

# Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Foreign Policy Developments:](#)  
October 2016, HC 552

Thursday 13 Oct 2016

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 13 Oct 2016.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Crispin Blunt (Chair); Mr John Baron; Rt hon. Ann Clwyd; Mike Gapes; Stephen Gethins; Andrew Rosindell.

Questions 101-188

## Witnesses

I: Rt hon. Boris Johnson MP, Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Sir Tim Barrow, Director General Political, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and Sir Simon McDonald, Permanent Under-Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rt hon. Boris Johnson MP, Sir Tim Barrow and Sir Simon McDonald gave evidence.

**Chair:** Order. Welcome to this morning's session of the Foreign Affairs Committee, our first session with the new Secretary of State. Welcome to the Committee and congratulations on your appointment.

**Boris Johnson:** Thank you.

Q101 **Chair:** Welcome to this first formal session with the Committee. It is designed in a sense to be a more open session than it might usually be on an inquiry into a particular subject. Obviously, that is associated with everything that is going on and of course we are rather limited by the time you have available for the Committee, so that will limit the subject coverage to a degree. We will also then want the opportunity to come back—we may need that. This is going to be an ongoing relationship—hopefully for both our sakes—for some time. I thought it would be appropriate to invite you to give us an opening statement—your tour d’horizon, as it were, for the Committee, but not for too long, so that we can get into the interrogative session. I invite you to speak about the layout of things for about 10 minutes and then I will ask my colleagues to begin questions.

**Boris Johnson:** Thank you very much, Mr Blunt. A few years ago I was traveling in the Gulf region on a trade trip and I was having lunch, and a sheikh who was my host turned to me and asked, “What happened to you guys?”—i.e. the Brits. “You used to run this place,” he said. And actually he was quite right, because the British flag had only come down in that particular country in living memory, and yet we had faded from the scene. Whether it was because of a loss of confidence or Denis Healey’s despairing decision to chop UK influence east of Suez, we had somehow become less present in that country politically, culturally, commercially, and others had moved in. And as my host put it to me, with slight mystification, “You left us to the French.” Mr Blunt and members of the Foreign Affairs Committee, I am here to tell you this morning, in so far as that was ever true of the UK, that neglect is being reversed with astonishing speed.

As I am sure members of the Committee know, our trade with the Gulf is booming. It is one of the fastest-growing areas of trade for the UK now. Our relations in that area are better than ever. After a period in which the Labour Government all but ignored that region—I don’t think Gordon Brown ever made an official visit to the country I am speaking of—our Prime Minister will, I hope, this year become the first female guest of honour at the Gulf Co-operation Council summit—or so I am told.

The reason for this growing engagement by the UK is at least partly that under William Hague, my predecessor, who reopened the language school,



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

and then under Philip Hammond and now under this Administration, with the strong support of the Prime Minister, we have a Foreign and Commonwealth Office that is more energetic and outward-looking and more engaged with the world than at any time in decades.

That outward-looking spirit is present not just in the Gulf but across the world, and I think it is going to intensify as we extricate ourselves from the EU treaty and we forge a new identity, as the Prime Minister has said, as a global Britain—and I mean global. Because it is vital to understand what Brexit is and what it is not. Yes, it means restoring our democracy and control of our laws and our borders and a fair bit of cash. But Brexit is emphatically not any kind of mandate for this country to turn in on itself, haul up the drawbridge or to detach itself from the international community.

I know, as a former Mayor of this city, how vastly our capital, and indeed our whole economy, has profited from London's role and the UK's role as a lodestar and a magnet for talent. I believe there is no inconsistency whatever between the desire to take back control of our borders and the need to be open to skills from around the world.

There is absolutely no inconsistency between ending the supremacy of EU law in this country—as we will—and being a major contributor to the security and stability and economic prosperity of the whole European region. We are leaving the EU; we are not leaving Europe.

Over the last three months I have been struck by how little I am asked about Brexit and how swiftly the conversation moves on to some other aspect of the UK's global role. In an age of uncertainty, with democracy in retreat in some parts of the world and large parts of the Middle East in chaos, the demand is for more Britain, not less. We can see that demand now most tragically and affectingly in Syria, where the people of Aleppo are hoping desperately that we and our allies may be able to do something to alleviate their suffering in the face of the barbaric assaults of the Assad regime, with the connivance of Russia and Iran.

I must tell you at this stage that it is vital that we do not raise false hopes. We know the difficulties and the implications of a no-fly zone or a no-bombing zone, no matter how easy those concepts may sometimes be made to sound. But if there is more that we can reasonably and practically do, together with our allies, then of course we should consider those measures. And believe me, that work is now going on.

We should also take pride in what we are already doing: we are the second-biggest donor of humanitarian aid to the region after the US; we fund the White Helmets who drag people from the rubble after the airstrikes and who themselves suffer terrible casualties. I have seen the work of British police training local Syrian police so that they are able to build public trust in the areas occupied by the moderate opposition.

We are helping to clear mines and shells, and we should never forget that it is thanks, at least partly, to the bravery of RAF crews flying repeated



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

missions over Iraq and Syria that we have helped reduce, by 50%, the territory of Daesh in Iraq, and, by 20%, their footprint in Syria.

So, whether it is through hard power, in that way, or through soft power, I think we sometimes forget in this country how much Britain is contributing around the world: helping to bring peace in Colombia; helping to get rid of the pirates off the coast of Somalia; leading the campaign to save the African elephant, now perilously endangered from the same bands of gangsters, by the way, who are involved in the people-trafficking that is helping to fuel the migration crisis. You look around the world and you see that this country is a massive force for good in an increasingly uncertain world—a world that is being deprived of leadership.

The values that we try to project—whether through our embassies, or the British Council, which I think is a fantastic institution, or simply through the British companies or the 5 million or 6 million Brits who live abroad, which is a bigger diaspora than any other rich country in the world. I think those values are not just good in themselves—though they are. When I speak of British values I mean democracy, free speech, independent judiciary, equalities, rule of law, anti-corruption, support for civil society. They are good in themselves, they are ideals, but they are also economically advantageous for the countries in which we try to project them. If you look around this city and this economy, I think it is pretty obvious that it provides the proof that political and social liberty are essential for sustainable economic prosperity, and that is one of the missions of global Britain.

I think an outward-looking Britain is, above all, good for us. It is good for Britain because we are about, in the next few years, to be liberated to go across the world and do a new set of free trade deals—an extremely exciting prospect. To get back to the beginning of my remarks, we will be going out again to places where perhaps people haven't seen so much of us in the past, and places where they thought we had forgotten about them. We have a superb FCO network to help make it happen. We've more reach than our friends in France—a bigger network of embassies at only 70% of the cost.

Finally, it has been one of the biggest privileges of my job in the last few months to meet our people who represent the UK to the world. They seem to me, at my advanced years, amazingly young, idealistic, very often intellectually brilliant—like the two people who are either side of me—and I believe they are excited about the challenge of projecting global Britain. They have a confidence—a real confidence—and an optimism that I think comes with the knowledge that they are speaking for a soft power superpower.

**Q102 Chair:** Secretary of State, thank you very much. Just before I invite colleagues to put questions to you—colleagues will have the opportunity to interrogate you on whatever subject they wish for 10 minutes or so, then I will come in and ask my own questions at the end—I just want to pick up one point out of your opening remarks. I think you would recognise the renewed focus on the Gulf, started under Lord Hague. But



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

all of that optimistic view about the reach of the Foreign Office and how energetic and active it is, is completely contradicted by the utterly dire resources situation your Department finds itself in. Perhaps you could explain how on earth you are going to pay for these splendid aspirations, given that half of your budget now appears to be constrained to areas that are ODA-able—in other words, committed out of the 0.7% of development expenditure—and that the British Council budget is being cut from your Department. It was the view of this Committee that you were going to need to double or treble the resources available if we are to meet these aspirations post Brexit, which I think the Committee no doubt share. What comfort can you give us that you are actually going to be able spend money on reinforcing our bilateral relations in places like Europe in the wake of Brexit, because there doesn't appear to be any money kicking around at the minute?

**Boris Johnson:** Obviously, we live in straitened circumstances so we have to make our money go further than ever before, and we do. As I have said, we have a bigger network than the French with only 70% of the costs. We are doing extremely well, and we can be very proud of what we are achieving.

