



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

HC 520

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Members present:

John Baron (Chair); Ann Clwyd; Mr Mark Hendrick; Mr Adam Holloway; Daniel Kawczynski; Yasmin Qureshi; Andrew Rosindell; Nadhim Zahawi

Questions 449-585

Examination of Witnesses

Witness: **Jonathan Powell**, UK Special Envoy to Libya, gave evidence.

Q449 Chair: Mr Powell, welcome. As you know, this is part of an inquiry entitled “Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK’s future policy options”. Thank you for joining us. We have 45 minutes before the second stage of this evidence session, so you will be aware of the time restriction, but would you like to say anything by way of a brief opening statement?

Jonathan Powell: No; I suggest we get straight into the questions.

Q450 Chair: Fantastic, thank you.

Exactly what are your mandate and objectives? You were very open with *The Guardian* in saying that you were pleased that you were not being paid by results. In our evidence session this morning, not a particularly optimistic picture was painted of the situation in Libya. What exactly is your mandate? What are your objectives? What would success look like from your point of view?

Jonathan Powell: Thank you very much for inviting me. I was appointed in 2014 along with David Satterfield, an American envoy. The objective at that time was, rather than just talking to people in politics often outside the country, to try to reach out to the real power brokers on the ground—people who were there and controlled things.

It started off relatively promisingly. We managed to get the sides together and get them to agree a set of 10 principles. We managed to get them to agree an agenda for talks. But unfortunately, what happened then was that one side thought it would win the election

and was therefore less keen on sharing power; it also thought that General Haftar might make some progress. So that exercise did not work and then we had the military intervention and after that Libya Dawn. The American envoy resigned.

What I have been concentrating on since then, along with the UN, is trying to support the UN, particularly on the security track. If you remember, when Bernardino León was appointed UN envoy he was going to have two parallel tracks: a political track, and behind that a military track that was working on the militias and trying to encourage them to give over control to an army and form a new, proper security force.

I was focusing particularly on that security track and I still am; sadly, it has fallen well behind what has happened on the political track. It needs to go further. We need a ceasefire in Benghazi, for example. Those are the sorts of issues I am working on. Success, obviously, would be success overall in Libya—success for the UN, success for the international community. I am just contributing a small bit to that, focused on this security track.

Q451 Chair: Is there a plan B with regard to the politics of the situation? In this morning's evidence session, we heard that there is not much optimism out there with regard to the politics. May I ask you something else, if you don't mind, Mr Powell? You bring a wealth of experience to the table. Your role in Northern Ireland is well recognised; you wanted to speak with everyone, and that was probably the right approach there. But there are those who say that you undermined the House of Representatives in the elections of 2014 by still talking to the GNC when they decided they were going to stay on. What is your response to that?

Jonathan Powell: Sure—let me take the second bit first. Actually, I have never met Abusahmain, the leader of the GNC or indeed the GNC as the GNC since it stood down. What happened, if you remember, was that the UN decided that talks were between the HOR and the GNC. It was actually the UN envoy and Michael Aron, the ambassador at the time, who were working on that political track; I was on the security track.

There is a wider question, of course: should we have backed one side or the other? What we might call the Joe Walker-Cousins thesis is that we should have thrown all our support behind one group in the hope that it would win. Unless we were prepared to put real military forces into that, it was very unlikely that one side would win. There is no military solution that I can see in Libya. You would have ended up simply being on one side of a civil war that would have gone on for a very long time and in which Daesh would have had a real chance of prospering—even more and even sooner than it has now. I must say that not so much me but no one much bought into the “back one side” thesis. When you look at it, it seems like something that you would not want to pursue.

Q452 Chair: May I press you? You were still talking to the GNC at a time when the elections, in summer 2014, I think, needed all the credibility they could garner, given that the turnout was certainly less than 20%—18%, I think. Do you not feel that still talking to the GNC at that crucial point undermined the HOR and might have given greater credibility to the GNC at the time? Really, they should have said, “We've had the elections—time for us to fold.”

Jonathan Powell: I say again that I did not speak to the GNC.

Q453 Chair: If you don't mind my asking, you had no communication with the GNC at all—at any level?

Jonathan Powell: Not as the GNC or with the leader of the GNC. I met some members of the GNC, as, of course, did others. The point is really that the UN was the body that decided it was going to try to do a negotiation between the GNC on the one side and the HOR on the other; whether or not I thought that was a good idea, that was what the international community did.

I was actually the first person to get to Tobruk after the HOR was established there. The problem with the HOR—I made it clear at the time that we totally regarded it as the legitimate body; it had been elected freely and fairly and no one contested its free and fair election—was that it was not inclusive. A large chunk of the country had not sent their representatives to the body once it set up in Tobruk, rather than in Tripoli or Benghazi.

The second point is that its writ did not run across the country—it was sitting on a boat off the shore at Tobruk and couldn't actually rule—so we had to come to some sort of power-sharing arrangement. As I said at the beginning, the first initiative we took before the elections was to try to get to some idea of power-sharing. If people had been prepared to share power, rather than trying to get all of it, we might be in happier place than we are now.

Q454 Chair: You briefly mentioned the UN. Can you just specify how your role as special envoy relates to the diplomacy conducted by our ambassador—who will be appearing in the second panel of this evidence session, as you are aware? Also—I'll tag this on before opening the questioning up to the rest of the Committee—isn't part of the problem that we have too many UN special envoys running around the place, and that the UN is therefore not recognised as having one voice? When I last looked, there must have been about 10 special envoys.

Jonathan Powell: Quite a lot of them have fallen by the wayside. There are a few surviving, but they are like dinosaurs: they have mainly died out. When I was appointed as a special envoy, and when the Americans appointed one, everyone else appointed one and we ended up with 14, or even 20 at one stage. But bit by bit they have gone. I am almost the only one remaining.

Chair: Last man standing.

Jonathan Powell: Yes, last dinosaur standing. I am not sure that is a major problem. The proclivity of envoys is not really an issue any more. What is interesting now is that it is the ambassadors who sit in Tunis with the UN, working very closely with it, and they were in the talks in Morocco before that. I always regarded it as my job not to interfere with what the UN is trying to do or to try to duplicate what it does, and not to try to duplicate what our ambassadors do—Peter now, and before him Michael Aron. They have the job of leading on the political front. They are the ones on the ground in Tunis and they are the ones who speak Arabic, so they have that expertise.

As you have said, my expertise is in dealing with armed groups and trying to get very recalcitrant groups to do the right thing, and that is what I am trying to focus on, but in co-

ordination with Peter, whom I meet and speak with on the phone regularly, as I do with the UN—Martin Kobler, and, before him, Bernardino León.

Q455 Nadhim Zahawi: You mentioned your relationship with the US ambassador. There are reports that Daesh-ISIL have now moved most of their commanders out of Raqqa and Mosul in preparation for rebuilding a much stronger operation out of Sirte in Libya. When you reflect on the decisions you took with the US, are there areas where you think you could have done better, or where you held back because there were reports that the Pentagon did have plans to deal with Daesh in Libya but they were awaiting the signature of the US President, which as yet is not forthcoming? Are there areas where you think you could have done more, or where things could have been done better, because you were frustrated, and how did that relationship work with the US?

Jonathan Powell: My relationship with my opposite number, the US envoy, was very specifically about the negotiations; it was not about Daesh—at that stage Daesh was not a major problem. I think that the reason why Daesh was able to operate in Libya was the vacuum created by having no Government; that is what it has filled. If I regret anything, it is the inability to get to a power-sharing Government back in 2014. Had we got a power-sharing Government that we could have fully backed and whose writ ran across the country, we would not have had the problem of Daesh.

Daesh's growth is not intrinsic or natural in Libya itself, unlike in Mesopotamia, where it had some roots in Sunni discontent. There really aren't any discontents for it to hold on to in Libya. It seems to me that there is no reason to wait for a counter-ISIL strategy for what happens politically, because there are perfectly good ways of moving forward now. But I am glad to say that I am not responsible for counter-ISIL strategy; I am a special envoy focused on talks. I think that you are seeing the Minister next, who will be much better placed than I am to comment on that.

Q456 Nadhim Zahawi: Are there other areas in your sphere of responsibility where you felt frustrated either by having so many envoys, or where the relationship with the US could have helped more?

Jonathan Powell: No. My relationship with my opposite number was excellent. The US has worked very closely with European countries. I don't think that has really been the problem. I think the problem has been that in Libya we have had a civil war in all but name, and the resulting vacuum has been filled by Daesh. That is what one would expect.

Q457 Chair: If I could just come in on the back of that answer, Mr Powell, one of the criticisms levied in this morning's evidence session was that the mistake that the international community has made generally—no fingers were pointed—is that we did not stand by the democratically elected Government, the HOR, in the summer of 2014 and that instead, once we released that they were as weak as they were, we ran around trying to negotiate with militias.

In one respect that undermined the HOR, although perhaps some would argue that it just reflected the reality on the ground. Do you think it was a fair criticism that we should have stood behind those democratic elections, imperfect though they may have been, rather than

trying to broker a deal between different militias when there are nearly 2,000 of them, according to the latest evidence?

Jonathan Powell: No, I don't think that is an accurate reflection of what happened. As I said, I was the first person to get to Tobruk when the Government was established there. I went on TV and said, "We recognise the free and fair elections that have taken place; this is a legitimate Parliament."

As I said, the problem with the Parliament was that it was not inclusive. It did not have the representatives from, for example, Misrata—a very major city. It did not have many of the representatives from the west, and its writ did not run in the country. It was sitting for a while on a boat and, if not, in a building on the very edge of the country and it could not affect what was happening elsewhere.

We could have left the Parliament there and said we supported it, or we could have sent troops in and supported it militarily, but there was no appetite for that, so the alternative really was to try to get to a Government that could function; otherwise, we would end up with the vacuum that we have ended up with, filled by Daesh. What we wanted to get to was a Government whose writ ran across the country. That is why we were looking for a national unity Government, a Government that had genuine power sharing.

Q458 Daniel Kawczynski: Mr Powell, you mentioned Joe Walker-Cousins. He is somebody with whom I have had extensive dialogue about this issue. His attitude, and mine, is—to take you back to what the Chairman was saying—that the closest thing that we had to a democratically elected Government was Tobruk, even if it may have been on a ship off the coast of Tobruk. We did not support them, and you are saying, "Well, there was no appetite for military intervention, and even if we had intervened, it would have been very difficult and precarious."

But our military intervention was decisive in the revolution, when it started: we eliminated Gaddafi. So—to take you back to that question—why could we not have intervened at that juncture, taken a stance and said, "Look. Tobruk, Haftar, we're going to lift the arms embargo. We're going to give you the weapons that you need to get rid of these terrorists and take over the running of the country"?

Jonathan Powell: First, I should pay tribute to Joe. Joe was very brave in Benghazi and deserves a lot of credit for what he did while he was there. I must say I don't agree with his thesis. The House of Representatives was freely and fairly elected, as I said. It did not, however, represent the whole country, so if we had thrown all our weight behind it, we would have been backing one part of the country, not the whole country.

If we had gone even further and backed Haftar, who had set himself up as the commander in the east—if you remember, first he tried a coup in the west of the country. Then he moved over to the east of the country and set himself up running a campaign called Campaign Dignity in Benghazi and later was endorsed by the House of Representatives, sometime after it was elected. If we had thrown ourselves in behind him, we would have found ourselves, very much as he has found himself, bogged down in Benghazi.

Haftar has been fighting there for nearly two years. He has promised that he will finish the fight within one week, two weeks, three weeks ever since and has been unable to do so—fighting actually a very small guerrilla force—let alone been able to advance on the rest of the country, as he said. He has been able to get his hands on weapons and ammunition, and that is why he has been able to carry on fighting. So I think throwing ourselves behind Haftar would have been—in retrospect, as well as seen at the time—a very, very bad idea indeed.

Q459 Daniel Kawczynski: Right, but may I press you briefly on the arms embargo? My understanding is that there is still an arms embargo, which is obviously being policed by the UN. Would you—not approve of a lifting of the arms embargo—do you think it should still stand?

Jonathan Powell: The arms embargo should obviously be lifted once we have a Government of national unity in place. This Government is still finding its way through the House of Representatives process, but once it is endorsed, I don't think there will be any difficulty in having the arms embargo lifted. What no one wanted to do was provide arms and ammunition for both sides in a civil war. We did not want to inflame the civil war still further. As I said, Haftar has not had any difficulty getting weapons, despite the arms embargo.

