



Select Committee on International Relations

Corrected oral evidence: Transformation of power in the Middle East and the implications for UK foreign policy

Wednesday 11 January 2017

10.30 am

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Members present: Lord Howell of Guildford (Chairman); Baroness Coussins; Lord Grocott; Lord Hannay of Chiswick; Baroness Helic; Baroness Hilton of Eggardon; Lord Inglewood; Lord Jopling; Lord Purvis of Tweed; Lord Reid of Cardowan; Baroness Smith of Newnham; Lord Wood of Anfield.

Evidence Session No. 9

Heard in Public

Questions 101 – 113

Witnesses

I: Ms Rebecca Crozier, Middle East and North Africa Programme Manager; Mr Philip Luther, Middle East and North Africa Research and Advocacy Director, Amnesty International; Mr Tim Holmes, Regional Director, Middle East, Oxfam.

II: Professor Umut Özkirimli, Professor of Political Science, Lund University and Senior Fellow, Sabanci University.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witnesses

Mr Tim Holmes, Ms Rebecca Crozier and Mr Philip Luther.

Q101 **The Chairman:** Good morning to all three of you, and thank you for coming to join us to share your thoughts with us on the issues before us, which I will touch on in a moment. We have Tim Holmes from Oxfam; Philip Luther, the Middle East and north Africa research and advocacy director at Amnesty International; and Rebecca Crozier from International Alert. You are at the centre of these affairs. This Committee is analysing the enormous transformations of power and influence that are going on in the Middle East region generally, where they are leading, and the implications for the United Kingdom and its relationships and the degree to which they need totally resetting in the light of what is happening, has happened or looks likely to happen. That is our rather ambitious scene. It is immensely complex and tangled, more so than ever before, and we need some illumination from those of you who are close to it to help us to prepare our conclusions.

I will begin with a question that is very general, as it questions the purposes of your organisations. Here you are based, I think, mostly in London, but you are obviously active in the region. The region has very poor areas, but it also has extremely wealthy areas with vast resources. There is a far higher income per head in some of the Emirates than can be found in the United Kingdom. Why do you feel that your organisations have a major role to play in the area—I think you have—from London, and why do you think that the UK Government should be involved in this area when their own resources are in some respects so vast, although their problems are also vast. This is a general question to ask you to describe your reason, your purpose and your mission. Will Rebecca Crozier please start?

Rebecca Crozier: I work for International Alert, which is a peace-building and conflict-resolution organisation as opposed to a development organisation. Our focus is very much on resolving conflict, particularly at a local level. In this region, we work in two ways. One is by addressing conflict within and between communities. It could be by facilitating cross-party dialogue between political parties in Lebanon, for example, including different conflicting sides. We also work at a very local level in Lebanon, for example, addressing tensions arising between Syrian refugees and host communities. In Tunisia, our focus is very much on the state-citizen relationship, conflict or tension between the state and the citizen and helping to support a peaceful democratic transition within Tunisia. We look at how young people are engaged in political decision-making, or not, and work on the increased inclusion of young people.

We also look at border security and the extent to which state security agencies work constructively with local communities to provide security in border areas. That is the type of work that we do, and I hope it is obvious why we are working in this region as a peace-building organisation. We in the UK should be doing that work, because real positive peace, not just stability or the absence of conflict, in which people have a say in the

decisions that affect them and have the ability to access economic opportunity and fair justice, and in which they feel safe and have a sense of well-being and purpose in their life, is essential to stability and peace for us as European neighbours of this region. That is my overview of why we are working here and why the UK should be working in the area.

The Chairman: Mr Luther, bearing in mind particularly that we are dealing with a region seething with millions of young and very active people—two-thirds of them are under 30 and half are aged 15 to 29—this is a new world, a new generation. How do you feel that you can connect with them, and why do you feel that we here in London should be so involved in doing so?