The overall budget of the FCO, as you know, is rising from £1.1 billion to £1.24 billion by 2019-20. Where you are spot-on, if I may say so, Mr Blunt, is in pointing to the very considerable sums that are available for official development assistance—for DFID spending. We obviously have quite a lot of ODA spend that we do ourselves. The game now—I know my colleague, Priti Patel, is in total agreement with this—is to make sure UK ODA DAC-able funds are not just used to serve development goals, as they undoubtedly must, but to ensure they mesh and chime with our diplomatic and political objectives. I see absolutely no contradiction in that approach. That is something that I know the Government at all levels agrees with.

Q103 **Chair:** Secretary of State, to pick up that point, that's fine but it only applies to those countries that are subject to development assistance. You can't spend that money elsewhere.

**Boris Johnson:** Sure.

Q104 **Chair:** So it's all very well having money there, but actually where our game needs to be raised is with the rest of the world, where our principal existing markets are going to be. We are obviously reinforcing the new work of the Department for International Trade, but you can't do this on fresh air. All you have is fresh air at the minute to meet these aspirations.

**Boris Johnson:** I note that you gave my predecessor quite a grilling about this when he last appeared before you. He made a very good point that he could imagine bidding for more funds himself. Since he is now the Chancellor, I am inclined to camp out, as they say in the Foreign Office, on what he had to say.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Q105 Mr Baron:** Foreign Secretary, in welcoming you to your post, it may not surprise you that we will kick off with Brexit. To many of us, the referendum gave a very clear message that we are leaving. The Government's position is very clear on this. We are going to take back control of immigration. We are going to introduce a fairer immigration policy that no longer discriminates against the rest of the world outside the EU, and we are going to attain the best possible deal with regard to accessing EU markets. One could argue that it is nonsense that there was so much noise about this, given that if 170-odd other countries can trade from outside the EU very profitably, there is no reason why the fifth-largest economy can't as well.

What would you say to the alarmists—some would perhaps unfairly call them the remoaners—who believe that we are heading to hell in a handbasket? What would you say to those who are genuinely concerned about developments and the uncertainty that this has created?

**Boris Johnson:** I think that those who prophesied doom before the referendum have been proved wrong, and I think they will continue to be proved wrong. Obviously, it will take time before the full benefits of Brexit appear, because after all we haven't even begun the process of leaving, so the whole thing is really very artificial and speculative. I do think that businesses investing in the UK can have the maximum possible certainty and assurance that our partners, our friends, across the channel have a huge interest in doing the best possible deal in goods and services, for the sake of their companies; and our friends in the political world across the channel have a symmetrical interest in doing a deal that will be for the benefit of their constituents, the people who elect them. That's a deal that's going to promote the growth and prosperity of both the UK and the EU, and I'm sure that's what we'll produce. There may be some Sturm und Drang along the way, but that's how it will end up.

**Q106 Mr Baron:** Perhaps we should take comfort from the fact that many of the people who were predicting doom and gloom if we did not join the euro, or if we left the exchange rate mechanism, are predicting doom and gloom now. Perhaps there is comfort to be taken there, but may I drill down a little bit on negotiations? One fully understands that a rolling commentary makes for poor outcomes. Despite the siren calls of certain Members of this place, it is just ridiculous to think that that can take place, and the Government have been very clear that it won't take place. There will be no rolling commentary; there will be scrutiny perhaps, but no rolling commentary. But the EU's position itself is quite interesting. They are very much—I can put it on the record that they are linking immigration with access to the single market. They say it is one of the four founding principles, if you like; it is non-negotiable. You have described that approach as "baloney".

**Boris Johnson:** Mais oui.

**Q107 Mr Baron:** Absolutely right. There is a disconnect here. How are we going to get round this, do you think?



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Boris Johnson:** Mr Baron, thank you very much for that question, because I genuinely think that there is a false connection, an unnecessary linkage, in all these concepts. Actually, I vividly remember being ordered by the Belgian Interior Minister, in 1989, to leave the country. They tried to deport me, when I went to work abroad, because I couldn't produce what was then called an attestation patronale. I had to show that I was economically viable in Belgium and I had to go to the commune with a letter proving that I had a job. This was, as you will readily appreciate, many years after the treaty of Rome—indeed, years after the Single European Act—so the idea that the Brownian movement of individuals, of citizens, across the surface of Europe is somehow there on tablets of stone in Brussels is complete nonsense. It is a fiction. We are taking back control of our borders, as we said we would, and that is what we'll do. It doesn't mean, as I said in my opening remarks, that we are going to be hostile to people of talent who want to come and live and work here. I think it is very important that we continue to send out a signal of openness and welcome to the many brilliant people who help to drive the London economy and, indeed, the whole of the UK economy.

Q108 **Mr Baron:** Is there, though, one knotty problem that we have to face? We haven't yet, perhaps, quite faced up to it, or perhaps we have behind closed doors. That is that our position ostensibly is access to the single market, and one can understand that, but at the same time we are going to be repealing the European Communities Act, and it is that Act that gave force to the European Court of Justice, which has jurisprudence with regard to the single market. There is a bit of a disconnect there, isn't there? How are you going to square that circle?

**Boris Johnson:** I think that the Prime Minister made it very clear a couple of weeks ago when she said that the UK will be leaving the EU and thereby we will be leaving the penumbra of the European Court of Justice. We will no longer be subject to European Community, European Union, law. That's the key point. We will get the best possible deal for goods and services for the UK and for the rest of the EU.

Q109 **Mr Baron:** Following on from that, it sounds to many of us—this holds no fear from many of our points of view—that we would be prepared, if all else fails in negotiations, to fall back on World Trade Organisation rules and tariffs. Your fellow Secretary of State, the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, said that holds no fears—if 170 countries can trade on such a basis and tariffs are as low as 3% to 5% courtesy of most favoured nation status, etc. I am picking up here that it certainly holds no fears for you.

**Boris Johnson:** I think you are tempting me, if I may say so, into getting into what we call running commentary about the negotiations. I am not going to—I think we can do a great deal that will deliver a result in both goods and services for our businesses and for our friends across the channel.

Q110 **Mr Baron:** But you would not disagree with your fellow Secretary of State in saying that WTO holds no fears.

**Boris Johnson:** As I say, that would be getting into the minutiae of the negotiations.

**Mr Baron:** Okay. Let's move on.

**Boris Johnson:** I think there will be a great deal done.

Q111 **Mr Baron:** EU division is something we are not picking up on—I have raised it on the Floor of the House before—because quite understandably, the spotlight is on our negotiating position. But if you look across the EU, it is quite an interesting situation. You seem to have an emerging, growing split between the ideologists within the European Commission and elected politicians who realise that, courtesy of the balance of trade in their favour, playing hardball may not be in their best interests. What can you tell us with regard to that situation, as you see it?

**Boris Johnson:** I understand that point, and I have heard it quite a lot. I have not actually tested that proposition yet with some of the key Commission people, but my impression is that they are faithful servants of Europe and of the EU, and they will ultimately do what they consider to be in the best interests of the entire Union. I think that will be a deal that is beneficial to the electorates—the people of Europe. That is where they will end up. Of course, a certain amount of plaster has come off the ceiling in Brussels since the vote on 23 June. People feel they have a project. There was a fascinating article in the *Financial Times* this morning by the French Prime Minister—this continued to show why we were so right to vote to leave—in which he very emphatically spelled out a vision for a United States of Europe: a federal system with very defined boundaries. I am afraid it is not an ideal to which I think the British people really aspire. I think we did the right thing, and I think we can make it work.

Q112 **Mr Baron:** Do you think relations a few years out could actually improve in the EU? No longer will they have to contend with those awkward Brits—a thorn in their side—as they march towards ever closer political union. It could make for a fresh relationship.

**Boris Johnson:** Of course. I am so glad to hear you speak in those terms. Europe is at its best when it is positive about the work it has engaged on and it sets itself a deadline. We should view the whole Brexit process as a positive thing. We are sorting out the UK problem. After all, that has been a problem for decades. We didn't go into Schengen. Critically, we decided to stay out of stage 3 of monetary union in 1991. That was the basic moment of divergence. All else really flowed from that. What we saw on 23 June was the logical conclusion of that divergence and that basic drift by the British people away from that ideal, which is articulated by the French Prime Minister in the paper this morning.

We do not want to be part of such a construct. We have always made it clear. It has always been very tense because we said, "No, we don't agree with this ever closer union. We don't agree with the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice over this or that." We have been the backmarkers. To a certain extent, some other countries have shielded

their own apprehensions behind us, but it is up to them now to get on and take the thing forward.