Q460 Yasmin Qureshi: I want to ask you about the effectiveness of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya. Would you say that it has been effective and, if not, what could be the reasons for that?

Jonathan Powell: The UN has been through phases. When I first started working on Libya, it had Tarek Mitri, a Lebanese special envoy, who had decided to take a position of being very hands-off—standing back and trying to let the political process work out. That was not successful. It did not lead to any understanding before we got to the elections of power-sharing or how the future system would work.

Tarek Mitri was replaced by Bernardino León, the Spanish special envoy, who took a very activist approach and went to great lengths to try to get the parties together. He adopted this approach that you were talking about of the GNC on one side and the House of Representatives on the other. That was accepted by both the GNC and the House of Representatives. It allowed them to come into the political process, and by a huge amount of effort and pressure he managed to get the two sides to negotiate with each other, and he deserves a lot of credit for that.

In the end, Bernardino could not bring that to a conclusion or an inclusive agreement before he had to leave, and he handed it on to Martin Kobler, the new German special envoy. He is trying a different approach. It is perhaps a slower or more methodical approach, which is probably the right approach for the moment. I would be very reluctant to blame the special envoys. I think they tried extremely hard in very difficult circumstances and made some progress.

Q461 Yasmin Qureshi: I was not trying to blame any special envoys; I was more concerned about the effectiveness of the United Nations support mission. The envoys are just one person

from one particular country. There has been a suggestion that one of the reasons, especially initially, why the UN has not been effective is that the member states who have the power to carry out things have not been fully engaged in the process. That lack of full engagement is the reason why it has not been so effective. As you said, the special envoys only represent a particular state.

Jonathan Powell: If you look back at the earlier period before I was involved, there is certainly a question about how far national Governments should have been involved relative to the UN. The UN, from the time of Bernardino onward, was much more inclusive. They had the ambassadors working with them. By that stage, they had been expelled from Tripoli, so they were all housed together in Tunis and were working together quite closely.

I do not think one can say that the Governments were not involved then. They were intimately plugged into what the UN was doing and were supporting what the UN was doing. If you are looking at the wider role of UNSMIL in terms of humanitarian and other support, I do not have visibility of that, so I could not comment on that. I am focused on the negotiating aspect of it, not the wider aspect, but you have the ambassador here later who could comment on that.

Q462 Chair: Just a quick follow-on: do you think Bernardino León acted impartially? You will be aware that he is being paid something like £1,000 a day by the UAE. He has been party to the factions within Libya, without going into it in more detail. Was he an effective UN envoy?

Jonathan Powell: Yes, I think he was impartial. It all ended rather unfortunately with the leaked emails and all that and certainly with the impression of bias, which allowed some people who wanted to reject the agreement to find a way of doing so, but it would be unfair on him to say that he had not handled things impartially up to then. He worked tirelessly for more than a year on this.

Chair: Thank you.

Q463 Andrew Rosindell: Mr Powell, obviously in Northern Ireland you had a reputation for talking to everyone. Have you done the same in Libya with all the different groups?

Jonathan Powell: I wrote a book called “Talking to Terrorists”, which I do not do in Libya, because I am working for the British Government. I do not sit down with Ansar al-Sharia or Daesh—I would not, even if I was able to—nor do I think it would be a good idea in the context of Libya.

I do think it is very sensible to try to make the agreement as inclusive as possible. One of the things that we have learned from Northern Ireland and in many of the other conflicts that I work on around the world is that unless you have an inclusive agreement, you will find it very difficult to make it last. The danger in Libya is that if you come to an agreement with just one or two parties, rather than a wide spectrum across the country, it will be very hard to make it enduring.

Q464 Andrew Rosindell: Have you had any contact or communication, even informally, with anyone who could represent al-Qaeda or Islamic State?

Jonathan Powell: No, I have not talked to anyone who could conceivably represent ISIS or Ansar al-Sharia, which is the home-grown terrorist group. I have dealt with a wide spectrum of people from Haftar through to the Islamist side on the other side in Tripoli, because I think that that is the right thing to do, but I have not dealt with anyone who could be regarded as a terrorist or as a listed terrorist group.

Q465 Andrew Rosindell: Tell us your view of the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya. When we as a Committee went there in the last Parliament, we had quite an extensive meeting with members of the Muslim Brotherhood, and many assurances were given. What is your view?

Jonathan Powell: My view of the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya is that it is not at all analogous to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or even in Tunisia. It is a far weaker body; it has far less support. One of the interesting things at the moment is that it is one of the most prominent moderate voices at the Tripoli end of the equation. It is calling on everyone to support the Government of national unity and is breaking completely with Abusahmain and the GNC and taking a very strong line for what the international community wants.

Paradoxically, the Muslim Brotherhood, which was seen as a great Islamist threat, is now seen as a sort of moderate centre, rather than anything else. It is slightly dangerous to take the Muslim Brotherhood in somewhere like Libya and say that it must be the same as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or Tunisia; it isn't at all. As far as I can tell, most of its leaders appear to come from Dublin, because they would always say to me, "Could you pass on my good wishes to Bertie Ahern?"

Q466 Andrew Rosindell: Do you detect any links, or any liaison, between Islamic State and other Islamic groups in Libya, or are Islamic State just acting on their own?

Jonathan Powell: Islamic State is a complicated thing in Libya. I don't fully understand how it works, how it is associated with Islamic State in Mesopotamia, and other bits and pieces. It clearly has absorbed bits of Ansar al-Sharia, or a large part of Ansar al-Sharia, inside Libya itself. It clearly has recruited some young men who want to go into that kind of activity. It doesn't have alliances with any other parties, or even fighting groups as far as we can tell. For example, where it fights in Benghazi it tends to fight alone, not with the rest of the Shura Council, which represents the old February 17 forces and the Ansar al-Sharia forces. As far as we understand it, Daesh is fighting in two districts by itself and with its own separate supply routes.

In Derna, where Daesh was strong for a long time, it was kicked out of town by the local population and by some members of what we would consider an al-Qaeda group. They drove Daesh out of town and now have it in the mountains, where it is really suffering. As I said before, ISIS is an artificial growth in Libya. It hasn't grown up within Libya, but it has taken over some of the terrorist forces that were already there, and there are a good many foreigners—we don't know how many, or at least I don't know how many—from Tunisia, Syria and elsewhere who are fighting there.

Q467 Nadhim Zahawi: What effect did the diplomatic engagement with the General National Congress in Tripoli have on the House of Representatives? We have touched on that, but what was the effect of that engagement?

Jonathan Powell: The UN are the ones who started down that track. The interesting thing to me was that the House of Representatives did not object to it; they were the ones who went along with that approach of negotiating on that basis, because the GNC clearly was not legitimate, and the House of Representatives clearly was legitimate. They allowed themselves to be part of that negotiation.

I don't think it undermines the House of Representatives because at no stage did anyone move to recognise the GNC; it never gained any more international recognition, despite repeated efforts. So I don't think it undermined the legitimacy of the House of Representatives at all from that point of view, but it failed to get to an inclusive agreement. Ultimately, large elements of both the House of Representatives and the GNC refused to join the agreement.

Q468 Nadhim Zahawi: So it wasn't the UK or the US but the UN that authorised and drove that strategy?

Jonathan Powell: It was the UN. It was Bernardino León's approach to do that.

Q469 Nadhim Zahawi: You say that it didn't undermine, but you also said earlier that there was no appetite for military support to the HOR. That would have been a decision by London and Washington, right?

Jonathan Powell: London, Washington and other European powers that would have been prepared to come in and fight for it, yes.

Q470 Nadhim Zahawi: And therefore, if there was appetite for military support, you could have seen the HOR being supported and having the ability to be credible?

Jonathan Powell: The other alternative would have been regional powers, such as the Egyptians or the Gulfies, sending people in to fight for it, too. No one had the appetite to do that, nor do I think it would be a very good idea. The people in Libya are very resistant to foreign forces coming in, as we have seen.

Q471 Nadhim Zahawi: But it doesn't have to be just foreign forces coming in; it could be trainers, as we are doing in Iraq and other places. It is not necessarily boots on the ground, but if we had moved at the right time to support the legitimately elected HOR, we could have given it credibility.

Jonathan Powell: If you remember, we tried training them in Cambridge, with mixed results for the people of Cambridge, if not for the people who were trained. We were not able to train on the ground because it was too dangerous to send people in to train there. You could have done some bombing in support of them. Indeed, some unnamed powers from the region did so, but that didn't make much difference to the fighting, either. On the ground, it makes very little difference. In the kind of warfare that you see in Libya, between these very small groups, bombing is not going to be decisive.

Q472 Nadhim Zahawi: So basically what you are saying is that the international community did not really give the support required or, at least in its assessment, there was no more support that it could give, whether militarily or otherwise. Is that right? If not, what could that support have looked like?

Jonathan Powell: The Chairman was asking a bit earlier about a plan B and I think this is the answer to the question. If what we are doing at the moment fails, plan B is going to look very much like plan A: it is going to be going back and trying to get a Government that the whole country accepts. If you cannot get a Government that the whole country accepts, it is going to be very hard for that Government's writ to run across the country.

So when the House of Representatives was elected, again now and in between, we always fall back on the idea that you are going to have to get something that has the basic consent of the two halves of the country if it is going to rule. Any notion that we should have backed one side or the other, because it was a legitimate Parliament or whatever, would not have been successful in practical terms. That is the difficulty.

Q473 Nadhim Zahawi: You have touched on the regional powers and the Egyptians are clearly more engaged in Libya than they are in Syria. Are you seeing a move from the Egyptians or any other regional powers for a plan B or a plan C or whatever?

Jonathan Powell: No. The only thing that would be less wise than western forces going in would be Egyptian forces because of the history, so I do not think there is any appetite for that. In fact, the President of Egypt has been explicitly clear on that and I do not see any appetite from them, too. I fear that we are stuck with the Sisyphean task of trying to get this country to agree.

I would like to say that it is not like Syria or Iraq—it is not divided in the same way by ethnic or sectarian divisions. In principle it ought to be a much easier problem; it is largely about money and power. It should be possible for us to get to a solution and I remain medium-term optimistic that we will get there, but sometimes when people say, “It has to be done by tomorrow”, I think that if we think of our own examples such as Northern Ireland or anywhere else, we see that negotiations take a long time. It is not going to be fixed overnight. We have to be patient if we think we are going to get to a lasting result.

Q474 Nadhim Zahawi: I do not disagree, but the flip side of that is clearly that ISIL sees this as a huge opportunity and has moved in, so, somewhere along the line, something is wrong.

Jonathan Powell: As I said, I do not personally see why you should wait for there to be a political settlement before you can start making sure that action is taken on ISIS. There are a number of armed groups there sitting next to ISIS who are more threatened than we are and have the capacity to deal with it, but they need to be united and have a common cause if they are to do something.

If you look at the forces in Ajdabiya and Jadhra's oil facilities guard and the commanders in Benghazi—not Haftar, but the commanders actually in Benghazi—the Misrata militias and some of the militias in the south, you can perfectly easily see how one could pull together a coalition who is willing to take the action necessary on Daesh. We do not need to wait until there is a GNA; it could be done before.

Q475 Nadhim Zahawi: I can sense the urgency in your voice. You would like to see that happen quickly.

Jonathan Powell: I am not in charge of that policy.

Q476 Daniel Kawczynski: With regards to the GNA, the political agreement was signed on 17 December last year and our own Prime Minister's mantra every time I have challenged him on this issue on the Floor of the House is that we have to wait for a Government of national accord. Why hasn't it been constituted yet? What are the sticking points?

Jonathan Powell: Well, as I said, these circumstances—if you think about Northern Ireland, it took us nine years from the Good Friday Agreement to get it implemented. Hopefully it will not take as long in Libya to get to an agreement and have it implemented, but it will take a while.

They have run into a series of difficulties in that you have to come to agreement between fundamentally unreconciled peoples: people who want different things. The people in the east want Haftar in place and the people in the west want Haftar gone; the people in the east want certain jobs and the people in the west want certain jobs. It is going to have to be a very delicate task. They came up with a Government of 32 or 34 Members that was then voted down by the House of Representatives. They are now coming up with a smaller Government in the next few days—we expect them to come up with a Government of 12, which will then go back to a vote in the House of Representatives. These reasons are why it takes time.

