusiasm for politics which produced—

Lord Hague: That would be your judgment about holding elections being a symptom of being out of touch.

Q303 Mr Hendrick: The way you presented it was as if to say—clearly people are grateful for the intervention and how it stopped what might have happened in Benghazi, but they would have wanted to give the impression, from the way in which they behaved, that they were in control of some sort of machinery of government, when in fact no machinery was there. What I am saying is: is it not the case that the Libyan people actually did not have the opportunity that the Prime Minister referred to, because the machinery of government was not there to help them implement what we would see as effective stabilisation?

Lord Hague: They had an opportunity in the elections of 2012, which produced the very mixed outcome that we have been talking about, so I think it is true to say that the Libyan people had an opportunity. But I think the problem here is that the very respected and effective people we worked with—Jalil and Jibril, as I mentioned—were out of office very quickly. As the Committee will well understand, it has been a big part of the debate in Libya, and continues to be, whether people who served in Gaddafi’s Administrations could ever be part of the future of Libya.

The political isolation law was passed in 2013, and one of the factors at work even in 2011-12 was pressure for people who had been associated in any way with Gaddafi not to go on into the democratic future of Libya. That was one of the arguments against Jibril, for instance. This is understandable in a country with such a strong feeling against Gaddafi in large parts of it, but it would have been better if that had been resisted, both by Libyan leaders and internationally, because they needed stable and experienced leadership, and any experienced leadership had had something to do with the Gaddafi Administration.

Q304 Mr Hendrick: Is that the experience from the de-Ba’athification of Iraq?

Lord Hague: Well, I suppose there is some parallel. Here, the pressure was really coming from within Libya, and it continues to do so—the hostility to Gaddafi-era figures serving in a new government. Actually, they did need some of those people, because in a

country with a small population, they were the only people who had ever run any aspect of government in the previous 40 years.

Q305 Yasmin Qureshi: I was one of the people who voted against the Libya intervention—I think there were about nine MPs—

Lord Hague: There were 13.

Q306 Yasmin Qureshi: Okay, 13. I thought I would make that declaration at the beginning. One reason I voted against it was that I foresaw exactly what would happen in Libya, and it did happen. That prompts the question: what kind of advice and information is being given to senior politicians in our country about different countries' individual circumstances? We seem to have had a disaster in Iraq. Afghanistan, as you know, was a secular one-state country until the late '70s; women were wearing miniskirts in Kabul. I mention that because there is an obsession in Europe now about the attire of Muslim women and what they should be wearing.

I will come to the question. With the proxy war being fought by the Russians, the Americans and everybody else, is it not clear when we were intervening in Libya, from the many people before us to tell us, that we just do not understand the Middle East and we should not be intervening militarily in these countries?

Lord Hague: There is a choice to be made. Those of us who have advocated interventions on several occasions should always respect this principled alternative point of view that they always go wrong. I don't think the Committee should think that there is a lack of debate in Government. As we discussed earlier, in the National Security Council at the time, there was a good exchange of views and an expression of caution: "Here are the risks." It would be wrong to think that Governments now, with the national security machinery in place, take these decisions without advice about what could go wrong, what the military risks are and so on. You still, at the end of that, have to make a judgment; to make a decision. You can argue, on the one hand, that interventions will always go wrong and it is better, whatever happens, to leave it be. On the other hand, there is a moral responsibility as well as a national interest argument. If you think slaughter is about to take place and you have the capability to prevent it, you should do something about it.

Q307 Chair: With the benefit of hindsight—having described why you behaved as you did in 2011 with the information you had then—given the information you have got now, would you have acted differently in 2011 and in the post-conflict period? Perhaps you can give us your recommendations for future British policy on Libya.

Lord Hague: Not differently in 2011; not differently in the military intervention, for the reasons I just gave. Faced with that situation again, virtually on the borders of Europe, we should take that decision again, to protect civilian life. I would wonder where the standards or morality of the western world had come to if we were not going to take decisions such as that. But there are good principled arguments on both sides of that.

Looking back at the post-intervention period, though, what I would recommend for the future—I referred to this in answering some of the Committee's questions—is that we

will need to understand that transition takes longer than we might think, and needs a more prescriptive approach, if it is possible to provide that.

If we think of what happened in the Balkans after conflict there. Bosnia and Herzegovina actually made considerable progress while there was a forceful High Representative, with the international community behind him, in Lord Ashdown. It has stalled ever since in its political progress, without that international prescriptive approach.

After the second world war, nobody imagined that the defeated countries that had been through all the trauma of defeat and their regimes collapsing, would rapidly move on into being mature democracies. It was a case of, “We will stay around as long as it takes to ensure they become mature democracies.”