Philip Luther: Thank you very much for inviting me. I shall take a step back, if I may, and say that I am a representative of Amnesty International and my role is Middle East and North Africa research and advocacy director. In the way in which our organisation is structured, we have an important part of our international secretariat in London. However, our international secretariat is increasingly decentralised, so when it comes to the Middle East and North Africa our operations are a bit in London and a bit in Beirut, Tunis and Jerusalem. In that sense, we at the international secretariat level see ourselves very much as being within the region and outside it. As Amnesty, we connect to our national sections and our members across the world. In that sense, we have different arms. Our research and documentation function is co-ordinated out of our international secretariat, but we use the power of our membership when campaigning with respect to Governments both in the region, because we have national sections in the region, and outside it. That allows us to connect in lots of different ways. Clearly part of that is connecting with youth, which is a massive constituency in the region, and with civil society more generally and at the level of Governments.

Coming back to the first question about what role the UK can have, I do not need to talk about all the historical, diplomatic and political relations the UK has in the region. It obviously has bilateral influence, and we can go into more detail about that. In terms of the UK's role in international forums, from a human rights organisation's perspective, the UK's role on the Human Rights Council of the UN and the role it can play in order to bring about scrutiny of the human rights situation in the region is important.

Also, because of the UK's military role in the region, and its military relations and arms sales—we will come on to that, I am sure—it has a very important role in ensuring that it sticks to its international obligations in that field.

The Chairman: Tim Holmes, how do you see Oxfam's mission?

Tim Holmes: Oxfam's mission focuses on overcoming poverty and injustice. That clearly applies in the region. Our work is primarily on the humanitarian response, but we are also working on development where possible and trying to address the underlying causes of poverty where we

can. We have a country presence in 10 countries across the Middle East and North Africa and respond directly and through local partners. A key focus of Oxfam's work is supporting local civil society organisations in humanitarian response development and on the empowerment and civil society agenda. We see our added value in the region partly as access to resources, but also as being a global organisation with decades of experience in some of these issues. We bring technical expertise and build the capacity of local entities. We see a particular role in supporting those local organisations to raise their voice beyond the national level to regional and global level fora to ensure that key areas of concern are heard and addressed.

As I have indicated, we come particularly from a humanitarian and development perspective. We are poverty and suffering-focused. While there is a lot of wealth in a number of countries across the region, there is also an incredible amount of poverty and suffering, which needs to be addressed by those countries and with international support. You will be familiar with some of the context—the desperate situation in Yemen, for example, which is less focused on than the more familiar context of Syria with its large-scale needs.

Lord Grocott: I have two questions. A couple of you mentioned young people, and the Chairman talked about the proportions in the region. Rebecca Crozier talked about getting them involved in political decision-making, or how they get involved. In this country, young people tend not to vote, so I am not sure how ambitious the objectives regarding young people in the area we are talking about are. More particularly, to generalise about young people, or indeed any other age group, is a bit difficult. Is there a big difference between metropolitan, educated, capital city-based young people and people living in the less cosmopolitan parts of the country?

My other question is to Amnesty. I do not know whether you still publish league tables of the most serious violations of human rights in different parts of the world. Will you comment fairly broadly on this question? In the area we are talking about, ignoring the two obvious places where there are wars going on, Yemen and Syria—I do not know how you categorise human rights when there is a war going on—in how bad a situation is this region compared with other parts of the world, and which are the most difficult countries for us to think about?

The Chairman: On the first question, who would like to start? We will then come to the Amnesty question.

Rebecca Crozier: On the question of engaging young people, I will give you an example of some of the work that we do in Tunisia. It links to your question about who you engage and whether you generalise. We are trying to work in some of the most marginalised, hard-to-access areas. For example, we work in suburbs of Tunis that are known as no-go areas and are seen as recruiting grounds for extremist groups. As you know, a lot of young people were going from Tunisia to fight in Syria for the Islamic State. We started doing research in that area, which told us that

there are extremely high levels of mistrust towards the new political elite and the political parties. For example, 98.8% of young people living in Ettadhamen, the area we looked at, believed that political parties work in their own interest and not in the interests of the people. There is a real disconnect between young people and the state and political parties in that area. The only real interaction they have is with the security forces, and that is usually quite negative.