**Q113 Mr Baron:** Finally on Brexit, may I reinforce what our Chairman said earlier about resources? Many of us believe that the FCO is under-resourced as it is, and that we have been poorly sighted in many of our interventions. Some of us have a particular view on those interventions, but if we put that to one side, the resources are going to be even more needed now, as we become truly globalist and outward-facing to not just the EU but outside the EU. An increase in the budget of £140 million, you know very well, Foreign Secretary, is a drop in the ocean compared with what is required. How forceful are you going to be in lobbying for more funds from where you sit?

**Boris Johnson:** I am grateful to you and to the Committee for the tenor of your arguments, because they are most welcome to us. We clearly want to be arguing that a global Britain needs to be properly represented overseas. I think we can make £140 million go a long way. We are really thrifty, parsimonious types in the Foreign Office, so we will make good use of that. Clearly, though, we have a big, robust network that needs to be funded properly.

**Q114 Stephen Gethins:** Thank you, Foreign Secretary, for joining us today. I thank your excellent colleagues for coming along as well. Some may refer to them as “unelected bureaucrats”, but we wouldn’t on this Committee.

**Boris Johnson:** I’m sorry to interrupt you, Mr Gethins. Far be it from me to criticise bureaucrats anywhere, but the unelected ones I was talking about were the ones in another European capital who will shortly cease to have control over our lives.

**Stephen Gethins:** Okay.

**Q115 Mike Gapes:** They are the ones with the skills.

**Boris Johnson:** These are the ones who will survive.

**Q116 Stephen Gethins:** Ah, right. So these unelected bureaucrats are okay, as are the ones in the House of Lords, of course.

I am going to take it on face value that your earlier analogy about you guys going off and running the place was about trade rather than any major change in British foreign policy after we leave the European Union. One of the great attractions to our partners overseas is access to and membership of the single market. Do you still believe we should retain membership of the single market? Just a yes or no, Foreign Secretary.

**Boris Johnson:** Well, let’s be clear that we are going to get a deal that will be—I think, as the Prime Minister herself said, that the term “single market” is increasingly useless. We are going to get a deal that will be of huge value. It will possibly be of greater value, if you look at what is still unachieved in goods and services for instance, for our friends on the continent and for businesses investing in the UK. I make these wearisome points, but we are the single biggest consumers of French champagne



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

and, indeed, of Italian prosecco. We are indiscriminate: we drink both more than anybody else. We import more German cars than any other country. This is a wonderful fact. We are going to continue to do that. Any attempt to, as it were, punish UK financial services, as the former Governor of the Bank of England said this morning or yesterday, would not make economic sense for Europe. In the end, as I said to Mr Baron—

**Q117 Stephen Gethins:** Foreign Secretary, that is not quite the question I asked. Also, as you will be aware—forgive me for mentioning this—the French drink more whisky in a month than they do cognac in a year, and I suspect that that is not going to stop either.

**Boris Johnson:** A very good point, if I may say so.

**Q118 Stephen Gethins:** The question I asked was: do you think we should retain membership of the single market? Or is it your negotiating objective to retain membership of the single market? That is a simple question, without getting into how much we are buying and selling and all the rest of it.

**Boris Johnson:** We are going to get the best possible deal for trade in goods and services.

**Stephen Gethins:** So you can't tell me.

**Boris Johnson:** As I said, the most useful thing I can say to you is that the phrase "single market" is probably one that not many people really understand.

**Q119 Stephen Gethins:** I presume you understand it.

**Boris Johnson:** As Mr Baron pointed out, there are many countries that sell very effectively into the single market, and that is certainly what we will do.

**Q120 Stephen Gethins:** So we will be outside the single market.

**Boris Johnson:** Well, we're going to get the best possible deal for trade in goods and services.

**Q121 Stephen Gethins:** So you don't know whether we are going to be in the single market or not, is what I take away from this. What I take away from the contributions of the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union this week is that nobody appears to have a Scooby, if you like, about what is going to happen. I'll tell you what, I'll do it one last time: is it even your objective to retain membership of the single market?

**Boris Johnson:** Well, we are leaving the European Union, but we will continue—

**Stephen Gethins:** That is not quite what I asked you.

**Boris Johnson:** Let me try to answer. You seem to think the single market is sort of like the Groucho Club or something. We are leaving the European Union. We will continue to have access for trade in goods and



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

services to the EU, and I think we will do a deal that will be to the benefit of both sides.

**Q122 Stephen Gethins:** So you don't know, you dinnae ken, you don't have a Scooby—this is something that's coming out. Can you maybe tell me this, then, because this is something I'm pushing for as well? Which Commissioners have you met with since you took office?

**Boris Johnson:** I have principally had dealings with Johannes Hahn and Vice-President and High Representative Commissioner Mogherini, because they deal with the foreign affairs side.

**Q123 Stephen Gethins:** I appreciate your candour on that. Yesterday I tabled a written question to the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union about which Commissioners he had met with, because I suspect it is an important relationship to have over these coming months and in the two years once or if we have triggered article 50. He says they cannot tell us because that is part of a negotiating strategy. Will Ministers be open to tell us which Commissioners they are talking to over this?

**Boris Johnson:** I am sure that Ministers will have no inhibition about meeting Commissioners the whole time. The Commissioners are very open and, in my view, charming people. They will want to engage with us, and my relations with Federica Mogherini and Johannes Hahn are extremely good. We have had some very good conversations.

**Q124 Stephen Gethins:** As part of this, do you still adhere to what the Prime Minister said when she met the First Minister of Scotland—that there should be an agreed position with devolved Administrations before any agreement is signed?

**Boris Johnson:** Well, it is certainly the case that the devolved Administrations, the overseas territories—they will all, of course, be properly consulted in the course of the negotiations.

**Q125 Stephen Gethins:** Right. But will there be an agreed position? Again, Foreign Secretary, I am asking you questions and I am not sure I am getting any answers, but we have had a week of that in the Chamber. Will there be an agreed position with the devolved Administrations?

**Boris Johnson:** What I can tell you is that the devolved Administrations will certainly play a role; they will be consulted, but this is a United Kingdom competence. It is something that was decided by the people of the UK. You would expect the Government of the United Kingdom to in the lead in the negotiations.

Just one interesting reflection on all this—the consultation of Parliament and consultation with the devolved Administrations and so on: I have seen plenty of European negotiations and treaty negotiations and at no stage in the run-up to the climax of those negotiations has there been any attempt to pre-agree a position with Parliament, let alone with the regions or devolved Administrations.

**Stephen Gethins:** Sure, but—

**Boris Johnson:** So there is a certain amount of hokum going on here.

Q126 **Stephen Gethins:** But there is a process. On the point of process, you are telling me there will not be an agreed position with the devolved Administrations. You are saying they will merely be consulted, which goes against what the Prime Minister told the First Minister back at the very start of this. Has there been movement on the involvement of the devolved Administrations?

**Boris Johnson:** I think I have answered your question.

Q127 **Stephen Gethins:** Let me ask you one further question on this if you cannot answer that question. You talked about ending the supremacy of EU law. Is there any law that David Cameron, as a full member of the Council of Ministers, signed up to with his European partners that you would not have signed up to?

**Boris Johnson:** I think the treaty of Lisbon was a step too far, and I think it was a great mistake. I think that we should have rejected it. I think it unnecessarily expanded EU competence. I think in particular what it got wrong was the extension of EU competence to the field of human rights and the notion that this great European Charter of Fundamental Rights should now be justiciable by the European Court of Justice, because that sets up a great deal of confusion with the Strasbourg Court of Human Rights and it, in my view, leads to all sorts of extensions of EU judicial activism in areas that I think are totally wrong. So that would be an example of the kind of area where I might have disagreed with the previous Administration.

Q128 **Stephen Gethins:** I think it is an area that we disagree on as well; I think having a common set of human rights across this continent is a good thing. Because I am nearly out of time, I want to ask you very briefly about Syria. I think there is a Sky News poll out today saying that the UK has a responsibility to protect civilians, but part of that is obviously about trying to get a broader political agreement. Can you tell me of any mapping that you have done of political factions in Syria, and any options you are exploring at the moment for a political agreement?

**Boris Johnson:** You will be familiar with the various maps that currently exist of the divisions of Syria and the—

**Stephen Gethins:** Sorry; when I say mapping, I mean of the wide variety of different groups that exist.

**Boris Johnson:** One of the bits of work that the UK has led on is in building up a broad-based opposition group, called the high negotiations committee, which is led by a gentleman called Dr Riyad Hijab. He came to London on 7 September with his team and they were pretty widely drawn from Syrian opposition groupings: military, civil society and so on. They laid out a case for transition away from Assad and to the kind of Syria they wanted to see and it was very compelling. It was democratic, pluralistic—with a higher quota for female representation than currently exists in the Tory party; certainly than in the Labour party—and it was very



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

progressive. Our ambition is to try to get the Russians and the Assad regime to desist from their violence in Aleppo, to get back to a ceasefire and to renew the negotiations in Geneva. In that context, I believe those opposition groups do carry a lot of credibility. When they speak you can see a future for Syria that does not include Assad. That is the question that is constantly put to us: who can replace Assad? Well, there are answers.