Q477 Daniel Kawczynski: Does the accord that was signed in December have a time limit, or is there a sunset clause on it?

Jonathan Powell: To the best of my knowledge, there is no sunset clause. It is quite a lengthy document, but it has no sunset clause in it.

Q478 Daniel Kawczynski: It refers to holding elections within the next two years. Given the unpopularity of some of these elections in the past and the sporadic way in which they have taken place, do you believe that is reasonable or even possible to take place legitimately?

Jonathan Powell: Elections?

Daniel Kawczynski: Yes.

Jonathan Powell: I think the problem is a practical one. A number of people over the last year have suggested elections as the solution, somehow, but how can you have elections when you have got fighting going on in Benghazi and a huge division in the country? It would be almost impossible to have a proper election. That is the difficulty. First, you need to come to a settlement. As I stressed earlier, one of the dangers is that we end up just talking to people engaged in politics largely outside the country and not talking to those people who control the ground.

If we want to get to elections and to a settlement, we will have to come to some sort of agreement with those people who control things, even if it is just that they should give up that territory and move on, so we need to find a way of talking to them. That is why it is a shame that the security track was not able to keep up with the political track. Had it carried on just a bit behind the political track but in parallel, we would have had a greater chance of having made more rapid progress.

Q479 Daniel Kawczynski: Lastly, if the Government of national accord is not formed—worst-case scenario—what is plan B?

Jonathan Powell: The first question that will arise is what happens when the Government of national accord is voted on before the 15th, which I think is the new deadline that they are in the process of agreeing to. If the Government were to be voted down, we enter uncharted territory, because the agreement does not specify what happens in those circumstances if the Government is voted down again. The international community is certainly hoping that that Government will be voted for, because it will have met the criteria that the House of Representatives set.

If the GNA collapses altogether, then, as I said before, plan B will be very much like plan A. We would have to go back to the Skhirat agreement. We would have to try and reconstitute the various bodies that we are dealing with and carry on negotiating. I do not think there is a magic solution. A lot of people have spent a lot of time trying to think of some imaginative idea that could just solve this problem. So far, no one has come up with one.

Q480 Chair: If I can briefly follow up, you have quite rightly said that you have to negotiate with the power on the ground if we are going to move this situation forward. Perhaps talk of 2,000 militias is exaggerated, but there is no doubt that there are hundreds of militias in Libya, all with vested interests and all with a stake in the territory. That is perhaps what is slightly different from Northern Ireland, where the demarcation lines were a little more obvious. It is a herculean task to deal with the force on the ground when you have this disparate force with conflicting allegiances, isn't it?

Jonathan Powell: That is true, and one of the big problems in Libya is the lack of legitimacy. No one accepts anyone else has legitimacy, and they therefore cannot negotiate for them. It is a very atomised society, because it has not had institutions either under Gaddafi or, frankly, much before. So trying to build that sense of a national unity is very difficult indeed.

In terms of the militias, it is not quite so complicated because the civil war in 2014 broadly split the country into two, so you had all the militias on one side grouped together. You had Zintan and the Haftar forces versus the forces of Dawn and Misrata. Broadly speaking, the country was split in two, so you could talk between two groups. It has got more complicated now as time has gone on. There are more different groups, but again there is a broad spectrum of opinion. You could imagine that if you could get a settlement with the forces in Misrata and some of the more Islamist forces in Tripoli, and possibly even those inside Benghazi, and if you could get a settlement with the eastern tribes and with some of the southern tribes in Zintan, then you would be in a position to have a pretty stable Government with some sort of force behind it that could enforce its will across the country. That would be the ideal scenario. If these two tracks had worked—you have got the political bit and the security bit together—you might have come to a solution.

Q481 Chair: You have to be an optimist in your job.

Jonathan Powell: I work in eight countries around the world and in every single one of them you have to be an optimist or you would give up.

Q482 Chair: Following on very briefly, what has been evident in Libya since the revolution is that different groups have said, “No, we are not handing on power.” Why would the House of Representatives give up what little power they have, because it would not follow form with what happened previously, even if we could get the Government of national accord—or unity—into place?

Jonathan Powell: Under the agreement, the House of Representatives remained in place and had its role, so they would not be giving it up. Technically, they are already out of time. In October, their mandate ran out, so they have kind of walked over the cliff and are still walking on air at the moment. In a sense, the only thing that would give them continued legitimacy is going to be the agreement working, where they would have a role, the State Council would have a role, and the Government would have a role. That was the idea behind the agreement: to make sure no one had to give things up and to encourage everyone to get into it.

One of the problems with the agreement is that it is not as inclusive as Bernardino León had originally intended. He wanted to try and get in more members of the GNC, possibly even including Abusahmain and more people from the eastern side, including the supporters of Haftar. That was not possible in the agreement that was signed. I think that one of the wisest things that Martin Kobler has done is to try and keep the agreement open, so no doors have been slammed. People who want to join it are going to be free to join it if they wish to do so.

Q483 Ann Clwyd: While there is a lack of a stable Government in the country, do you think ISIL is simply going to flourish? You argue for patience on the one hand, but if we are patient, the lack of a stable Government is surely going to mean that ISIL is going to continue to fill that gap.

Jonathan Powell: Much the best way to deal with this is to have a stable Government whose writ runs across the country and unites those forces. Although that is not going to happen overnight, as I said earlier, it is possible to get military alliances that can start dealing with Daesh on the ground if we are willing and able to bring them together, and if we can get them to put some of their differences behind them and start encroaching on Sirte, in particular, where ISIS’s biggest expansion has been. Even if we don’t get to a GNA immediately, I don’t think it is completely hopeless. It is still possible to take steps to reduce ISIS’s reach in the country. It has been demonstrated in Derna, which has always been the strongest Islamist part of Libya. ISIS had a firm grip on it, but were kicked out of town by the local population, so it can happen. We should be empowering them to do that as far as we can.

Q484 Ann Clwyd: Is the international community hands-on enough, or are they too far from what they should be doing?

Jonathan Powell: No, I think the international community is hands-on. The trouble is that it has priorities. There are lots of priorities around the world, as the Foreign Affairs Committee knows, from Iraq to Syria to North Korea to everything else. The question is, is Libya high enough up the list of priorities? That’s an open question.

Q485 Ann Clwyd: Since the UK has concentrated on a political solution, should it be looking outside a political solution?

Jonathan Powell: As I say, I don't think there is a purely military solution. It's about getting the security track and the political track together. We have been trying to contribute to that through my efforts at trying to get a ceasefire in Benghazi. We nearly got to one several times, only to have it collapse. That really is the only way. You have to keep working away on the talking/military track and the talking/political track. I don't think there is some magic military solution that we can impose from outside.

Q486 Ann Clwyd: What are your major frustrations?

Jonathan Powell: Trying to get people to agree.

Q487 Chair: Agree or agree with you?

Jonathan Powell: Agree with each other. I don't need them to agree with me. That country has been very individualistic for a long time. You have tribes, cities and clans, and trying to get them to have a sense of commonality and a common purpose is very, very difficult. It is the most difficult place to do that I have found anywhere in the world. The challenge is to get them to see that the greater good may be better for all of them than seeking the individual good for the moment.

Q488 Yasmin Qureshi: Briefly, you said—I think everybody here agrees with this—that for a democratic solution it may take time to get all the different militias together to fight their common enemy, ISIL. You were saying that it means the state will have to get involved and deal with some of the issues that the tribes are concerned about. In terms of practical actions—steps one, two and three—what are the things that need to be resolved so the tribes can act together and fight their common enemy?

Jonathan Powell: One of the interesting things is that a lot of discussions go on inside Libya, which we are not really aware of, that suddenly break surface. For example, the ceasefires in the west of the country, which have been remarkably successful—they brought an end to all the fighting in the west of the country—happened entirely on a Libya-to-Libya basis. The fighters got fed up with fighting, sat down together on the front line and agreed to stop. That sort of thing is also now happening in the east. Around the Sirte area, people from Benghazi, Ajdabiya and even from Derna are talking to each other. That is probably where success will come from. They have traditional means of dealing with those kinds of differences. We can help by making it more sustainable and giving them a framework in which it can happen. That is the way we can best contribute.

Q489 Mr Hendrick: You said earlier that you do not want to get into the business of backing one side or another, and that what you want is a solution that suits most people—I think anybody would say that that is quite admirable. That still isn't resolved, and the factions are still against each other, notwithstanding the fact that you said that, although there are lots of militias, they basically still fall within two groups. How long do you think this can go on before Daesh really get their act together, as they have done in Syria and Iraq? In Syria and Iraq, the different factions and groups have been arguing and fighting with each other, and the only winners seem to be ISIL. Could they be the winners here again? The democratic

tradition that we hold so dear cannot simply be installed elsewhere, as we have seen in Iraq, Afghanistan and possibly here as well.

Jonathan Powell: You are right that Daesh do fill a vacuum whenever one opens up, so it is important for us to try to close that vacuum by getting them to an agreement. Interestingly, Daesh doesn't seem to have the room; it can't do the sort of Blitzkrieg it did in Iraq, marching towards Baghdad. It is not able to do that in Libya, even with the forces they have.

The policy they seem to have adopted from Sirte at the moment is trying not to take the oil fields but destroy them. They are trying to destroy the oil tanks so that the new Government in Libya will not have the wherewithal to pay for the Government once it gets into Government. Their strategy is different from the one they have adopted elsewhere.

I don't think it is as if ISIS is about to take over the whole country; I don't think that will happen. Obviously it is urgent to get on with dealing with ISIS, which is why I say that we don't necessarily need to wait for the Government of national unity to do that. There are people on the ground who are more threatened than we are by ISIS in Libya and who have an interest in taking action to deal with them.

Q490 Mr Hendrick: They may have an interest, but unless there is some co-ordination between them, clearly the attacks or the defences that they have of their territory are going to be quite spurious, and Daesh can pick when and how it fights in particular parts of the country. Do you think any external security help should or could be given to them? You mentioned Cambridge and what happened there, where there was an attempt to train Libyan forces, but maybe closer to home and on the ground.

Jonathan Powell: As I said at the beginning, that is not my policy area. You have the Minister coming next and you can ask more about this. It seems to me that, at the very least, we can talk to these different groups—indeed, I am talking to them—and get them to see that they have a common enemy and can work together against that common enemy.

That is beginning to happen. When Daesh attacked the oil tanks, the forces in Ajdabiya under Colonel Boudhifira did then get some support from Misrata. So someone from the other side of the divide did come in and bomb Daesh a bit, which drove them back a bit. So you are beginning to see some of that co-operation, but I agree with you that it is up to us as the international community to try to help that co-operation between those groups. What we do militarily is outwith what I am allowed to talk about.

Mr Hendrick: I was going to ask you about what to do militarily, but I will leave that.

Q491 Chair: May I finish, Mr Powell, with a few general questions? The scope of the report is to look back, try to learn some lessons and ask what the policy should be going forward. In your view, what was the biggest mistake that the international community made? Some of us would argue that it was going in in the first place. Put that to one side, and given that Gaddafi has been replaced, what was the biggest mistake the international community made?

Jonathan Powell: I personally think intervention was the right thing to do. I think it would have been very difficult to have turned down that opportunity when Benghazi was under attack. When I started going to Libya two years ago, Libyans would say to me, “Thank you very much, indeed, Britain, for supporting us in the revolution, but why did you go away and desert us after the revolution and leave us by ourselves?” I think that is an unfair criticism, because the people on the ground at the time were trying to help the Government. It was more Jibril and people in the Government who were telling them to go away.

I do think there were people maybe drawing the wrong lesson from Iraq. They thought we don’t want any more Bremers telling them what to do on the ground. Actually, again, you were dealing with a country with no institutions, no tradition at all of how to do this Government. We should have been more proactive. I note that President Obama, interviewed last year in *The New York Times*, said: “We...underestimated the need to come in full force,” and that there should have been a “much more aggressive effort to rebuild societies”. He said he thought that was his biggest mistake in foreign policy and I think there is something to that.

Q492 Chair: But doesn’t that fly in the face of what the Prime Minister recently said? He intimated pretty strongly that he thought it was the fault of the Libyans at the end of the day. He is on record as saying that we gave them their chance but they blew it.

Jonathan Powell: He is certainly right to say that the Libyans have to be responsible for their own fate. We can’t take over their fate for them, but I do think we should have done more. I agree with President Obama that we should have been more willing, and ignored them when they told us to go away and leave them alone. We should have actually tried to help them with the institutions in a more proactive way.