So we set out to work with a group of young people in this area to see whether we could help to build a relationship not between all the young people in Tunisia and the Tunisian state but between the young people living in that area and the local authority. We did that by working with these young people. They mapped their area using open street maps. They looked at where the mosques and schools were and the problem areas where litter was not being collected, for example, or there was no street lighting. That meant that they came up with a really detailed map of their area which they were able to go to the local authority with and say, "Here's what we've done". That was useful for the local authority, because it did not have a map; it had a paper map dated 1999. The young people gave the local authority something that it needed and they were able to talk on an equal level. Very slowly, local government started to invite young people to meetings and consultations.

Then we moved to the next stage where we asked the local authority whether it would allow these young people to engage in a participatory budgeting process. It was agreed that half the development budget for that municipality would be given to the young people to decide how it was used in a consultation process with the wider community. It was €300,000. We are working towards a small model that demonstrates that young people can play a positive role, even in communities where young people are seen as a threat and a problem and where the state's main engagement is raids against potential terrorists. That is one example.

We are also working with more central authorities in Tunisia to look at scaling that up into other municipalities. That is one example of how we engage young people. The ambition starts off being quite modest but looks at a model that we can scale up and work towards doing more broadly. The real importance is getting beyond the elites and working with grass-roots civil society organisations to get to the hardest-to-access young people in the hard-to-reach areas. That requires long-term engagement and getting to know who is who and who has access in those areas. For that reason, it requires working on quite a small level and then scaling up, rather than a top-down approach. That is my example to answer that question.

The Chairman: And the Amnesty question?

Philip Luther: On the question of how to split up the Middle East and North Africa, let me say a word first about the conflict areas, because you rightly mentioned that conflict poses particular challenges to human rights. Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya are live conflict zones, which we would characterise on the one hand as mass violations of international

humanitarian law and the rules of war, whether they be indiscriminate attacks or direct attacks against civilians, which we find in each of those conflict zones, but going hand-in-hand with that mass violations of human rights, which are often less visible, certainly when you look at international media coverage.

In Syria, there is an industrial scale of arbitrary detention and torture, and those responsible include state actors, certainly in the majority of cases in that context, and non-state actors, whether they be Islamic State or others. Somewhere like Egypt is particularly worrying, because there had been an improvement post the 2011 revolution. We then saw a serious regression, which has meant that hundreds of people have been subject to enforced disappearance. It is on a really serious scale, so we have been talking about it as worse than what we saw during the Mubarak era, which is very concerning.

So starting from the worst and moving on to where the situation was sort of getting better, the Gulf, which we may come on to more, is an interesting case, because the prevailing narrative, including the UK Government's narrative, is that is on the slow path to reform, and genuinely there are some interesting initiatives. If we take the example of Bahrain, the UK Government are involved in financing the training of human rights oversight mechanisms. That is a good thing, and we think that the UK are playing an important role there. However, what is going on at the same time and threatens to undermine that good initiative is a regression when it comes to respect for freedom of expression and association and to a continuation of torture. That is where we have an issue with the UK Government, who are not speaking out on that, which undermines the positive role they are playing in supporting those mechanisms.

There are other countries in the region about which there are more positive things to say: Tunisia, Morocco and Lebanon. Tunisia is interesting because, like Morocco before it, it is making a serious effort to deal with some of the mass abuses of the past under former dictatorships with a truth commission, which should get all the support it needs in order to be able to do that work, because it is out of that that you get reconciliation and then long-term changes that can ensure stability in that country and others. So it is very much a mixed bag, from horrors in Syria to some countries that are doing some interesting things that are perhaps more under the radar.

The Chairman: Lord Hannay has questions, still on this theme.