Q129 **Stephen Gethins:** Sure, but I did ask about mapping. I know I am out of time, and I know it is a bigger question, so maybe, Foreign Secretary, you could write to the Committee with some of the details about the work that is being carried out on mapping?

**Boris Johnson:** I would be very glad to do so.

Q130 **Andrew Rosindell:** Good morning, Foreign Secretary; I am delighted to see you in your new role. There is one word that has been missing from this morning's discussion that I have not heard from your lips: Commonwealth. Lord Hague said the "C" was going to be put back into FCO. Not much happened after that. What is the new Foreign Secretary intending to do to ensure that the Commonwealth is paramount in our long-term planning and thinking for trade, co-operation and friendship?

**Boris Johnson:** Thank you, Mr Rosindell. I know that you have long been a champion of the Commonwealth, and indeed of Britain's relations with the Commonwealth; thanks for all the work that you do. The Commonwealth is a wonderful asset for the world, and it is yet another forum in which Britain—our country—is able to express our values, to get things done and to get things moving. Yes, we see it as vital for our future overseas. We are having the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in 2018, which is probably coming to this city, though there is still some discussion about that. We are using the Commonwealth and our networks. Principally, if you think about it, many of the Commonwealth countries are the growth economies of the world. That has been one of the staggering developments over the past 25 years. While the EU has been mired in low growth it is actually these Commonwealth countries that have been bounding ahead and yet, because of our constriction under the EU treaties, for 43 years we haven't been able to do free trade agreements with them. Many of them are now stepping up and volunteering to do these deals, and it is a very, very exciting prospect. One after the other—Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand—they are standing up and saying they want to increase trade with the UK.

Q131 **Andrew Rosindell:** So Brexit is an opportunity, in your view, for the United Kingdom to do a whole lot more with the Commonwealth and perhaps rekindle those relationships we've neglected since we joined the common market?

**Boris Johnson:** Absolutely. I yield to no one in my admiration of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. You know, I walk around its great palazzo in a daily state of wonder. It has many mansions and it is a fantastic thing. But when I used to go around the world doing trade missions for London, one thing that some FCO wallahs used to tell me was



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

that they thought there was a huge operation dedicated to the EU but perhaps not quite enough welly went into some of the other areas. I am not saying that I want to subtract our commitment to other European capitals and our European work, because that is obviously vital—44% of our trade is with the EU; it is colossally important—but there are opportunities. I meant what I said earlier about the enthusiasm of the people at the FCO. I think they really see this and they want to do it. They see an opportunity here.

**Q132 Andrew Rosindell:** So I assume that you agree with me that the Commonwealth flag should fly from British embassies and high commissions around the world as you remove the European flag.

**Boris Johnson:** Mr Rosindell, you are testing my sigillography here—I think “vexillography” is the word I want. I don’t think I am going to make any particular commitments about the flag of the Commonwealth.

**Q133 Andrew Rosindell:** You are happy for it to fly from embassies and high commissions.

**Boris Johnson:** As soon as somebody can identify it to me, I would be very happy— I am going to have to own up, Mr Rosindell; I am unaware of the exact configuration of the Commonwealth flag, but there you go.

**Andrew Rosindell:** Moving on.

**Boris Johnson:** What does it look like?

**Sir Simon McDonald:** This is my drawing.

**Boris Johnson:** That is a very good drawing. Okay, well that looks like a lovely flag. It looks like a lovely flag, Mr Rosindell, but—

**Q134 Andrew Rosindell:** Are you happy to commit to flying it?

**Boris Johnson:** I am not going to commit now to flying it everywhere.

**Andrew Rosindell:** Could you check that one out and come back to us?

**Stephen Gethins:** Foreign Secretary, that’s what the flag looks like.

**Boris Johnson:** Thank you.

**Q135 Andrew Rosindell:** Could you come back on that particular point, if that’s okay? May I move on now to the next item? Apart from the Commonwealth, the United Kingdom actually has sovereign power over 21 territories and dependencies, 16 of which your Department is directly responsible for. One of those is Gibraltar, which is particularly affected by our leaving the European Union. Can we now expect a bit more bulldog spirit in dealing with Madrid? Can we have a more robust stance in tackling the way Spain has treated Gibraltar, or are we going to continue with the Foreign Office line of effectively diplomatic pussyfooting, which allows Spain to continue to think that they might one day achieve their wish of claiming the Rock under the Spanish flag?



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Boris Johnson:** You are going to see a completely implacable, marmoreal and rocklike resistance on the part of this Government to any such claim. We see no justification in law for that claim. On the other hand, obviously, we see no particular reason to be in any way difficult with our friends in Madrid. They can raise it with us. We simply make our points politely but firmly. I remember when the Spanish Foreign Minister raised it with me. Do you remember Marlon Brando in *The Godfather*? He said, "Mr Barzini, I must tell you, 'I am sorry, my answer is no.'"

Q136 **Andrew Rosindell:** Foreign Secretary, if they do get difficult, and they have become difficult—they have done some things that have made the lives of Gibraltarians pretty bad over the years—can we expect a thoroughly robust response from now on, rather than effectively diplomatically pushing the issue into the long grass?

**Boris Johnson:** Well, I think we have been very clear that we see no grounds whatever for any change to the sovereignty of Gibraltar. The people of Gibraltar, about 98.5%, support the status quo, and the status quo is going to remain.

Q137 **Andrew Rosindell:** Would you welcome the possibility of a visit to Gibraltar by Her Majesty the Queen? She has not been for over 50 years. The people of Gibraltar have repeatedly asked over the last five to six decades that their Queen visit Gibraltar, but for some reason the Foreign Office has never seemed to recommend that to Her Majesty. Would you make a change of policy on that issue?

**Boris Johnson:** I am more than happy to consult the Foreign Office and, indeed, the Palace about this. I don't know the thinking behind Her Majesty's itinerary, but obviously a lot of people want Her Majesty to go to a lot of places at the moment. She is much in demand across the world, as you can imagine. We have to be careful about issuing promises.

Q138 **Andrew Rosindell:** Could I also commend you, Foreign Secretary, on your well-known robust stance in terms of supporting self-determination for all the peoples of former British colonies, particularly British overseas territories—Gibraltar, of course, and the Falkland Islands and others? You have consistently spoken up in favour of self-determination. Can I confirm that that is your view today—that it is the view of the British Government that all peoples of all former British colonies should have the absolute right of self-determination?

**Boris Johnson:** Of course; that is our view. If you look at what is happening in the Falklands and our relations with Argentina, you know, we have to be careful, but the relationship with Buenos Aires is actually improving, simply because we are parking the Falklands.

Q139 **Andrew Rosindell:** But self-determination is the principle. It is the people themselves who determine—

**Boris Johnson:** It is the people themselves.

Q140 **Andrew Rosindell:** So that includes Gibraltar and the Falklands. Would that include Norfolk island as well?



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Boris Johnson:** I can't remember what the views of the people of Norfolk island are, but I support the principle—

Q141 **Andrew Rosindell:** But would their views be equally respected as those of the people of the Falkland Islands, to give an example?

**Boris Johnson:** We have no intention of changing Government policy towards Norfolk island or its people. Their rights will be protected.

Q142 **Andrew Rosindell:** So you support self-determination for Norfolk island.

**Boris Johnson:** I support self-determination generally as a principle, and I think I have—

Q143 **Andrew Rosindell:** How about for the Chagos islands? That is a British overseas territory. Their people should have the same rights as the other overseas territories. Would you agree with that, Foreign Secretary?

**Boris Johnson:** Well, that is a difficult question, because there are, as you know, Chagossians who have been moved from that area. We are conscious of their concerns. I have met some of them and we are in discussions with them at the moment, but the position of Diego Garcia and the rest of those islands remains unchanged.

Q144 **Andrew Rosindell:** One final question. Will the Government consider the possibility of restoring a royal yacht? If so, will you be giving your full support to that policy?