Q493 Chair: In the final dying minutes, what do you think the chances are of getting the GNA to function effectively? There are already identifiable holes in the process. I am given to understand that the forces in Misrata are not represented in the GNA. If you can update on that, please do. You have said that plan B will in effect be a rerun of plan A. There is no alternative to getting people around the table. I would completely concur. At the end of the day, it will all just take time. As has been proven in Northern Ireland, you need the diplomats and the politicians to make real progress. If you look at the events on the ground, there is little to be hopeful about, at least in the short term. There are hundreds of militias. The economy has dived. There is no meaningful rule of law that we can detect. In trying to get the militias around the table to feed the political process, you’re going to have to do everything in reverse to previous engagements.

Jonathan Powell: The key thing is getting a Government that has wide enough support and getting it into Tripoli. We cannot have three Governments: one in Tobruk, one in Tripoli, and one in Tunis. That will not be satisfactory. We need a Government that has wide enough support to get into Tripoli and start governing and start having its writ run across the country.

Interestingly, the situation in most parts of the country is not necessarily as bad as all that. There isn’t that much violence in great parts of it. The fighting is fairly isolated to pockets of Benghazi and the Daesh areas and then of course in Derna, which is also one of those Daesh areas. There are real humanitarian problems inside Benghazi itself, but if you

went to many of these towns and cities, it would look like ordinary law and order on the street. There is no “wild west” feeling to many of them. It is not like in Iraq and Syria from that point of view.

It is difficult to be optimistic in the short term, because we have tried and tried again with these Governments and they have failed, but I come back to my argument that I am much more optimistic about the medium term for Libya than I would be for Iraq or Syria. It ought to be possible to get to an agreement, but the question I cannot answer is, “How long is the medium term?”

Q494 Chair: Final questions. There are two tectonic plates: one is the political process, and you’ve answered that question; the other is ISIL. You have said that you don’t think the two have to be connected, in the sense that the political process can be stalled, but that doesn’t stop us taking on ISIL. You are advocating, quite clearly, military intervention, with or without the consent of any form of Government in Libya, are you not?

Jonathan Powell: No. That would be illegal. You have to have the consent of a Government.

Q495 Chair: In other words, the tectonic plates are still connected. You need a political process to succeed at least partially so that you can get the invite required to make it legal.

Jonathan Powell: I need to be careful that I do not stray into areas for which I have no responsibility at all—

Chair: Oh, go on.

Jonathan Powell: Luckily, my time is running out. That is something you can ask the Minister about afterwards.

Q496 Chair: Can I just press you on this slightly? You say that we can separate the politics and the military, but we cannot because we cannot intervene militarily, even if everybody agreed to do so, without a stable enough political situation to get the invite required. There is a connection. If you are telling us that you are not optimistic in the short term that we can make political progress—which certainly doesn’t look likely on the ground—you are in effect saying that we might not be able to take on ISIL, in whatever form, for quite a while.

Jonathan Powell: First, I wasn’t necessarily advocating military action by the West against ISIL. You could have action there. Secondly, there is still a Government that we deal with in Bayda, in the form of the al-Thinni Government. Of course, if the Government is voted on next week, there will be the new Government. There are legitimate Governments to deal with. That is not an insuperable problem. What I am saying is that you don’t have to come to a full political settlement in order to be able to do it, but acting illegally would obviously be wrong.

Chair: Okay. Mr Powell, many thanks to you.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Tobias Ellwood**, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, **Peter Millett**, HM Ambassador, Libya, and **Sally Axworthy**, former Joint Head North Africa Department, FCO, gave evidence.

Q497 Chair: Welcome, Minister; welcome Mr Millett. As you are well aware, this is part of an evidence session in our inquiry entitled “Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK’s future policy options”. I understand you would like to make a brief comment or statement to kick off with, Minister. We would welcome that, but I should just remind everybody that we are expecting a Division at four. As soon as it is called, we will adjourn and aim to meet about 15 minutes afterwards. So welcome, Minister; the floor is yours.

Mr Ellwood: Chair, thank you very much indeed. It is a pleasure to be in front of this Committee. I welcome very much this inquiry. I know that you have been travelling, and further travels are planned. If the FCO can be helpful in assisting you with your endeavours, then we stand ready to do so.

Thank you for the opportunity to say a few words at the beginning. I very much welcome this inquiry and, indeed, the scrutiny that you are giving to this particular subject. It is right that we should ask ourselves whether the Government acted correctly in the crucial years following the revolution that took place in 2011. We all know that hindsight is a wonderful thing. It is very easy to look back at the last five years of Libyan history and conclude that we should have seen it coming—that we intervened in Libya without considering the consequences—but I am sitting here today to say that simply is not the case. In fact, it was precisely the consideration of the potential consequences which caused us to act. It was the horrific examples of Srebrenica, and Rwanda before, which we saw unfolding again before us in Libya in 2011, following the popular uprising against the hated Gaddafi. Our French partners felt exactly as we did. Far from rushing in, we did consult widely. We listened to the Arab League, who urged us to intervene, and acted in accordance with United Nations Security Council resolution 1973. So our intervention saved many Libyan lives, but of course we cannot prove that exactly.

If there is one thing we absolutely know about Gaddafi, it was his willingness to commit acts of brutality, and not just against his own people. I need not remind the Committee of the Lockerbie and Fletcher murders and the Berlin discotheque bombing—acts of terrorism which Gaddafi directly ordered. Likewise the bombings in Brighton, Harrods, Enniskillen, Omagh, docklands and many others, which were committed by IRA operatives using Gaddafi-supplied Semtex. The idea that Gaddafi would have baulked at ordering the murder of thousands of protesters in Benghazi in 2011 is frankly absurd. We were all struck by Gaddafi’s grisly threat to the citizens of Benghazi. I quote: “We are coming tonight. There won’t be any mercy.” He said, “We will come zenga by zenga”—neighbourhood by neighbourhood—“house by house, room by room. We will find you in your closets.” Those are the words of Gaddafi. In short, Gaddafi would have done anything to stay in power, conscious of what was happening to the left and the right of his own country.

I often hear people who look at Libya today and say from the comfort of their armchairs that the country would have been better off if Gaddafi had remained in power, but I haven’t ever heard that from Libyans who experienced life under the dictator. Did we do enough to support Libya as it emerged from decades of Gaddafi misrule? I do think we could

have done more. We tried, but perhaps too readily believed the Libyans when they assured us they didn't need massive outside help, and we needed to respect their sovereign wishes. Could we have imposed more assistance on a people who had risen up themselves against their oppressor, and were brimful of confidence in their newfound freedoms? I somehow doubt it. Had we tried, we would no doubt have faced accusations that our bullying had been the principal reason for the country's failure.

To conclude, Mr Chairman, with hindsight, the international community could have co-ordinated its assistance better. I admit that. In 2011 and 2012 new Libyan Ministers were overwhelmed with plans and project proposals from different countries and organisations from across the globe. It is clear now that there was a lack of institutional capacity to manage the flow of ideas and advisors and to translate advice into policy implementation. *[Interruption.]* We have learned those lessons, and perhaps I can go into more detail once we return from the Division.

Chair: Thank you for that statement, Minister.

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

On resuming—

Q498 Chair: Minister, do you want to finish what you were saying?

Mr Ellwood: I was just touching on the lessons to be learned. I had the opportunity to open an international conference in the Foreign Office last October, jointly with the United Nations, at which we agreed a set of co-ordination mechanisms to optimise international support for the Libyan Government. The UK is one of the most active donors. Of course, we need to be realistic: however well-co-ordinated donors are already, we can only offer assistance at a speed at which the Libyan institutions can absorb it. The more unstable the political situation, the more time the new Libyan leadership will need to spend on this.

We should also bear in mind that, although the economy is currently exceptionally weak following the collapse of Libyan oil production and international oil prices, Libya is not a poor country. We will be looking to transfer responsibility for and funding of projects to the Libyan Government in due course.

Finally, turning to the question of Daesh, there can be little doubt that al-Qaeda and Ansar al-Sharia/Daesh all exploit the governance and security vacuums which expanded post-Gaddafi Libyan Governments. Tackling these terrorists is one of the biggest challenges facing the new Government of National Accord, which is in the process of being formed. We stand ready to examine carefully any request that the new Government make to us for support in this area. The same applies to efforts to counter the criminals who profit from the misery of the thousands of migrants whom they traffic through Libya.

To conclude, Libya matters. It matters as a risk to the security and prosperity of the UK, but also as an opportunity. Libya is a potentially wealthy country which should be a key trading partner in construction, financing, education—a whole host of areas. So we will continue to support a Government of National Accord that tries to navigate Libya towards a peaceful and democratic future. Above all, we will support the Libyan people, as we have

supported them in the past, because it is the right thing for Libya and the right thing for Britain.

Q499 Chair: Thank you very much, Minister. As you are aware, a large part of this inquiry is trying to look forward, not back, and ask questions, quite rightly, of the Government. We took on board your early comments about the initial intervention and, as you know, opinion is keenly divided as to whether we should have intervened or not, but you made a case for being more positive than the consensus—I think you recently wrote a piece in *Conservative Home* entitled “So you think Libya’s a disaster story? Here’s why you should think again”.

I suggest to you that we have had an economy that has collapsed; estimates vary, but perhaps almost half a million people are internally displaced. There is no rule of law. We have had either no Government or two or three Governments, and meanwhile ISIL has established a foothold, if not more than that. I admire optimism in any Minister, but in what sense is this not a disaster story, before we start looking forward?

Mr Ellwood: That is a really good question. There are levels of disaster. We are almost haunted in Parliament by our recent interventions—what we have done and the scale of what has happened. The purpose of that article was the same, in essence, as what your Committee is trying to do: to shine a little more light on the detail from which we can then say what scale of disaster, or otherwise, it actually is. The purpose of that article was to highlight how this is different from the situation in places such as Iraq, Syria or Yemen.

We have this almost bizarre situation whereby oil has continued to flow and revenues have continued to be generated—have been given to the national bank. Salaries have been paid: doctors’ salaries, nurses’ salaries, teachers’ salaries, salaries of the armed forces. So there are many cities, many areas, that are able to function in a manner which is not comparable with these other interventions in which we have participated or been involved. That was at the heart of the article—to say that, in fact, here we had an uprising that took place, and we had an international community that stood ready to support.

As I said in my introductory words, perhaps we should have done more to encourage the Libyan people to listen to us, but ultimately it was for the Libyan people to decide the direction they wanted to go in. What has proved difficult is that after 40 years of misrule by Gaddafi, where the institutions simply were not allowed to develop in any sense whatsoever, when that dictator was removed, the scale of the challenge was enormous.

Q500 Chair: Putting aside the rights and wrongs of intervention for one moment, what do you think was the biggest mistake that the international community made in the aftermath of that intervention?

Mr Ellwood: Again, that is a really good question. There are many things we would like to have done. The trouble is, what authority would we have had to do them? There is a line you then step over to say, “Had you pursued them with more vigour and more energy, you’d have actually been breaching and overstepping the mark.”

You talked about an intervention as such. It was an intervention and there was an air campaign, but we went in there to protect lives and to stop the bloodbath that was going to

take place in Benghazi and, indeed, other cities. Gaddafi was determined. He had many opportunities to row back. He had many opportunities, through organisations such as the Arab League, to step away from the direction of travel he was going in, and that clearly was not going to happen.

There is then the big question of what you then do to stabilise the country and move it forward. That challenge, there is no doubt, has been immense. There was a period when the euphoria of the removal of a dictator led to elections and to the power structures being formed, and that is perhaps where the international community should have been more on the front foot, to be invigorated in making sure that the capacity building happened as soon as possible.

Q501 Chair: One hears what you say, and as I say, we are putting the rights and wrongs of the actual intervention to one side, because no purpose is served by that. But there is no doubt about it: lives have been lost since the intervention on a major scale. You only have to read the various reports to know the extent of that, let alone the internally displaced people and so forth.

One of the criticisms we heard levelled against the international community in this morning's evidence session was that we have not stuck to our guns when it comes to the democratic process. We did not stand by the House of Representatives after the elections in June 2014, imperfect though they were—with 18% turnout and all the rest. We started negotiating, or we continued our negotiations, with hundreds of militias. There are, by various accounts, up to perhaps a couple of thousand militias running round in the country. We did not back that democratic process and stand firm behind it. Do you think that that is a valid criticism?