Q102 **Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** Our previous inquiry was about priorities for the UN Secretary-General. Quite a lot of our witnesses said that they thought the UN was inadequately involved in conflict prevention, particularly in the Middle East, and that it was not given enough resources and effective support when it was involved, as it is in Syria, Yemen and Libya. Could you comment from the point of view of your organisations on whether you think there is a bigger role for the UN in this or whether basically there is not?

The Chairman: One of you mentioned the UN.

Philip Luther: When it comes to the UN, you have on the one hand, as we all know, the impasse at Security Council level when it comes to Syria. That is a major blot on the international community's conscience—it should be, anyway—and the UK has been playing more of a positive role when it comes to putting forward, with others, draft resolutions, but that has been hampered by vetoes by others, such as Russia and China. There was a recent development at the level of the UN where the UN General Assembly came up with a resolution at the end of last year because the Security Council was blocking any advancement in, for instance, referring the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. What it came up with is not as good, but at least it is something: the establishment of a mechanism that would lead to some form of accountability.

That is a sign of where the UN has been hampered, and efforts have had to be made at another level that can never be as effective. Saudi Arabian involvement in Yemen is an interesting example. The UN Human Rights Council has played an important role in other conflicts in setting up an independent international inquiry into serious reports of violations. That has happened for Syria, Gaza and many other conflicts around the world. That has not happened to date for Yemen, because Saudi Arabia has managed to block that. It has used its position on the Human Rights Council to block international scrutiny, and that is where we would say that the UK Government, among other Governments, have not done what they should, particularly given their influence within the Saudi-led coalition, to ensure that Saudi Arabia does not block scrutiny. Those are a couple of examples of the UN trying to do something but where there is blockage at a political level and where the UK and others need to do more to ensure scrutiny of violations.

The Chairman: Lord Inglewood, we are getting into a slight traffic jam, as everyone wants to talk about these key general issues. If we can slightly shorten questions and answers, we can get on to more specific things.

Lord Inglewood: I would like to go back to the beginning of the questions. Each of you has helpfully described what you are doing, which is excellent, and I support it, but it is important to go back to Lord Howell's question, which is that as the world is full of terrible things, why, in an area where there is a lot of wealth and when we have real problems in our country, should we be devoting taxpayers' money, and why should citizens be devoting their private money, to the particular activities you are doing?

Tim Holmes: From a humanitarian perspective, it is about looking at where the UK, for example, needs to prioritise resources, and that needs to be done based on vulnerability criteria, where there is greatest need and where people's rights are being met the least. We have a number of cases in the Middle East where that is absolutely justified. It is justified where we have failed states, very unstable states or states that cannot

provide the services that they need to provide across their population. We also have states in conflict that as a result of that conflict cannot do so. We also have states that have resources but are choosing not to use them in a way that supports their population effectively. That is where diplomacy and influence need to be brought, because that is clearly the only long-term solution from a development perspective and as a social contract between the citizen and the state. It is very much justified from both a humanitarian perspective and a rights perspective.

Lord Purvis of Tweed: My question follows that, I am afraid, so forgive me. By definition, you have a global perspective. From our perspective of looking at the UK's position, are you clear that the UK has a clear strategic plan for the region? If so, are the funding and the structures for funding matching that? If not, where could that be strengthened?

Rebecca Crozier: It is not always clear that the UK has a clear strategic plan for the region. Sometimes we are aware that there might be a plan, not necessarily for the whole region but for a particular country, but it is not an externally shareable document. As international agencies, with regard to UK priorities we sometimes feel as though we are working in the dark, although that varies from context to context. There obviously needs to be a much longer-term plan. With contexts such as Syria, we are not going to see a resolution immediately. Even if there is a peace agreement tomorrow, for example, it will take decades to rebuild and to address the impact that that conflict has had on the region. That is what we really do not have at the moment: we do not have a plan within Syria, for example, for the idea of winning the peace rather than the military solution or a security-focused response to issues of extremism or migration. We at International Alert would like the Government to focus much more on the idea of long-term stability as outlined in the building stability overseas strategy, on looking at what it really takes to build stability in a region such as this and on committing to that and investing in it over the longer term, because we will not get stability in the space of one, two or three Governments. There needs to be a long-term plan and a long-term strategy.