**Boris Johnson:** It is not a Government priority, I must tell you regretfully. I must also inform you, alas, that the former Royal Yacht Britannia is, I am told, incapable of being refloated because its engine has been removed, its propellers have been sawn off and a hole has been carved in its side to make it into a museum. So you can't do that. What I have said is that if a consortium of philanthropists wished to give Her Majesty a yacht and pay for it, then obviously that is not something that I would try to impede.

Q145 **Ann Clwyd:** There has been a bit of good news about Syria over the past 24 hours, in that the United States and others are meeting in Switzerland to discuss what may happen in future. Given that that meeting is taking place with Russia, that must be a hopeful development. In that case—I speak as one who advocated marching outside embassies—would you agree that it would be advisable to wait to see what comes out of this meeting over the weekend, and if it does not come out the way we want it to come out, we should march on the embassies of all the countries involved in the current situation in Syria?

**Boris Johnson:** Thank you, Ms Clwyd. We must obviously all hope that the contact between the Russians and the Americans does produce something on Saturday. I think everyone would agree that we have been here before many times. The whole Lavrov-Kerry process ran for quite a while. It did not actually interrupt the bombing. You'll have seen from the front pages of today's papers that that continues. People are continuing to die in Aleppo; far more civilians being killed than militiamen.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

This is a gross, gross crime against humanity. You spoke very powerfully in the House the other day about that and I agreed with every word that you said. I also thought you were right, by the way, to point out the peculiarity that the Stop the War coalition do not think it suitable to protest against this particular war of aggression against an innocent civilian population. That is an oddity that has been noticed, and I remark upon it again.

Q146 **Ann Clwyd:** The point I am making is, given the number of players in this horrible situation, perhaps if this weekend they do not come to some agreement, we can also focus attention on the embassies of other countries involved.

**Boris Johnson:** Okay. Let me be very direct, then. I think it important not to let a general sort of blame game diffuse the central responsibility for what is taking place. This is the Assad regime. Of the 400,000 people who have died in Syria, 95% of them have been killed by the Assad regime. They are being backed up by the Russians and the Iranians. Those are the culprits.

Q147 **Chair:** That's not true, is it? How many casualties have the Syrian Arab army taken?

**Boris Johnson:** Well, my information from the Foreign Office is that the vast majority of the casualties that have been sustained, according to Staffan de Mistura's figures, are a result of—

Q148 **Chair:** I was assuming you meant the conflict as a whole.

**Boris Johnson:** In the conflict as a whole.

Q149 **Chair:** I have heard data that the Syrian Arab army has taken 70,000 fatalities in the course of this conflict.

**Boris Johnson:** Well, I defer to you, Mr Blunt. The figures I have been told are that the Assad regime is responsible. Of the 400,000 fatalities regularly quoted by the UN and the special representative Staffan de Mistura, the overwhelming majority, to the best of my knowledge, have been claimed by the Assad regime. My point to Ms Clwyd is that that should be the focus of our outrage. As I said, I think it peculiar that the Stop the War coalition does not see it that way.

Q150 **Ann Clwyd:** May I ask what policy options you think are open to the UK to respond to events in Aleppo?

**Boris Johnson:** As I said in my opening remarks, I think it is very important not to get hopes up too high, because you will remember the point that Parliament got to in 2013 when this House took a big step backwards from intervention. I thought that was regrettable at the time and I know that you did, too. We vacated the space that has been occupied by the Russians.

Our options now on the humanitarian front are to try to find extra ways of getting help into Aleppo; to do what we can to warn the people of Aleppo about impending airstrikes; to support the White Helmets; to support all



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

types of humanitarian relief; to intensify sanctions on some of the key players in the Assad regime and the Russians as well.

Of course, it is right now that we should be looking again at the more kinetic, military options. But you know we must be realistic about how these in fact work and what is deliverable. Certainly, you can't do anything without a coalition, without doing it with the Americans. I think we are still a pretty long day's march from getting that but that doesn't mean that discussions are not going on, because they certainly are.

**Q151 Ann Clwyd:** May I ask you about the situation with the Kurds? There has been so much emphasis on the role of the peshmerga, and of course the peshmerga were very useful in liberating people, such as the Yazidis from Sinjar. But the Turks in particular seem to have now turned against the Kurds. I wonder how we are going to attempt to protect the Kurds. Having used them and praised them, how do we then protect them?

**Boris Johnson:** You are asking an incredibly good question. There is no doubt that there are difficulties with the Turkish-Kurdish relations in the north of Syria. Clearly, the Turks have concerns about some groups of Kurds, and they make no distinction between the YPG and the PKK, for instance, whereas the Americans see things differently. One thing everybody agrees, including the Turks, is that the peshmerga—I think the peshmerga, the Iraqi Kurds who have been so important in driving Daesh out of their bits of Iraq, have the confidence of the Turkish leadership, and that has been very encouraging.

**Q152 Ann Clwyd:** Mosul, of course, is very much on the agenda at the moment. The public seem to be very concerned about how we protect the civilians in Mosul once the liberation of Mosul is under way. I am not quite clear how that is going to happen.

**Boris Johnson:** Look, I think that is going to be a huge question for all of us in the course of the months ahead. Mosul must be liberated from Daesh. The question is how to do it in such a way as to minimise civilian loss of life. It is a city of at least 1.5 million people, very largely Sunni. They are not going to want to be liberated, to put it mildly, by Shi'a militias. It is going to be a very, very difficult and delicate operation, but the nettle has got to be grasped. It requires a great deal of thought, and it also requires us collectively to think about Mosul post liberation—how is it going to be ordered? How is it going to be run? Who is going to be in charge? These are all questions we need to be answering now.

**Q153 Ann Clwyd:** What exactly is our role in Mosul? What is the UK doing?

**Boris Johnson:** Our role in Mosul at the moment is obviously to help prepare for the liberation of Mosul and to think about how we will order it. You may be interested to know that on Sunday, I am calling a meeting of fellow Foreign Ministers. John Kerry is coming over, and my French counterpart, my German counterpart and others, to discuss exactly how we are going to proceed, not just in Syria but in Iraq as well.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

I think the general feeling is that—obviously it is good that things are happening again in Geneva, but most people—I think including John Kerry—feel that the process of discussion with the Russians has basically run out of road. On Sunday, we will be talking about all the options that we think are available to us and to the West.

I am not going to pretend that there is any easy answer here, because there isn't, but I think most people—I am interested in what you say about polls from the UK public—are now changing their minds about this and they are thinking, "We can't let this go on forever. We can't just see Aleppo pulverised in this way; we have to do something." And I thought the mood of the House of Commons the other day was very telling; I think it has changed from 2013. Whether that means we can get the—get a coalition together for more kinetic action now, I cannot prophesy, but certainly what most people want to see is a new set of options.

**Chair:** I will certainly come back to this.

Q154 **Ann Clwyd:** Foreign Secretary, may I ask you about Yemen? Are you satisfied that the protection of civilians is in our sights, given the horrible stories that are coming out of there and given the role of Saudi Arabia and our role in selling arms to Saudi Arabia?

**Boris Johnson:** Obviously, we have a very elaborate—probably the most elaborate of any arms-exporting country—system of trying to check that the things we export are being used in conformity with international humanitarian law. We take all the allegations, all the news, from Yemen incredibly seriously. You saw what happened on Saturday in Sana'a. It was extremely worrying. We have to encourage—we do encourage very strongly—our Saudi friends to go for a ceasefire to sort this out and to investigate thoroughly what has taken place, and they are investigating.

**Chair:** Let us try and come back to Yemen, which is a very substantial subject that obviously deserves significant time of its own. Let us see if we can create that time at the end.

Q155 **Mike Gapes:** Foreign Secretary, may I go back to your initial remarks where you said you wanted to forge a new identity for a global Britain? You controversially drew attention to the part-Kenyan heritage of the United States President, and you yourself have a part-American and part-Turkish heritage. Are you what the Prime Minister would refer to as a citizen of the world?

**Boris Johnson:** They used to say on the back of the honey in Sainsbury's, "produce of more than one country". Yes, I certainly am in that sense. I think we all are. The human race probably emerged from Africa. That is why, by the way, I was so offended by the French Prime Minister's article in the *Financial Times* today.

Q156 **Mike Gapes:** Aren't you offended by the Prime Minister's attack on the people who see themselves as citizens of the world, which was in her speech at your conference?

**Boris Johnson:** Did she?



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Mike Gapes:** Yes, she did.