Mr Ellwood: The scale of the challenge became apparent after the elections took place, in the fact that the institutions themselves were not there in order to allow the country to move forward and the decisions made at the high level to then filter down to the various power bases that existed.

We have to remember, going back to the Ottoman time or King Idris and so forth, that the sense of nation state has been absent from this neck of the woods. It is fundamentally a tribal structure; loyalty goes to the tribes from that perspective. This had been sat on for 40 years. When that pressure had been removed, there was an awful lot of movement to try to establish—to re-establish—a sense of identity and a sense of leadership. It is a very difficult question to answer, in terms of what more we could have done.

Q502 Chair: With respect, Minister, we knew most of what you just said before we intervened—the history, the tribal factions and how difficult it would be. So what was the biggest mistake we actually made in your view, post-intervention? Should we have followed through in a much more forceful manner, or do you agree with the Prime Minister that we gave the Libyans their chance and, frankly, they blew it?

Mr Ellwood: It was absolutely for the Libyan people to take advantage of the removal of a dictator and also absorb and take advantage of the international community that was there and ready to support in a variety of ways. You are trying to make a comparison and say

that if the intervention—the air campaign—had been followed up with boots on the ground, somehow we would be in a different position.

Q503 Chair: No, I was saying if we had been more forceful in our support of democratic institutions, particularly, for example, post the summer of 2014, when we had the elections, imperfect though they were. We then continued with our negotiations with the militias, which some could argue undermined—certainly some would say that that continued in our talks with the GNC—the democratic process, fragile though it was. If anybody else wants to come in, please feel free.

Peter Millett: Once the HOR had moved to Tobruk, you clearly had two competing Governments and two competing Parliaments. It was right for the United Nations to try to bridge the gap and establish an agreement that would achieve an inclusive Government.

If we had backed one side, I think we would have created a situation of civil war. It would have been absolutely the wrong thing to do. We are looking for an inclusive agreement, an inclusive Government, which is what we have the prospect of, although it is not perfect by any means. However, the agreement signed at Skhirat brings the different sides together.

I am not aware of us negotiating with militias. It was negotiations with the political dialogue members, some representing the GNC, some representing the HOR, others representing a range of different backgrounds and tribal representations to try to establish an inclusive arrangement, which is what we have the prospect of now.

Q504 Chair: Finally, Mr Millett—I will then open this up to the Committee—you say that, and it would have been dangerous to take sides, but correct me if I am wrong but the UN recognised one but not the other post the summer elections, so actually we were taking sides. It is just that we compounded that error by then negotiating with various militia groups which undermined the democratic process.

Peter Millett: We were doing business with the House of Representatives. Clearly, we regarded that institution and the Government mandated by the House of Representatives as a Government that we could do business with and a Government that we recognised. That was for pragmatic reasons, but at the same time clearly that Government did not have a wide remit within the country. Trying to bring the sides together to establish a new arrangement was the right approach.

Sally Axworthy: Just to reinforce that, as Peter has just said, we treated the Tobruk Government as a Government that had come to power through a legitimate process. We did not treat the GNC and the Tobruk Government equally. I think I am right in saying that our Ministers never met anyone from the GNC, but they did meet Ministers from the Tobruk Government.

You asked us what mistakes we had made. One of the things we didn't realise right at the beginning was that, immediately after the first set of elections, we focused on trying to help the new Government establish security, in particular by helping them to train troops. Through that episode—it is referred to in the memorandum, the general purpose force training—it became clear that what was needed in Libya was a political settlement.

We took the view and have taken the view throughout that there wasn't a military solution to the conflict that was going on. We still think that—that it has to be a negotiated solution. After the second set of elections, when the Tobruk Government set up in Tobruk but only one side effectively was sitting in the House and the other MPs were not sitting, to provide military support somehow for that side would have been, we felt, to fuel the civil war. The right way was through the UN negotiation process that was launched to try to get the two sides to come to an agreement.

Q505 Chair: It worries me somewhat that you say that you came to a conclusion that it had to be a political process. History suggests that at the end of the day it has to be a political process. Soldiers can only buy time, as the Minister will be fully aware. Perhaps we will come back to that point later.

Mr Ellwood: Can I make a quick comment? It applies not just here but to any of the areas or other countries that the Committee might be looking towards. Who are the stakeholders who have a vested interest in the future of the country and what is their agenda? Judgments have to be made—not necessarily by us, but possibly by the United Nations envoy and so forth—about whom to talk to and when to talk to them and how to bring them to the table. It isn't possible, because of their scale, reach, gravitas and influence in areas, to deny them space at a negotiating table. Judgments have to be made about whether that is pertinent.

Chair: You ask a series of questions. We will see whether we can pass them back to you in a second, but let us open it up to the Committee first.

Q506 Yasmin Qureshi: On the issue of military interventions or lack of them, confidential information from MOD and RUSI sources indicates that the Government is interested in reasserting the Royal Prerogative, thereby reducing the role of Parliament in decision making about whether we intervene militarily in Libya. Is there any truth in that?

Mr Ellwood: The last time I checked, RUSI doesn't tell the Foreign Office what to do. They may speculate—that is their right and, no doubt, their duty—but I am sure that that is not the case.

Q507 Yasmin Qureshi: So you would say categorically that at this moment in time the Government has no intention of getting into a military intervention in Libya without coming back to Parliament.

Mr Ellwood: In a kinetic form?

Q508 Yasmin Qureshi: Yes.

Mr Ellwood: No, we're not. Discussions are being had about what we can do to facilitate assistance once a Government is actually formed, and what more we can do to advise, assist, support and train. That is why I specifically asked you to confirm that. No, we are not going in there to hold and take ground in that sense. I should make a distinction between support being given for stabilisation in Tripoli—I am alluding to what support might come through—and support that might be required to deal with Daesh in Derna or Sirte.

Q509 Yasmin Qureshi: When you say “support”, are you talking about military help, whether it is RAF pilots, drones, Reapers and things such as that?

Mr Ellwood: You are jumping ahead. First of all—

Yasmin Qureshi: I just want to know.

Mr Ellwood: That's fine, but the first question that has to be answered is on confirmation and invitation; otherwise, it would be illegal for us to send any such support. Once the Government of National Accord is in place, if we are then invited to assist them in training their armed forces, we will happily look at that.

Q510 Yasmin Qureshi: So you are saying that if there is an invitation from some kind of Government of Libya, the only thing we are going to be doing is providing assistance in training. Therefore, we are not going to go in and, for example, use drones or RAF planes to carry out targeted bombing. We are not going to do that.

Mr Ellwood: No. You made it very, very clear. As the situation stands at the moment, that is absolutely the case.

Q511 Yasmin Qureshi: Are you also saying, therefore, that at the moment there are no British troops deployed on the ground in Libya?

Mr Ellwood: That is the case, yes.

Q512 Yasmin Qureshi: Are there any special forces currently deployed in Libya?

Mr Ellwood: I think you know the answer to that.

Yasmin Qureshi: No, I would like to—

Mr Ellwood: We never comment on that. I admire your attempts to tease that out of a Minister, but no Minister ever comments on the role or otherwise of the special forces.

Q513 Yasmin Qureshi: So no comment on that. Is one of the reasons that they can be deployed without parliamentary scrutiny?

Mr Ellwood: I am not able to provide any comment whatever on any questions involving the role of special forces. That is standard for any environment.

Q514 Yasmin Qureshi: I understand that, but you are saying on the one hand that we are not going to help militarily in any way, and on the other that special forces are effectively helping militarily, but you can't comment on it. It's a bit of a contradiction.

Mr Ellwood: No, you are putting words into my mouth. I made it very, very clear that the green Army might be used, if requested, to assist in training and equipping, and to provide assistance specifically in stabilisation—for example, around Tripoli—separately from taking on Daesh. That is something we said we would look at. I think it is from there that the rumour mill has ended up churning out the possibility that there may be boots on the ground. I am pleased to place on the record that that is not the case.

Q515 Yasmin Qureshi: It does not have to be boots on the ground. I am not asking specifically about that; I am talking about military intervention. Has the RAF flown any missions over Libya this year so far?

Mr Ellwood: It has flown over Libya, yes.

Q516 Yasmin Qureshi: We have also heard—you may tell me that this is incorrect—that coalition allies such as the USA have troops deployed on the ground in Libya. Is there any truth in that, or is it a rumour?

Mr Ellwood: I cannot speak for the United States of America.

Q517 Yasmin Qureshi: Okay. I will move on to what I call armed or military assistance. Leaving training to one side, *The Sunday Times* recently reported—correct me if this is wrong—that the RAF, the FCO and the military are meeting in Tobruk to plan RAF airstrikes against ISIS militants. You might say again that you cannot tell us what may be used, but are you able to say that that is incorrect—that there is no intention at this moment in time to carry out any strikes against IS militants?

Mr Ellwood: I think I have made that pretty clear, yes.

Q518 Yasmin Qureshi: Okay. Do you know about the preliminary plan drawn up by the Italians for Italian Reaper drones, which are already in Libya and have been identifying targets for possible bombing by the British and the Americans? They are saying there are 6,000 ground forces, including 1,000 British troops. Is that made up as well or is it a rumour?

Mr Ellwood: Again, this is where the rumour mill is ticking over quite merrily. The Italians also have indicated that they want to create a support effort probably in the region of—I don't know the numbers, but they want to provide a sizeable force to the country of Libya, once a Government is in place. Again, it will be for Italy to comment on that directly. It will be in the lines that I have just spoken about, from the point of view of training, assisting and supporting the Libyan national army itself and other organisations such as the Petroleum Facilities Guard.

Q519 Yasmin Qureshi: One final question: earlier, we heard from Jonathan Powell, as you are probably aware. He was saying that there are—I think everyone agrees—different groups of militias in Libya who all hate ISIL, but at the moment they are not working together. One thing he said was that we should help them to get a framework. I forgot to ask him what we are talking about when we talk about a framework. He said that we need to address the issues being raised by these different militias, so that we can get them to be united, because obviously it is beneficial to us if they are united to fight ISIL.

Mr Ellwood: I had the opportunity to speak to Prime Minister Sarraj a few days ago in order to encourage the movement forward of gaining the support of first his Cabinet and then the wider Government as well. It is clear that he has his manifesto—his Government programme—that he needs to put forward, which needs to be accepted. That will then be the blueprint, if you like, for how we move forward. That is exactly what this focuses on—making sure that all the necessary voices feel included. Unfortunately, there are hard-liners on both sides of the equation here that have prevented and slowed down the process. Indeed,

it has been frustrating as deadlines have come and gone. We have made progress, albeit that it has been slow.

Q520 Chair: A couple of questions from me, Minister, and then I will hand you over to Adam. What can you tell us about the RAF missions? One accepts you are restricted to a certain extent, but what can you reasonably tell us about the number of missions and their objective?

Mr Ellwood: I cannot say anything. I do not have any more details than that. I will write to you.

Q521 Chair: Could you supply the Committee with those details? That, in my book, is outside the scope of SF, and it is perfectly legitimate for us to ask about the nature of those missions and the frequency. If you do not have the details on you now, it would be useful if you could send them to the Committee. I would appreciate it.

Mr Ellwood: I am happy to do so.

Q522 Chair: Secondly, outside SF, what level of involvement do you believe you would need to go up to before consulting Parliament?

Mr Ellwood: In order to achieve what?

Q523 Chair: Well, you tell me what you wish to achieve by that involvement. We are not trying to pin you down as regards the special forces, we accept that, but outside special forces, what level of military involvement in Libya do you see as acceptable before having to come to Parliament to seek consultation, approval, debate, whatever?

Mr Ellwood: I recognise the pertinence of the question and why you ask it, but there are a lot of hypotheticals as to what might be our contribution and who we might act with under a coalition or from a bilateral perspective. Until I had those details, it would be very difficult for me to speculate as to how this might be engaged. Ultimately, it is for the Prime Minister to use that judgment on how it fits in with the royal prerogative.

Q524 Chair: Okay. Briefly, though, Minister, help us if you can. Despite all the possible permutations—and we know what layers there are as regards forward observation officers and co-ordinating air strikes, and that it goes on and escalates into heavier involvement—in your own mind there must be a level, a bar, for military intervention. Can you give us any indication of what point you feel you can reach before consulting Parliament?