My reflection on the Libyan intervention is that it needed more prescription after the intervention. Possibly, as I said in answer to Mr Kawczynski’s question, more through a coalition of the willing than through the UN, or at least through a much more effective UN approach, and a longer timetable for elections, at least for the transfer of power to an elected Government than we had at the time.

Q308 Chair: But the missing element here, with this advice about prescription, is an understanding of the society on which you are inflicting that prescription. I wonder whether some of the Stabilisation Unit papers prepared for you at the time did not appear to demonstrate an understanding of the nature of Libyan society. I have one point to make before asking Yasmin to ask the final question. On reflection, in light of conversations between Blair and Gaddafi that were made available to us recently, it is clear that Gaddafi was right about the nature of the opposition that he was generally facing in Libya, isn’t it?

Lord Hague: No, Chair.

Q309 Chair: I say that only to illustrate that our fault here has been not to listen to and understand Libya well enough. I challenge the idea that you can then come with an international prescription and impose it, except at a fearful price, which we have paid, for example, in Iraq.

Lord Hague: It either has to be an approach of “Trust the Libyans to be able to sort it out on their own,” or it is a more prescriptive approach. The Committee has been discussing the sad state of Libya today. The approach has largely relied on the Libyans sorting it out on their own. I am saying that in future situations we might want to consider that alternative.

Q310 Chair: It didn’t go that well in Afghanistan.

Lord Hague: The sad truth about interventions is that every country is different. That is why it is difficult, both for this Committee and for someone who has been in office, to come to absolute truths and iron-clad recommendations for every circumstance. They are all different, but these are reflections on the Libya situation. On your question about whether Gaddafi was right, the answer to that is no, or that there was an element or he was partly right.

Chair: On the narrow point about the Islamic nature of the opposition.

Lord Hague: Actually, the people we were working with in the National Transitional Council were predominantly not like that. They were people who wanted a free, democratic Libya. I spent many hours with people such as Mr Jalil, the president of the National Transitional Council. He was not looking for an Islamic Libya, and he was their leader. I think that was Gaddafi's caricature of the opposition, to try to get a deal with the West or provoke our intervention on his side. For the West to have been a party to dealing with Gaddafi when he was engaged in murdering many of his own citizens would have been outrageous.

Chair: That was not quite the point I was making.

Lord Hague: That was the alternative. Politics is a choice between alternatives.

Q311 Chair: The question is whether we understood what we were getting into.

Lord Hague: In answer to that, I make the point again that the Libyan leaders themselves did not have a deeper understanding of what was happening in their own country. Colonel Gaddafi had no idea what was going to happen to him, and the National Transitional Council probably did not have a good appreciation of what would happen in elections. If they did not know, it is probably wrong to expect somebody sitting in the backrooms of the Foreign Office or Vauxhall Cross to know better than they did.

Chair: Yasmin Qureshi, a final question.

Q312 Yasmin Qureshi: Lord Hague, you have probably heard members of the Committee allude to the fact that there are parts of Libya where Daesh now has a very strong presence, along with other what I would call vicious criminal groups which operate there. Many people think that one of the reasons why they have been allowed to flourish there is precisely the instability of the country. There is a similar situation in Iraq and Afghanistan and similar countries. Should we not think about these things and what we leave behind when we go into these countries, and think about what the instability fomented, and its repercussions? Because of what Daesh is doing, you have the whole crisis in Syria and then the crisis here in Europe, because now everyone wants to shut up the doors. Could these things not be looked at?

Lord Hague: Of course we should think about what we leave behind, but my point is that there are entirely legitimate arguments on both sides of this divide. Of course it is possible to argue, looking across the Middle East and central Asia today, that where there has been intervention you have extremism. But it is also possible to argue that without intervention there was extremism; 9/11 happened, and the rise of al-Qaeda happened in Afghanistan, before western intervention in Afghanistan.

Yasmin Qureshi: Hang on. Can I just disturb you? Russia and America were fighting their proxy war in Afghanistan. That is what led to the extremism.

Chair: That was the point I was tempted to go to, but it is an inquiry all of its own.

Lord Hague: It is an inquiry all of its own. I will simply say that there is an argument the other way. The Committee will have to consider what has happened in other deliberations.

Chair: I take Yasmin's point. We were intervening there from 1979.

Q313 Yasmin Qureshi: That is right. And then years later, we got al-Qaeda.

Lord Hague: That is not the only example. There is the record of not intervening until recently in the Syria conflict, which has not been a success. Syria became a failed state without western military intervention. Sadly, these arguments probably do not fall into a convenient box where intervention is always right or always wrong. It is making the decision in the individual case that is the tricky task of the political leaders of the time.

Chair: A very good note on which to end. Thank you for your time.