**Boris Johnson:** Well, I am a citizen of the UK and proud to be a citizen of the UK. So are we all. That is our primary identity. I also think that we're all, you know, part of the same great species. I get back to my point: we should be open to people from other countries; we really should. It is something that has been of immense value, and it is a two-way thing. Britain is the biggest exporter of its own people of all the rich countries. You know, we send Brits abroad, and it's a fantastic thing that we do. The world, in my view, is better for it. Britain is also better for having some brilliant people working here.

Q157 **Mike Gapes:** Good. Including, perhaps, on our plans for how we deal with the European Union—people working at the London School of Economics and elsewhere.

**Boris Johnson:** No, that was complete—Mr Gapes, I am so glad you mentioned that, because I am able to knock that one totally on the head. That was absolute nonsense. Someone rang up the Foreign Office. There was a phone conversation in which it was made clear what is the standard procedure. Anybody working for the Foreign Office or for the FCO, as a member of staff or seconded to it, has got to get security clearance. That has always been the case. But there is absolutely no reason for anybody who is supplying research data or analysis to us to have security clearance.

Q158 **Mike Gapes:** So nothing has changed.

**Boris Johnson:** The LSE, I am afraid to say, inaccurately reported this conversation in an internal email and presented it, or somebody did—some remoaning remainer presented it as a post-referendum change in policy, and it wasn't true. It wasn't true, and it is like—you know, everything is now attributed to Brexit—

Q159 **Mike Gapes:** Has anything changed?

**Boris Johnson:** It was total nonsense.

Q160 **Mike Gapes:** Nothing has changed.

**Boris Johnson:** Nothing has changed.

Q161 **Mike Gapes:** Good. May I ask you about this relationship between your Department and the Department for leaving the European Union? The Secretary of State, your colleague David Davis, came before us a few weeks ago and I asked him questions about that. I asked him whether UKRep would be reporting to him or to the FCO and he said, "Well, there's probably a pay and rations link. I don't know." Could you clarify? Does UKRep report to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as well as to the Department for leaving the EU?

**Boris Johnson:** Yes, of course it does—and I have had regular contact with Ivan Rogers, who is our perm rep. And all European embassies obviously—you know, we run the network. But I want to stress, on this, of all the sort of fictions in the media, this is the most— The idea that there



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

are these three competing poles is complete nonsense. We are working together. The FCO holds the network. We are immensely supportive of the work being done by both DIT and DExEU, and we have got to get on with it.

Q162 **Mike Gapes:** In that context, since the referendum vote, there have been calls by Ministers in France, Italy and Germany for a revitalisation of the acceleration towards an EU defence policy. Now, your colleague the Secretary of State for Defence has said that we would block such a development, but given that we are intending to be out of the EU within around two years or so, is it wise for us to obstruct what other EU countries wish to do to increase their defence co-operation? Will we not actually damage the possibility of us getting a good deal in the negotiations if we take that attitude?

**Boris Johnson:** A couple of points. First of all, I think it is perfectly right to point out, as Michael Fallon has done, that an EU defence pact that undermines NATO is a bad idea and we have got to make sure that the defence architecture of Europe, of this part of the world, continues to have the Americans very much in it. I think that is something that is widely understood across other European capitals.

If our friends want to go ahead with new security architecture—as they have pledged to do, by the way, many times over the last four decades, because I remember all of them quite well—I don't think, as you indicate, that post Brexit we can reasonably stand in their way. I think that, given that we are the biggest military player in the area—the second biggest, you know, the only other nuclear power, it wouldn't be a bad idea if, if they do propose, they do genuinely go ahead with such things, we might suggest a way in which Britain could be supportive, involved in the enterprise. I think that might be something that would commend itself to Commissioner High Representative Mogherini and others currently involved in this venture.

**Mike Gapes:** Finally—I am not sure how much time I have got left, Chairman.

**Chair:** Four minutes.

Q163 **Mike Gapes:** Right, good. Penultimately then, your predecessor but one, William Hague, said in November 2012 that the UK “recognise the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces as the sole legitimate representative of the Syrian people.” There were some questions about that—I myself queried it—in terms of whether it really did represent all the opposition forces. Is it still the position of the Government that the National Coalition are the sole legitimate representative of the Syrian people?

**Boris Johnson:** No. The High Negotiations Committee, which is this broadly based body—

Q164 **Mike Gapes:** Which is wider than the—

**Boris Johnson:** Which is wider. I think they have a great deal of



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

credibility. They should be at the centre of the Geneva negotiations, but I don't exclude that there might be others who could also have a claim. We should not be so Cartesian about this. If there are others who want to be useful to the future of Syria, of course their claims should be considered if they are democratic, pluralistic and so on and so forth.

**Q165 Mike Gapes:** To be clear, you are confirming that the Government no longer regards the National Coalition as the sole legitimate representative.

**Boris Johnson:** What I am saying is that we think the HNC is a powerful and credible voice for those opposition groups.

**Q166 Mike Gapes:** Okay. We may want to explore that. Finally, during the statement that we had in the debate that Andrew Mitchell introduced a couple of days ago, parallels were drawn between what Russia is doing in Aleppo and what the Nazis did in Guernica. Given the history of what Russia has done in Ukraine, what it did in Georgia and what it did internally in its own country in flattening Grozny, isn't it time for us to fundamentally reassess our attitude to Russia? Linked to that, given the threats to the Baltic states, the positioning of nuclear-tipped missiles in Kaliningrad, which can potentially hit Berlin as well as Poland, and the revelations about the hacking of the Democratic National Committee and the attempts to interfere in the American election process, do we not need to have a fundamental reassessment of our attitude to Russia?

**Boris Johnson:** I heard your powerful speech the other day in the Commons about Guernica and the Russian bombing, and I think your feelings are shared by millions of people in this country. Two points. It is very important to stress that we have no quarrel with the Russian people. We are not hostile to Russia as a country; far from it. I would go further. I would say that, for all that Russia is doing many, many terrible things, as you rightly say, I don't think that Russia today can be compared to the Soviet Union that I remember as a child. I don't think it is as much of a threat to the stability of the world as the former Soviet Union. I don't think it is entirely right to talk about a new cold war. But it is obvious—you correctly list the ways in which Russia is being reckless and aggressive—that we have a serious problem.

Our sanctions are biting. The Russian economy shrank by almost 3.5% more last year. It is tough for people in Russia, but the regime seems determined to remain on its present course. I think we have to remain very, very tough. It is the UK that is in the lead in the UN Security Council in drafting and passing resolutions on Russia's behaviour, it is the UK that has escalated the question of whether the bombing of Aleppo may amount to a war crime, and it is the UK that is in the lead in making sure we keep the sanctions tight on Russia because of what is happening in Ukraine. That is another terrible conflict: 9,200 lives claimed in eastern Ukraine.

Mr Gapes, I cannot disagree with your analysis. We have a very serious problem, but we have to engage with Russia. We have to persuade the Russian Government. We have to persuade Vladimir Putin that there is another path for him and his Government, and that if he will lead the way



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

and bring peace to Syria, he will deserve credit and the thanks of the people of this world. But if he continues on the present path of barbarism, I am afraid, as I said in the House, Russia is in danger of being reduced to the status of a rogue nation.

I think that would be a tragedy, if you consider where we were 25 years ago when we had such hopes at the end of the cold war. We really thought it could all be so different.

I do not want us to get back into a logic of endless confrontation with Russia in every part of the world. That would be crazy. We have so much—there are things we have to do together. We have to fight terror together. Russian people—Russian holidaymakers and British holidaymakers both face the threat of being blown out of the sky by terrorists. We have things we must do together. We have common interests; but at the moment the behaviour of the Russian Government is making it very, very difficult for us to pursue those interests together.

**Q167 Chair:** While we are on this subject, before I get on to Syria, what effect do you think the sanctions are having on Russia, with regard to Ukraine? Specifically, are they changing Russian policy?

**Boris Johnson:** No, I mean the sanctions are biting, as I said. The Russian economy has shrunk—the effect of the sanctions is hard to distinguish from the result of the collapse in the price of hydrocarbons, but there is no doubt that the sanctions have hurt the Russians, particularly in their ability to raise finance. We must continue that pressure. It is not uncontroversial with our European friends. There are plenty of my fellow Foreign Ministers in the EU who have told me privately that they feel their economies are feeling the pressure of these sanctions; because, after all, they may have considerable trade with Russia. Our own trade with Russia, as the Committee will know, has fallen dramatically following these sanctions. They are having an effect on both sides, but at present there is no—

**Q168 Chair:** So the difficult conundrum you face is that we are now examining, presumably over the course of the activity during the coming weekend about what to do about Russian action in Syria—is that so far the levers available to us over Ukraine have no policy effect, and our European partners are saying they are now questioning presumably either their efficacy or their effect on their own economies.