Mr Ellwood: Again, you are asking for a yardstick of when parliamentary involvement is triggered. It is very difficult for me to provide details on that, because every situation will vary. The Prime Minister has made it clear that if it is in the national interest and there is immediacy, he will act immediately. He has made that very clear. One such act has taken place in relation to Syria, with which you will be familiar.

Chair: Absolutely, and one accepts that the Prime Minister needs that prerogative, but we are trying to get to the medium to longer-term planning when it comes to military intervention. But we will park it there for a moment.

Q525 Mr Holloway: Are the UN-recognised Government of Libya helping out with ISIS and the migration issue?

Mr Ellwood: Perhaps the ambassador would like to say a little bit more about this, but it is a very blurred picture as to even the scale and strength of Daesh in Libya at the moment, and what their intentions are. The Government are not as focused as they should be, and that is partly because they have yet to settle the differences between them and then to focus on what needs to be done. It is hoped that once a Government of National Accord is in place, we can focus on that very important question.

Q526 Mr Holloway: But we have a legitimate Government in Libya now. Are we working with them?

Mr Ellwood: No. There are still some processes to go through in order for the full agreement and programme to be satisfied, and then an invitation made for us to be involved, were we to participate.

Q527 Mr Holloway: What, they need to invite you?

Mr Ellwood: That happens in every country. You cannot wander in.

Mr Holloway: Forgive me, but I have letter to Sally and Fiona Ferry, dated 29 November from the Prime Minister in Tobruk, which says, “Our Government will welcome the opportunity to develop the strongest long-term security and business alliances with the United Kingdom.” The Prime Minister goes on to talk about using their navy and says, “We are particularly anxious to intercept the maritime movement of illicit weapons, drugs and people.” They still have not had a reply to that letter. Do you remember this one? They are offering—

Mr Ellwood: What is the date on that?

Mr Holloway: Last November.

Mr Ellwood: That was before a Government of National Accord. It would not be correct for us to do that. When did I meet the Prime Minister? I think it was in November, so he was Prime Minister-designate. Whoever is making that request, it is helpful to know what is on their mind, but until the request comes from the Prime Minister himself, we cannot act on those measures. It would be illegal for us to do so.

Q528 Mr Holloway: And you cannot even reply? These guys are offering. They have got the Libyan navy, and—

Peter Millett: The letter is from the HOR-mandated Government in Tobruk. Our focus is on the Government that will be established under the Skhirat agreement, which was signed on 17 December 2015. That will be the Government of National Accord.

Q529 Mr Holloway: Are other people in Libya going to recognise that?

Peter Millett: Yes. We are waiting for the House of Representatives to validate that Government. In our contact so far, including the Minister, who met Prime Minister-designate Sarraj in Tunis in the autumn, we are already engaging with those people, so that we can deal with them and will get requests for assistance on all the big issues, such as dealing with Daesh and migration.

Mr Ellwood: I should add, in light of what you said, that on the number of occasions that I have spoken to the President and the Prime Minister and others, I have said, “Please, until you have this Government of accord, we and the rest of the international community cannot venture in, much as we would like to—not just on this type of assistance but on the wide variety of support that we want to do.”

I mentioned that we held a conference here last October. That cannot all be put into place unless we have the permissions to do so, other than humanitarian packages and bits and pieces, but not on the scale that we want to. We need a Government of accord in order to be able to do that; that gives us the green light to move ahead with any of these objectives.

Q530 Mr Holloway: It sounds to me a bit like wishful thinking. It’s a bit like thinking that we could destroy the regime and send in DFID with stability advisers. It does not sound as though we are particularly serious.

Mr Ellwood: I am not sure how to respond to that. Destroy the regime? The regime was destroyed by the people of Libya. They then had their elections and moved forward. It then unravelled in the manner it has done. We are now moving forward to having that Government of unity, which had been denied. Once that is in place, we stand ready to help, absolutely.

Chair: Okay, I am going to leave it there. We are going to come on to the Government of national unity or accord later.

Q531 Daniel Kawczynski: Mr Ellwood, I find your positive assessment of Libya, in both your articles and statements, deeply troubling and worrying.

Mr Ellwood: Can you expand on that, please?

Daniel Kawczynski: I will. I consider the situation in Libya, with the growing expansion of ISIS in Libya, to be one of the biggest threats to EU security. All of the Government’s attention at the moment is on Raqqa and Iraq, whereas these fighters are starting to come over to Libya. With that in mind, what is your assessment of the number of ISIL fighters that are currently operating in Libya?

Mr Ellwood: Let’s go back to your first comments, because they were somewhat provocative.

Daniel Kawczynski: I don’t think they were provocative. They were trying to get to ask you some serious questions about an issue of paramount importance. They are not meant to be provocative; they meant to try to solicit information from you.

Mr Ellwood: What I was focusing on was that you think I am in denial that there are major challenges that Libya faces.

Q532 Daniel Kawczynski: Certainly, from the articles that you write and the things that you say, you give a rather glossy, rosy perspective of the situation.

Chair: I think Mr Kawczynski is describing you as an optimist, Minister.

Mr Ellwood: Please humour me, I am curious. Please tell me how I have given a glossy, rosy perspective of Libya.

Q533 Daniel Kawczynski: Let's get back to the question. How many ISIL operators are there in Libya at the moment?

Mr Ellwood: For the record, I just reread my article before I came here. I don't see it as glossy or rosy in any sense. That is why I was curious to give you the opportunity to expand on that. If there isn't time—

Chair: I think we have to move on. Could you answer the question, please?

Mr Ellwood: The migration of Daesh forces from Iraq and Syria was considered at the Rome conference of the counter-Daesh coalition. You will be aware that that is the smaller group of about 20 countries that meets periodically to discuss five major themes in the strategy to defeat Daesh in Iraq and Syria. Those are the military component; the movement of foreign fighters; the funding; the stabilisation and humanitarian support; and the counter-messaging, because much of what these organisations do now is online. What this group has done is develop a wide variety and scope of expertise across these fields, and not just the military. We have seen progress made in places such as Ramadi, and indeed Tikrit, where 80% of the people have returned.

What we are seeking now is that this group expands its understanding and remit on extremism in whatever forms it takes—Daesh as a brand has spread, with Boko Haram swapping its flag for that of Daesh, Ansar Bait al-Maqdis has done the same and now we see Ansar al-Sharia doing the same in Libya as well. So the group spent a morning looking at migration and the challenges that we face, and how we can expand our knowledge in order to provide assistance but also be aware and collect intelligence as to what is happening with Daesh, particularly as it pressurises the oil crescent itself.

I have placed it into context, and I am choosing my words very carefully. I absolutely agree with you. This is arguably the biggest threat that Libya faces in the long term, because it is taking full advantage of the vacuum that it faces, but currently as a militia or entity it is quite small in comparison with some of the other militias there already. So while we recognise it from an international perspective, because we see this play out in Iraq and Syria, I do not think it is seen as such a priority at this stage by the very people in that country, who just see it as another more extremist militia development. I am really cautious about the words I use, because we need to bear in mind where this could go. That is why I have repeated on many occasions: be aware of what is going on, because the absence of a Government is allowing them to get a footprint in, and once they have got a footprint, it becomes easier not only to expand but to effect attacks such as what we saw in Sousse on 26 June last year.

Q534 Daniel Kawczynski: We have heard a tour de force of your assessment of Daesh across the region, but I am still none the wiser as to what you consider to be the number of ISIS fighters currently operating in Libya.

Mr Holloway: Is it around 5,000? What is it?

Mr Ellwood: I would say it was less than that, but as I say, it is very difficult to pinpoint exactly. The other question we have here is that there are many individuals there who are flipping who they support. There are some people coming in from other countries who choose to join extremism, and there are others who are local and part of a local terrorist group but then they grab the black flag because they see them as winning. So the movement of people changes and fluctuates a lot, but there is no doubt about it—I absolutely agree with the sentiment of the Committee, which I do not think resonates as much as it should do in the country itself, that this is a major threat. That is why the counter-Daesh coalition meeting in Rome spent a morning focusing on this. Forgive me, I cannot say too much about it, because a lot was operational, but the international community and the counter-Daesh coalition is now treating Libya in the wider context of Iraq and Syria.

Q535 Daniel Kawczynski: I have a couple of other questions, so I need to go through them quite quickly. In terms of the oil and gas facilities in Libya—the pipelines and fields—how confident are you that they are secure? What are you doing to ensure that ISIS does not take over these facilities, bearing in mind that they are Libya’s main revenue generator and we have seen the ever increasing spread of ISIS out of its stronghold in Sirte?

Mr Ellwood: You are right to flag up this concern. There have been sporadic attacks. As far as I understand, from the latest that I was aware of, they do not own any of the oil terminals themselves; they are doing attacks and, simply because of the nature of the topography, it is very easy to launch attacks across the desert and so forth. So the Libyan National Army is working to provide greater defences to prevent this from happening, but we have seen sporadic attacks take place, not least in Ras Lanuf, for example, which was hit and then the Daesh forces retreated.

Q536 Daniel Kawczynski: Bearing in mind the possibility of the spread of ISIS, could the United Kingdom intervene effectively in Libya against Daesh without an invitation from a UN-backed Government of National Accord? Basically, can we go in unilaterally without their agreement if we feel that the nature of the threat posed by Daesh is of such a degree that it will cause high volatility in the oil sector, and indeed a humanitarian crisis across the Mediterranean to Lampedusa, as we have seen in the past?

Mr Ellwood: You again ask an almost hypothetical question, but you touch on something that is very important and which we have not really dealt with. That is the consequence of a lack of governance in the country, which is being utilised by criminal gangs to ferry people who are not necessarily from Libya, but from other parts, across into Europe itself. That is why we need the ports and the whole maritime peace to be secured as soon as possible.

From the perspective of the scenario that you spell out, I can only repeat what I said about the Prime Minister making a judgment. If there is any immediacy to a threat to the UK,

he will make that judgment, but certainly there is no planning whatever from the current situation to pursue what you are suggesting.

Q537 Daniel Kawczynski: Lastly, say Daesh has moved out of its Sirte base and taken control of the oilfields—what would be the Government’s response?

Mr Ellwood: Unilaterally, or in conjunction with our allies?

Q538 Daniel Kawczynski: These are not hypothetical questions. I am concerned that you have repeatedly referred to hypothetical questions, wanting therefore not to answer. These are not hypothetical questions; these are very imminent potential dangers to Libya and to the security of the European Union. Will you please answer that question now, Minister?

Mr Ellwood: However you like to focus on it, it remains a hypothetical question: “What if this happens?” means that I am having to make a judgment or speculate about something in the future. We are looking for a political agreement. Once that is in place, we can work towards providing assistance to the Libyan national army, which can absolutely do what you are asking, which is to provide greater defences and to take Daesh out. That is the order in which we want to do things. That is the order that we are encouraging Prime Minister Sarraj to focus on.

Chair: Okay. I am going to pull stumps there. Nadhim.

Q539 Nadhim Zahawi: Thank you, Chair.

Welcome, Minister. The Libyan Political Agreement was signed on 17 December last year. Why has the proposed Government of National Accord not yet been constituted?

Mr Ellwood: There are a number of reasons, and the ambassador may want to add to this. I mentioned that there were some spoilers on both sides who had denied the ability to sign off and to confirm what was actually happening. The first step was for the Prime Minister to set up his own Cabinet, the strength of which I think was nine in all, including himself. He then had to agree, or present, a further total of 20 in, essentially, his Government. On top of that he then had his programme, which is his manifesto of where he wants to go. These then need to be agreed by all the necessary parties, and it is that process that we are in at the moment—it needs to be completed in order for us to get into a position whereby we can be granted permission to do the variety of things that have been discussed today.

Do you want to add anything to that?

Peter Millett: This is the focus of all our efforts at the moment. The Presidential Council produced a list of Ministers, which was then rejected by the House of Representatives. They are now meeting to try to produce a new list. Certainly, looking back to the point that Mr Kawczynski made, the UN and all of us are constantly urging them with urgency to get on with this and to do it quickly, so that we can collaborate with that Government to deal with these top-priority issues.

Q540 Nadhim Zahawi: So what is the timeline on that?

Peter Millett: They have asked for a little bit more time. They are working towards this weekend to produce the new list of Ministers. Then the House of Representatives will have 10 days to endorse it, or to send it back.