**Boris Johnson:** I would not go so far as to say that. I think that they are certainly having an effect; they are biting. I think that the strategy of the Russians, the Kremlin, seems to be basically to keep the Donbass region in a state of turmoil and make Ukraine very difficult politically to govern as a united whole, and I am afraid that we could be in for a long haul here. But I think it would be a mistake—

**Q169 Chair:** I am interested—chart a route as to how we get Russia out of the cul-de-sac where it has placed itself.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Boris Johnson:** I am afraid it needs both sides in Ukraine to make progress, and I do think the Minsk—I went there to see for myself what was going on, and members of the Committee must not underestimate the psychological effect on the people of Ukraine of this war. They have lost lots of people and they feel very, very deeply—

**Chair:** We are going next week.

**Boris Johnson:** I am delighted to hear that. They feel very deeply and very bitterly about what Russia is doing; but it is also true—and it is incredibly difficult, as a result, for Ukrainian politicians—that they have to try and take the thing forward. There needs at some stage to be a democratic process in the Donbass region. The Minsk process has got to get going. That means that there must be reform in Ukraine, and progress is perhaps not as fast as the Ukrainian leadership would like.

Q170 **Chair:** But my question was, picking up your wider strategic point about the need to have a constructive relationship with Russia, and all the interests we actually do have in common—yet at the same time you are using rhetoric about Russia becoming a pariah state, and the terms under which our ambassador in the UN spoke about Russia were extremely severe, presumably on your instruction—how are we going to get Russia into a place where we can begin to have that kind of constructive relationship? You have Mr Barrow next to you, who is obviously something of an authority in this area.

**Boris Johnson:** He is, and in both Kiev and Moscow he has represented us. I just want to get back to what I was saying to Mr Gapes, because it is very important. Russia is a great country. I am a Russophile; I went there when I was 16. It is an extraordinary culture and civilisation from which we can learn endlessly, with profit. We should be friends with the Russians. We should be building relations. We should be keeping channels open. We should be constantly talking to them. We must not get into a logic of a new cold war; I think that would be totally wrong. But I think the route forward is for us to recognise that about Russia, to acknowledge Russia's importance on the world stage, but to make it clear that that recognition is only possible if they will cease from what I am afraid are barbaric acts in Aleppo and in Syria, and if they will help find a way forward in Ukraine.

You clearly can see what has happened to the former Soviet Union over the last 25 years. Everybody can see the reasons why the Russians might collectively feel that they had been squeezed. They have lost huge amounts of territory that they once conceived of as belonging to them. They see NATO ringed around. You have to see things, to a certain extent, from the Russian point of view, but the Russians have got to understand that the way forward for them is to do the right thing. Doing the right thing means doing a deal in Syria—let us hope that John Kerry and his counterpart have success on Saturday, and let us see where we get—and doing a deal in Ukraine. The points that Mr Gapes makes about Russian cyber activity and all that are, I'm afraid, valid and we need to think about them, but the answer is to engage.



**Q171 Chair:** Moving back to Syria—we are doing an inquiry into Russia and we will take the opportunity to take evidence from you or the responsible Minister, and hopefully Mr Barrow, before we conclude that inquiry. Turning back to Syria and our understanding of the Syrian position, which was behind my question about the challenge of casualties, how well do we understand the reasons for the resilience of the Assad regime? I wonder if there is anything further you can say on the casualties. I understood that the Syrian Arab Army had taken 70,000 fatalities, which would obviously be significantly more than a 5% share—is the carnage on both sides here? Is there a misappreciation of why people in Syria—we might not like it—are looking to the regime for security because they are fearful of the Islamist threat?

**Boris Johnson:** One of the things that Assad did almost immediately in 2011 was, as you know, to open jails and release the Islamists and to create this false equivalence between—to create this scenario in which he was inviting everybody to choose between himself and a bunch of jihadis. That is not true; there is a significant moderate opposition. I cannot give you the figures, I'm afraid, for the casualties that have been sustained by the Syrian Arab Army. If I can write to you about that, I would be very happy to do so.

**Q172 Chair:** I would be grateful. Turning to the moderate opposition and the hard power that the HNC and the Free Syrian Army have on the ground, can you give us your assessment of exactly what hard power they have in this conflict? The evidence that this Committee has taken suggests that that is not particularly great.

**Boris Johnson:** This has been a subject of a great deal of controversy. I remember the former Prime Minister used a figure of 70,000, as I recall, in the House for the number of, as it were, moderate opposition fighters. I am not going to give you a particular figure. I am told that their numbers are still very substantial, although obviously one of the disasters of what has been happening is that, as a result of the behaviour of the Assad regime and the feeling that no one is sticking up for them, some of the moderate people have become more radicalised—I don't think there is any particular controversy about that. But, there are still large areas in Homs, Hama, Aleppo and many other parts of Syria that are basically run by a moderate opposition, and we should never forget that.

**Q173 Chair:** Our Syria strategy is obviously now under some reassessment, as it is with all these meetings we are having over the weekend. I have seen reports that those meetings might include a Foreign Minister meeting between Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, alongside the United States and Russia. Can you give us a picture of what the diplomatic activity is this weekend and how it comes together on Sunday?

**Boris Johnson:** On Sunday, we are bringing together like-minded countries to see what—everyone will know that the Syrian diplomacy has basically been conducted through the International Syria Support Group, the ISSG. That has brought together 25 countries. It is a very big forum, with the Russians and the Americans sitting, as it were, as joint chairs,



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

and everybody else around the table. They have had the Iranians and everybody there. In the end, it has not worked. The last session was extremely acrimonious, as speaker after speaker effectively denounced the Russian position and it turned into a sort of slanging match in which the Iranians came to the assistance of the Russians and the conversation really got nowhere.

We need to think about what our options are, so, on Sunday, we will be getting John Kerry and others—a like-minded group—together. I cannot give you the exact cast list at the moment because it is in the process of being assembled, but it will be like-minded countries that wish to canvass all the options. I repeat my caution to the Committee: those options of course include more kinetic action, but there are grave difficulties involved, as the Prime Minister said in the House yesterday.

Q174 **Chair:** Presumably, one of the prime difficulties at the moment is that the current American Administration has set its face against no-fly zones, presumably because of the difficulties you are alluding to. What change do you think might come with a new Administration under the stated policies of Hillary Clinton?

**Boris Johnson:** I think it is really too early to say. I have had discussions with some people in Washington who may or may not be close to any future Administration. Hillary Clinton has taken a tougher line on Syria than the current White House Administration, but I really think it is too early to prophesy.

Q175 **Chair:** How close do you think the Russians and the Assad regime are to achieving their military objectives?

**Boris Johnson:** Again, I would not like to speculate. The tragedy is that they might achieve what they think are their military objectives, but that would not be a victory. They have to understand that whatever happens, they will not have recaptured the people of Syria. He has done too much damage and murdered too many people ever to have a claim to be the ruler of a united Syria again. I think we are right to say that he cannot be part of the solution. There has to be a transition away from Assad. We do not say that that has to happen immediately, but it must happen. Resolution 2254 sketches out the route map: a six-month period of continuity and then 18 months of a condominium between the Assad regime—elements of the Assad regime—and the opposition, but Assad going. That's got to be part of it. And don't forget that it was only a few years ago, in 2012, that the Russians were on the verge of dumping him themselves. So this thing is possible, and people should not lose hope.

Q176 **Chair:** We had a discussion at the beginning about the efficacy of sanctions on Russia vis-à-vis Ukraine. What measures could we take, short of kinetic engagement, which—

**Boris Johnson:** In Ukraine?

**Chair:** No, with regard to Syria. What sanctions would be available, given Russian action in Syria, and how would you differentiate those sanctions

from the sanctions applied to Russia on Ukraine?

**Boris Johnson:** Clearly, the big anomaly in the whole issue of sanctions against Russia is that much of western Europe continues to take huge amounts of Russian gas. There are some European countries that say that that's where the sanctions should apply next. That would be very difficult because, I think, 50% of German gas supplies come from Russia. That's big stuff. That would be damaging to those economies as well as to Russia.

Q177 **Chair:** I am going to allow my colleagues to come in, and I hope we can continue this until 11 o'clock, but I just want to return briefly to the issue of Europe. On Brexit, you said, "We're going to get the best possible deal for trade and services." It is not in our gift, is it? It is perfectly possible there will be no deal, because we can't command the 27 on the other side of the table. The difficulty we face is that—I think you may have heard my question to the Brexit Secretary—the better the deal looks for the United Kingdom, the more difficult it is politically to deliver among the 27, and it may get vetoed by the European Parliament anyway. We can't control that Parliament, let alone ours.

**Boris Johnson:** Which is why I think it's so important to recast this whole conversation and to look at Brexit as an evolution in the development of the EU and as a solution to "the British problem", and to stop thinking of it as this acrimonious divorce. It's not going to be like that. This is going to be the development of a new European partnership between Britain and the EU, and it will be beneficial for both sides. That's the way to look at it.

Q178 **Chair:** However, the first phase of that might be a two-year negotiation that does not end in a deal.

**Boris Johnson:** Well, let's see where we get to. I think it's profoundly in the interests of both sides to do a deal.

Q179 **Chair:** What I am inviting you to do is assist this Committee in identifying what the consequences of no deal would be, because business, commerce and industry could do with a deal of certainty about this. If the worst-case scenario is no deal, how bad is that? What are the implications? What does it mean for trade policy in relation to the WTO? This Committee was very critical of the last Government, and I notice that in your response to our report on the implications of Brexit—in your rather brief letter, we might be asking you to give us a slightly more substantive reply to that report—you offered no defence to this Committee's charge that the last Administration had been grossly negligent in failing to do any contingency planning for the possibility that the electorate might actually vote for Brexit. I think we should be making clear to business, industry and commerce what the implications of no deal would be, because no deal is perfectly possible, and we cannot control the outcome of these negotiations.

**Boris Johnson:** Well, a couple of points. I don't, obviously, take any particular responsibility for the failure of the Government to produce a plan for Brexit—

**Chair:** No, that was evident in your letter.

**Boris Johnson:** Since after all it was one of the central charges that I was making in the run-up to 23 June. But seriously, on the deal/no deal question, I think there will be a deal. I think it will be a great deal. If—I don't for one moment suppose this to be the case—it can't be done in two years, there are mechanisms for extending the period of discussion. I don't think that that will be necessary. I think we can do it.

Q180 **Chair:** I think your characterisation is correct. It is the first stage of the evolution of a process for a new relationship between the UK and the EU. It may be that we will move towards a deep and comprehensive free trade agreement along the usual timescale in which the EU does these things. But we need to give some degree of certainty to industry and commerce in respect of the investment decisions they have got to take over the next two and half years. I am wondering whether you are going to assist the Committee in that process.

**Boris Johnson:** I think they can be absolutely certain that Britain will remain the No. 1 place to invest in this region, simply because of our time zone, language and skills base, and the incredible diversity of our economy and its 21st century sectors, which mean that we are the place to come. That is going to be a giant fact of life even if we and our partners are so foolish as not to do a great deal in goods and services. I think we will. I am absolutely confident we will, because it is profoundly in the interests of elected politicians like ourselves over the channel to do it for the good of their constituents. That is what this is all about. In the end, this isn't about theology or the ideology of the European Union. That is entirely secondary to the imperative of taking forward a strong European economy and a strong UK economy.

**Chair:** I look forward to the active assistance of your office in what will be our inquiry on the consequences of having no deal.

Q181 **Mike Gapes:** Back on the sanctions, we currently implement European Union sanctions and, as you said, we are at the forefront in pressing for those. When we leave the EU, will we still be implementing EU sanctions, or will we, because we have a more robust attitude, move towards a position like that of the United States and perhaps towards a Magnitsky Act or something similar?

**Boris Johnson:** That is extremely good question. I have been thinking a great deal about how exactly it is going work. We have been thinking about it with our European friends, because, clearly, they want us to stick with them in a broad way when it comes to foreign policy questions. Do we all have to be around the table in the EU Council or are there other intergovernmental mechanisms that we are going to produce to reflect the new European partnership between Britain and the EU that will mean we can do it in a different way? Either way, we are coming out of the treaties. Whatever we do will be done purely intergovernmentally, and I think there is going to be a strong interest on both sides in having a concerted approach, but what is interesting is that it might be that there



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

will be scope for the UK sometimes to go further. It might also be that we would want to keep the serried ranks and march forward together. That is a discussion that we are obviously going to have over the course of the negotiations.

**Chair:** I will ask my colleagues to be very brief in their final questions, and then we are in your hands as to how long the answers take.

Q182 **Mr Baron:** Foreign Secretary, can I press you on Syria? Many of us here in Parliament would urge you to be careful what you wish for, and urge caution when it comes to contemplating additional military force. You will be the first to recognise that Syria represents a multi-layered conflict involving Shi'a and Sunni, the old Persian Gulf rivalry, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Russia and the west, and also in the mix are jihadis, Islamist extremists and so on. If history is anything to go by—our involvement in Iraq, Helmand, Libya, and the fact that we have almost changed sides in Syria between 2013 and 2015, intentionally or not—we have got to progress with caution because force, in the end, has not always been wholly positive; and there are many in this place who have so far remained silent on this issue, but perhaps will raise their heads if it looks as though we may be repeating previous errors when it comes to military intervention.

**Boris Johnson:** I absolutely accept that and understand that, and by the way, I understand completely what you mean about the voices of caution that weren't raised the other day in Parliament. We did have lots of passionate voices raised in favour of no-fly zones and so on, and as I say, it is vital that we consider them, and we will do that now, but the points that you make are certainly valid.

Q183 **Stephen Gethins:** Foreign Secretary, thank you for staying so long and for your evidence. Earlier on, just after I accused you of not having a clue—a Scooby—you said, in response to a question from me, that you were unhappy that David Cameron had signed up to the Lisbon treaty; but, of course, Gordon Brown signed the Lisbon treaty. Just for the record, would you like to answer that question in terms of what David Cameron signed up to? Secondly—

**Boris Johnson:** Let me just clarify. If you remember, there was a pledge that we were going to have a referendum on the Lisbon treaty, which we then, in my view regrettably, did not carry through. That was what I was referring to.

Q184 **Stephen Gethins:** Okay. Rather than a treaty he had signed.

**Boris Johnson:** One thing I should also clarify. I referred to moderate fighters in Homs. I should have said north of Homs, just for the record.

Q185 **Ann Clwyd:** Foreign Secretary, do you think we should suspend arms sales to Saudi Arabia till we are satisfied that they are not being used against civilians in Yemen?

**Boris Johnson:** I repeat what I have said about our deep concern about what is happening in Yemen. On the export licensing, we have one of the



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

most robust systems in the world and we do consider each licence application against the consolidated criteria, and export licences that do not meet those criteria are not licensed. But we are keeping this under, I can tell you, a very careful review at present.

Q186 **Chair:** You will have noted the report we made on this, and that we dissented from that report.

**Boris Johnson:** I did notice that.

**Chair:** But there is a view of this Committee, and the requirement about getting proper independent investigations under way into Saudi Arabia's conduct and the coalition's conduct of operations there.

Q187 **Andrew Rosindell:** The one issue that is unresolved in Europe—nothing to do with the European Union—is the issue of Cyprus. Will the Foreign Secretary undertake to work with the Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus to work for a fair and amicable solution, while at the same time not conceding sovereignty over the British sovereign bases of Akrotiri and Dhekelia?

**Boris Johnson:** I think we are potentially on the verge of some great progress in Cyprus and I pay tribute to the leaders on both sides, Mr Anastasiades and Mr Akinci; I met them both, and Mr Kasoulides the Foreign Minister, in New York. And the Turks are playing their role; the Greeks are playing their role. We obviously have a role too. The territory of our bases, as you know, is huge in Cyprus. We are willing to cede some of that territory that we don't need, to help move the process forward, and I think that's a good thing. I think it's too early to count our chickens in Cyprus; it really is, but Cyprus is one of the few examples in the world of two leaders who are willing to—talk about a lack of leadership! These two guys are trying to make a difference for peace and are willing to take a risk with the electorates behind them, rather than solely obeying the narrow party politics of the group that's got them into power. They are really reaching out for peace and I think they are doing a great thing.

Q188 **Chair:** Well, Secretary of State, your predecessor said pretty much the same thing a year ago, so let's hope that we are actually going to bring it home.

**Boris Johnson:** Let's. I think I said it was too early to count our chickens then.

**Chair:** Let's hope that we are going to bring it home, or contribute to bringing it home, on Cyprus. Thank you very much for your evidence this morning.

**Boris Johnson:** Thank you.

**Chair:** Sir Tim, my apologies, I fear that I may have referred to you as Mr Barrow during the course of the session. Thank you to you and Sir Simon for accompanying the Secretary of State. Thank you very much for this morning's evidence.