Mr Ellwood: I have found, and you may have picked this up in other studies that you do, that there are always these hardliners who want something for their own reason—because they have their own domestic audience to make statements to or keep onside. We make two steps forward and we end up going one step back, and it is frustrating. The Iranian nuclear deal was a great example of this—of how deadlines were extended and extended, and eventually, we got to where we needed to be. Yemen is the same. There is a breakdown of the ceasefire. You move forward and you get people back to go again. Libya is absolutely no different, but if we think where we are today, compared with six months or a year ago, absolute progress has been made, but we are frustratingly close to having a Government of accord.

If I may add, what I have asked the Prime Minister to focus on as well is the next tier of governance. Going back to the tribal structures that everybody is very familiar with and the power bases in Benghazi or Zintan or even the smaller cities such as Derna and so forth, who is going to be the individual representative who will lead and create that local governance? They are the ones who will provide the security and who will ensure that life ticks over in a more prosperous way. At the moment, everything is focused on the national objective of who is going to run the centralised Government, and to everyday people, this is miles away. What is as important is who is going to be running the city council or the town council as well, and that has been acknowledged.

Q541 Nadhim Zahawi: That is a great lesson learnt from Iraq. So there is no time limit on the formation of the GNA, and despite the delay, from what I hearing from you, it is a still credible option—or is it still a credible option?

Mr Ellwood: The only thing that is on the line is the elections themselves.

Q542 Nadhim Zahawi: I will come to that in a minute. So there is no time limit, is what you are saying. We just keep extending it till we get it right.

Peter Millett: Because the original list of Ministers was sent back, the time is now extended. The House of Representatives gave them 10 days to come back. They have asked for a few more days. Getting the names together and getting agreement within the presidential council has taken a bit more time, but then there will be 10 days for the House of Representatives to endorse it.

Q543 Nadhim Zahawi: And under the agreement, there is a proposal to hold more elections within two years. Are more elections required? Given what I am hearing from the Minister, is it not more about stability and getting services to local people? Is there a lesson to be learnt—that is not just about the ballot box, but about institutions?

Mr Ellwood: I think I can answer, perhaps, as the elected person on the panel. We in the west—and the United Nations specifically—are committed to going in anywhere and getting elections in there, because that is what we do. That seems to be the fair thing to do. As parliamentarians, coming from the mother of all Parliaments, that is absolutely where we

should aspire to do, but you are right in saying—from Maslow’s hierarchy of needs—that there is a time and a place where elections are appropriate to bring in. When you have elections, without the formation of political parties, who is it that gets elected? It is the head honcho. It is the big cheese. It is basically whoever owns the power in wherever it is. Does that help or hinder us? Does it cause more problems or not? That is a philosophical question more than anything else, but there has to be a process whereby at the same time, in parallel, we also focus on these other aspects of stabilisation and support. I think in retrospect, as we digest everything that has happened, that is where—in terms of the UN and other organisations—perhaps we could have devoted more effort.

Peter Millett: Can I just add to that, Minister, to clarify that there are no plans at the moment for additional elections? Every now and then I hear people saying, “We should have fresh elections to break the deadlock”, but within the agreement, there is a requirement for the constitutional drafting assembly—which is a completely separate process—to produce a new constitution by 24 March. I don’t think they’ll meet that deadline, but after that, there will be a referendum and then there will be fresh elections.

Q544 Nadhim Zahawi: Given what we have heard about ISIL’s move into Libya and a lot of their commanders moving out of Raqqa and Mosul, is there a plan B, Minister, if this doesn’t work?

Mr Ellwood: As soon as anybody mentions plan B, that suggests that you’re not happy with plan A. As I said, we are very close to making this work, and it would be unhelpful to discuss any form of plan B. There are concerns, such as the growth of Daesh and so forth, but we need to encourage all parties to push forward and support the Prime Minister. We had a meeting in Rome just prior to Christmas and we invited parties from both sides—it was John Kerry’s initiative—a week before the signing in Morocco. I wondered why he was calling everybody there, but it was enough to focus the world’s attention on to the main stakeholders to get things over the line the following week. The UN resolution 2259 followed straight after that, which was good news. We need to continue the momentum and not talk about plan B.

Q545 Nadhim Zahawi: Thank you for that. How will the proposed Government actually exercise governance over the Libyan army?

Mr Ellwood: The Libyan army will come under the control of the Ministry of Defence, but it will also answer to the presidential council. I know where this question is going. There are some big questions to be asked about which characters are appropriate to take that forward.

Q546 Nadhim Zahawi: There is one character: General Haftar. Does he support the formation of the Government of National Accord?

Mr Ellwood: I think the answer to that is yes, but he has his own thoughts on what should happen.

Q547 Nadhim Zahawi: What is your assessment of him? What are his objectives?

Mr Ellwood: I don't know him well enough to give a candid reply. I know that there are some tribal structures that support him and have given him that base. It is important that ultimate power is with the civilian structures and that the armed forces answer to them. There should be no person in uniform who is more powerful than the Prime Minister.

Q548 Nadhim Zahawi: To what extent is he supported by Egypt? How is he getting his support and funding?

Mr Ellwood: You raise an interesting question about outside influences, which have added another dimension to all this. There is recognition from countries, including Egypt, that we are now close to getting that Government of National Accord, and General Haftar has to play his role as well.

Q549 Chair: Before I call Adam, Mr Millett, can you answer that last question about General Haftar? I know that you are only relatively recent in post, but what is your assessment? You might have met him more than the Minister?

Peter Millett: I have not met General Haftar.

Chair: Okay.

Peter Millett: I discuss General Haftar frequently with my Libyan contacts and members of the presidential council. The one consistent theme that comes through is that you should not let one person be an obstacle to the implementation of the Libya political agreement.

Chair: In that case, I would be nervous if I was him.

Q550 Mr Holloway: I have just had a text from someone who lives in the region saying, "Will explain later. They're telling you porkies." I don't know what they mean by that.

Mr Ellwood: There are always experts in the region who say that they know better. One thing that is clear from all this discussion is that people are saying, in hindsight, that we should have done this, that and the other. I am sure that there will be experts. You should call them in. Give the name to your Chairman and get them to sit here.

Q551 Mr Holloway: The big lesson since we started off on these adventures in the middle east is that we didn't listen to people in the region and we thought we knew it all in Whitehall, but that's a completely different discussion.

Why don't we support the elected Government that we recognise?

Mr Ellwood: We have supported the elected Government. The ambassador—I think we have had this question already.

Q552 Mr Holloway: Sorry to go back to my theme, but ISIS and migration matter a lot to the British people. When people from a Government that we recognise are offering us help, why aren't we accepting it?

Mr Ellwood: Sorry. You will have to explain that.

Q553 Mr Holloway: Why aren't we accepting offers of help on migration and against ISIS from the Government in Tobruk when we recognise them?

Mr Ellwood: Why aren't we accepting offers of help from whom?

Q554 Mr Holloway: From the Government in Tobruk.

Mr Ellwood: Because, as has just been illustrated—

Q555 Mr Holloway: I am really missing that because, as a Government we recognise them but do not accept offers of help from them.

Mr Ellwood: There is now a UN resolution in place that recognises the process—

Q556 Mr Holloway: I thought that had run out. Wasn't it 40 days from 23 December or something? Sally, is that right?

Sally Axworthy: Which resolution are you referring to?

Q557 Mr Holloway: I'm not sure.

Mr Ellwood: It is difficult for us to comment if you are not sure.

Peter Millett: I think I understand the question. The House of Representatives was elected in June 2014 and we backed it. We backed the Government that it mandated and we collaborated with them. If they offered us help, we worked with them. That mandate expired in October—

Mr Ellwood: Because they didn't have fresh elections.

Peter Millett: We then had the new agreement: an agreement on the establishment of a Government of National Accord and that is the Government we want to work with. We hope we will get requests from them to work in all of these important areas and I am sure we will respond to them positively.

Q558 Mr Holloway: So Peter Osborne was wrong to refer to this as a coup—in *The Spectator*, I think, did he not?

Peter Millett: It is an agreement signed by a large number of Libyans from both the House of Representatives and the GNC, and it is endorsed unanimously by a Security Council resolution. I don't think you can call that a coup.

Q559 Chair: Okay. Adam, we are going to move on if you don't mind. Can I move us on to the United Nations and our support mission in Libya, please? It is an integral part of the process, or so we are led to believe. How effective do you think it has been in co-ordinating efforts, and how well supported has it been by member state Governments?

Mr Ellwood: We can give you some figures on the support we have provided for it. I think we are one of the leading nations to support it. There is no doubt that, like all UN missions, it has had difficulties. The focus has been on the work of the envoy in answering to

the Secretary-General to bring together the parties, leading on from the last question. Bernardino Leon has stepped aside now and Martin Kobler has taken over. I think he has done a commendable job in encouraging and bringing the parties together. The work of UNSMIL will move into a different gear when we have a Government of Accord in place.

Q560 Chair: If I may press you on that, Minister, let's assume it all goes well and the Government of National Accord is formed and so forth, what will be the precise role of the United Nations mission there vis-à-vis other Governments? At the moment, one criticism, which we heard this morning, is that there has been no shortage of envoys, special envoys, UN envoys in Libya and that perhaps to some extent that has contributed to an element of confusion, without wishing to overplay it. What is going to happen? Let's say we get the Government of National Accord or Unity or whatever you want to call it formed and let's be optimistic, what will be the role of the UN, how will it click together and who will co-ordinate to give it the best possible chance of success?

Mr Ellwood: This is where the Cabinet will then come in with the responsibility of building the necessary structures. Under Gaddafi, there was an absence of structures that allowed the country to be governed. The first port of call will be to make sure the financial institutions are robust enough, that there are educational programmes to get the schools up and running in a better way and to make sure there is a maritime programme. All those will come into play.

To answer your question in full, the best thing is to follow on from the October conference where some detailed thoughts were put into place as to what the offering will be and how the international community will co-ordinate and dovetail in with the Government that it is there to support.

Q561 Chair: May I press you because it is important that we think of the next phase? Let us be optimistic and say we have a Government of National Unity or Accord. Who will they turn to when it comes to the international community? Will their first port of call be the United Nations or will they follow past practice? I don't want you to address this criticism, but there has been a tendency in the past to have too many envoys and representatives and that hasn't helped. Who will the Government turn to as a first port of call when it comes to help?

Mr Ellwood: As I say, a far more advanced programme is ready to be offered to the Government. It involves the work of the UN and what they will do.

Q562 Chair: The UN is going to be the first point of call?

Mr Ellwood: Absolutely. The EU will then have an involvement in the maritime component, I think, primarily. I'm afraid I can't do justice here to how these dovetail, but I am very happy to give you more detail.

Q563 Chair: If you could send those details to the Committee, we would very much appreciate it. Can I follow through briefly? We are all great supporters of the UN, but it has a bit of a patchy record when it comes to supporting nation building after the event and co-ordinating it. How confident are you that it is going to succeed this time, assuming we get that Government of national unity?

Mr Ellwood: I react a little to the line of questioning that places a heavy burden on what the international community does and whether or not we succeed because of what that community does. I think you are right to say, “Can we do it better?” I acknowledged that in my opening remarks and that was the purpose of the October conference, of which I will give you details. But there is a huge burden on the people of Libya themselves who are diverse in their approach. We need them to recognise the threat of Daesh and the migration problems.

Q564 Chair: One fully accepts that and it has to be down to the people at the end of the day. But to give them the best possible chance, given from where we have travelled over the last four or five years, it is important—in fact, it is imperative—that the international community stands ready to support them as best they can. Given the UN’s patchy record—I am perhaps even being kind when I say that—at supporting the concept of nation building, post events, are you confident it has the capabilities and the expertise on the ground to be able to deliver?

Mr Ellwood: I am confident that a robust plan is in place, because we have done far more homework this time in making sure that we have learned the lessons from the past. I think we are in a far stronger position than we have ever been in in the past. We need to be more robust in recognising the challenges ahead. I think there is also a sense of the experience that the Libyan people have endured and lived through—they recognise that they need to do their part as well.

Q565 Chair: It is those plans that you are sending off to us?

Mr Ellwood: We will give you an overview of how we have mapped out how we would envisage being able to offer assistance in various sectors to the Libyan people. I will repeat what I have said so many times—I know you smile—it is for the Libyan people. It will be the Libyan people who will defeat Daesh, who sort out their finances, who get the oil flowing and get this rather prosperous country back on its feet.

Chair: Yes, but I would also suggest, and I think you accept, that the international community can also help when it comes to the basics like rule of law—to get that process going. There are no precise lines here; it is a grey area.

Mr Ellwood: Yes, completely. We have touched on the policing packages; the possibility of providing assistance to the Libyan National Army. In these various sectors, plans are being devised and different countries are offering assistance in different areas, whether rule of law, governance and so forth. Italy and other countries will be offering certain things with the United Nations bringing them together.

Peter Millett: I want to emphasise the role of UNSMIL as a co-ordination mechanism. One of the biggest challenges and lessons from the past was the lack of capacity or absorption capacity within the Libyan system. Part of the challenge is how to prevent the Libyan Government in the future from being overwhelmed by offers of support. The first role of the United Nations is to say, “Yes, these match the Government’s priorities, go ahead with them”. The Libyan Government themselves also have to have a co-ordination mechanism that works with UNSMIL to make sure that the quick wins are ticked off very quickly and the longer-term plans can be implemented.

Q566 Chair: There almost has to be a filtering process to give it the best chance of success.

Q567 Yasmin Qureshi: Will there be a lead nation from the UN that does the overall co-ordinating of the plans to rebuild Libya? If it is just left to the UN, there are so many different countries and different groups of people to talk to. Will there be a country, or a group of perhaps three or four countries, that takes charge of the overall UN strategy? Can you tell us which countries might take the lead in the UN on Libyan initiatives?

Mr Ellwood: As I say, the UN will lead on this. Certain countries will bring their own expertise and have put up their hand to say that they are willing to focus on particular areas, and then within a country there will be certain aspects on which they will want to focus.

Q568 Yasmin Qureshi: I ask because after the NATO bombing in 1999, the UN set up a mission in Kosovo, at which I worked for the UN for two years. I have to say that the set-up there was not too bad, but I felt that the UN mission in Kosovo had no sense of direction in terms of being able to deal practically with things that were happening there.

One of the reasons was that even though it was predominantly European-led, with America, Germany, France, the UK and Italy involved, even those five countries that were running the show—so to speak—in Kosovo could not co-ordinate things properly. A country like Libya is far bigger, with much more complex challenges. Who exactly in the UN will take proper responsibility and have a complete oversight of what is happening? I can tell you that I did not think the UN had a complete grip on the situation in Kosovo.

Mr Ellwood: You raise a very important point, because we need leadership. I hope we have learned lessons from when the UN went into Kosovo. Unfortunately, as in any organisation, people have skill sets and learn from experience, but the individuals who have gained then move off to do something else. We need to ensure that that does not happen. Huge amounts of effort have been put in to make sure that—I am trying to remember how many countries attended.

Peter Millett: About 40.

Mr Ellwood: Forty countries attended the conference in October. With that concern at the forefront of our minds, how can we make sure that the offering that Japan, Korea or DFID makes can fit in and dovetail with the United Nations' focus on the variety of areas that we need to support?

Peter Millett: I want to make two points. The United Nations and the rest of the donor community are looking to us to work with UNSMIL to take exactly that broad approach. We are working with the UN to have another meeting of senior officials in March to try to bring the whole thing together so that we have a co-ordinated package that we can offer to the Government of National Accord.

Also, the special representative, Martin Kobler, recognises the need—perhaps not for a lead nation, but he is developing this concept from his time in the Congo of a shepherd: a country that takes on the shepherding role of working with the UN to bring together the different countries. For example, the EU, the UK, the Germans and the Dutch all want to work on assistance to municipalities. We do not want to all invite the same group of mayors to come to the same sort of meetings, so let's have someone who takes over that co-

ordination role, working with the UN. Martin Kobler himself recognises the need to do that more effectively.

Q569 Mr Hendrick: I am going to give the Minister some relief, because my questions are directed towards the ambassador. You have been in Libya for a relatively short time, Mr Millett. How have you co-ordinated your work with the activities of our UK special envoy, Jonathan Powell, whom we spoke to earlier?

Peter Millett: First of all, I should say that I am not in Libya; I'm in Tunis. So far, for security reasons, I have been unable to go to Libya. Co-ordination with Jonathan Powell is very close and very good. We meet whenever I am back in the UK, as we did this morning, to compare notes. We phone each other once a week—we have that in our diaries so that we speak to each other—and we share each other's emails so that he can see what I am doing and I can see what he is doing.

Q570 Mr Hendrick: Could you enlarge on that, in terms of the substantive differences between your role and his role, and perhaps characterise that with some examples?

Peter Millett: I have attended all the meetings with the UN on the political process. For example, I attended all the meetings that were taking place in Morocco. I represented the UK at those meetings and worked with the UN and the other envoys and ambassadors who were trying to push forward the UN-led process. Jonathan has concentrated very much on the militias, what is happening in Benghazi, the security track and working with UNSMIL on that. We try to separate out our roles, with me doing the political track and him doing the security track, but obviously there is some overlap in the context we have.

Q571 Mr Hendrick: Do you feel that the relative lack of progress on the political side is hindering Mr Powell's work in terms of trying to deal with the security situation? While there may be many militias there who are happy to fight with Daesh, the fact that they are so un-co-ordinated because there is not political unity means that the fight is not as effective as it could be at the moment.

Peter Millett: Certainly. The two tracks are very closely intertwined. We need a political agreement. We have a political agreement. We need to see it implemented, so that we can make progress with dealing with Daesh and the other security issues in Libya. The two are interdependent.

Q572 Mr Hendrick: Would you accept that the political process is holding up the security process?

Peter Millett: The political process is not easy to take forward, but we are pushing it as urgently as possible. We use the need for additional security for dealing with Daesh as a method of, or as a key argument for, pushing forward the urgency of concluding the political agreement and getting the Government in place.

Q573 Mr Hendrick: Do you accept that security in the onward march of Daesh is going to suffer as long as that political agreement is not there?

Peter Millett: If we want to deal effectively with Daesh, we need a Government that we can work with and collaborate and co-ordinate with in taking whatever action they ask us to take that we are capable of taking.

Q574 Mr Hendrick: The House of Representatives, as you mentioned earlier, has expired. As Mr Powell put it, even though they have walked off the end of a cliff, they are still in the air, so to speak. How important do you think they are? There have been exchanges with you in this meeting to highlight the point that they do not have the legitimacy they had, but nevertheless they are to some extent still functioning. How important do you think they are for a solution, in terms of coming to a national accord?

Peter Millett: I would say that the House of Representatives, as a parliamentary gathering or parliamentary assembly, is very important, because we need their endorsement of the list of the Government. The Government mandated by the House of Representatives is a Government that we had a lot of contact with until the mandate expired, but increasingly our focus of attention is on the new Government of National Accord, members of the Presidency Council and, in future, the Ministers that they appoint.

Q575 Mr Hendrick: Are you optimistic?

Peter Millett: It helps to push the process forward if you can see some light at the end of the tunnel. I have spoken at length with all the members of the Presidency Council—all nine of them—and getting them together in the national interest has not been easy, but they are determined now to produce a list of Ministers. We will then focus on ensuring that the House of Representatives can vote in favour. It is obviously up to them—it is a democratic process—but many of the regional countries and they themselves want to ensure that they can endorse that Government, so that the Government can start to look at the next stage, which will be the entry of that Government into Tripoli.

Q576 Chair: I have a final few questions; I am very conscious of time, and you have been generous with yours. We have tried to be optimistic about the Government of national unity and accord. We asked a series of questions going down that route, assuming that it was going to succeed. Let's assume for a moment that it does not.

I want to take your measure of things vis-à-vis Daesh/ISIL. One of the reasons why a number of people oppose the intervention—without looking back at history too much—is that in the absence of strong government, you get this sort of situation. We now have ISIL apparently growing in influence, if not power, in Libya. We have a political process, and you have quite rightly said, Minister, that without an invitation from a legitimate Government, we would not be intervening, whatever form that intervention takes.

Let us assume for a moment that the political process stalls and keeps stalling—after all, we have already missed several deadlines. Will there come a point when ISIL keeps growing and the political process keeps failing so that there is a disconnect between the two?

Mr Ellwood: I have done my best to avoid the hypotheticals today.

Q577 Chair: Let me confess: it is a hypothetical question but, given what has happened so far, there is a real chance of it happening.

Mr Ellwood: As you have said it so nicely, the scale of concern we have about the growth of Daesh is such that we need to watch this very carefully. Every effort is made to try to get the Government in place and provide it with that support. I am speculating now, but if there is any part of the world where extremism is developing at a pace that the country itself cannot cope with, the process that the international community follows is for a UN resolution to be agreed in order to provide the legitimacy for the international community to respond. I am not sure I can put that any other way.

Q578 Chair: That is a fair answer, Minister. I would press you a little bit more and say it is surely obvious that if the threat from ISIL builds and continues to build and presents a danger to the international community on a scale that we envisage it will, it is incumbent at the very least to examine the possibility of intervention, whatever form that may take, regardless of the political progress. Would you agree?

Mr Ellwood: I would.

Chair: Does anyone want to come in on that? Briefly, Yasmin.

Q579 Yasmin Qureshi: Presumably, you may not be at liberty to tell us here, but the thought is that, if all else fails, there is military intervention. Have they thought through what form that military intervention might take? Are they thinking about it, at least?

Mr Ellwood: You are leading me into answering questions on operational matters. You are right in your analysis that I can't respond to that.

Q580 Yasmin Qureshi: One purpose of today, as you must have realised, is to ask a number of questions so as to flag up issues and concerns that we have, and I am sure everybody else has.

Mr Ellwood: Maybe I could put it this way. It is not the first time that that question has come in front of me.

Q581 Mr Holloway: What responsibility do you think the UK and France bear towards the state of Libya today?

Mr Ellwood: That is a very interesting question. We did the right thing in preventing a bloodbath from taking place. From the aftermath of that, as we have discussed, there are lessons to be learned. Ultimately, we stand by.

You could have had me or any Minister in front of this Committee and asked why Britain did not do more, had the catastrophe unfolded as it might have done, not just in Benghazi but the other cities that he was threatening, not least the edges of Tripoli. Gaddafi was conscious of what was going on in Egypt and Tunisia and was going to do everything he could to remain and retain his power. I still look back and say it was the right call to make.

Q582 Mr Holloway: Do you think the Libyan people would agree with you?

Mr Ellwood: Not only that. Clearly, not the same Libyans you are speaking to.

Q583 Mr Holloway: No, no. It was a genuine question. I haven't been there since that time.

Mr Ellwood: There are two questions. I spent a lot of time—I hope you will be impressed—and I read an awful lot of the characters that you had in front of you. It is interesting that there is a wide variety of views, as you would expect, from across the board. The two questions that do come up are these. Had we not gone in, where would we end up? If Gaddafi were there today, would life be any different? We stand by saying that it was the correct call to make. It is right that Britain stood up, with others around the world—there are very few countries that can do so—to prevent the catastrophe that would have taken place. I think that is correct.

Chair: Very briefly, Yasmin.

Q584 Yasmin Qureshi: I am sorry, but I am obviously going to challenge the assessment that there would have been this bloodbath that people were suggesting. We have heard from experts as well during the course of our inquiry, and people who also know quite a lot about what was going on in Libya did not think that that would happen. There has been the suggestion that there are other possible motives for going into Libya that fit. I remember during the debate in Parliament on the issue a number of colleagues talked about how in the past Gaddafi had supported the IRA or whatever.

It was almost as if an element of it was, “We want to get rid of Gaddafi”, even though by that time, with the work that Tony Blair had done—he had tried to bring Gaddafi and Libya in from the cold—Libya was progressing in some respects a lot better than it had been. After the fall of Libya, we had 400,000 people internally displaced, no rule of law, more murder and mayhem and the rise of ISIS. The situation is really bad in Libya now. We need to challenge whether Libya really needed that.

Chair: Very briefly, Minister, do you want to answer?

Mr Ellwood: I am saying, it is the timelines that we draw and what would have happened if? That is getting into speculation and hypothesis again. Of course we would have liked to see certain different scenarios in the aftermath of the fall of Gaddafi. The international community has learnt about what more it can do, but I stand by the fact that what could have happened might have been far worse than we see today.

Q585 Chair: Minister, on your optimistic assessment, may I pull up stumps there? I thank you all for joining us for this evidence session. It is much appreciated. I particularly thank you for taking that little bit of extra time. We wish you well.

Mr Ellwood: Thank you very much indeed.