The Chairman: Does anyone else want to comment on long-term plans?

Tim Holmes: I would very much endorse that. Two issues come to mind. One is how the UK Government provides the support. There is room for improvement on long-term flexible support that is focused on supporting local civil society. The second is coherence. In a number of contexts, there seem to be multiple UK government objectives that do not always move in the same direction. Yemen is a case in point; there seems to be a lack of policy coherence on the end objective, both from the arms and the humanitarian perspective.

Lord Reid of Cardowan: I have one comment and one question. The comment is that we should spend a lot more time talking about the phrase that Ms Crozier gave us, "winning the peace", which has been a recurrent point. The question arises out of what Mr Luther said. He gave a specific example that highlights a more general quandary for

government: the apparent contradiction between engagement in order to ameliorate problems and at the same time engagement indicating acquiescence in the remaining problems. You gave the example of Bahrain, but I suppose it applies to almost anywhere. To what extent is this apparent contradiction an absolute from your point of view, or is it a case of a balanced judgment? In Bahrain, as you said, the UK is supporting oversight facilities and practices for human rights at the same time as apparently tolerating other breaches of human rights. Of course, a government Minister would respond that if we overdo the criticism, they will not allow the engagement and we would no longer have the relationship that allows us to go in there. To what extent do you understand the quandary of government and that balanced judgment, or do you take the view that these are absolutes and therefore the Government, even at the risk of disengagement, should be saying that they will not tolerate people with whom they are engaged behaving in this fashion?

Philip Luther: We do not see it as an absolute, and in no way are we saying that all *démarches* must be public and that the UK must publicly voice its criticism. There is obviously a place for confidential and private *démarches*. We would say that Bahrain has said very clearly that it is supportive of international engagement and has in a way given a green light to commentary on its human rights situation, which is a good thing. We have said publicly that that is to be supported. With the UK, the Government say that that private diplomacy is the best, most effective means where there is regression, such as in cases where people have been locked up simply for writing things on social media, as in the case in Bahrain, or continuing torture. That is what we are challenging, because the situation has been getting worse, not better, so it begs the question whether the private diplomacy is working. In our conversations with the Foreign Office, we had a sense that the Gulf summit at the end of last year would be something of a watershed in that it would evaluate at that moment whether the private diplomacy route was working. We very much insist that it does not appear to be, so there should be a review, an evaluation, of whether it is, which may take us more into the public criticism space.

The other point is in relation to arms sales, and there we are very clear: there can be arms sales to the region—that is not an issue—but the big issue is where international obligations are violated, and we believe that that is the case.

The Chairman: May I stop you? We are coming on to a specific question, so we will leave it there.

Baroness Coussins: Going back to local work on the ground, how do you deal with the social norms in most Arab countries that restrict the social and political participation of women so that your projects can include them, particularly, perhaps, young women?

Rebecca Crozier: It is a particular issue on the ground in some countries. We have separate engagement for young women and young

men before we engage them together. In parts of Tunisia, for example, one problem is that the labour participation rate of young women is extremely low, as it is in Jordan and other places. We do specialist engagement with young women. In Jordan, we are doing some work in the tech sector getting young women trained as coders to work in tech companies. It means doing a lot of work with young women themselves, with the companies that might employ them in future and with the families and communities of the young women to sensitise them and raise awareness that the inclusion of young women in the workforce is beneficial not just for the women themselves but for the wider community. The work in that respect is dependent on strong relations with civil society organisations that are already there on the ground working on women's empowerment, because those organisations have already built up a level of trust. It is about identifying those agencies and working with them over the long term. You cannot do that in one year, because you are talking about changing societal attitudes. It takes three, four, five years to open up that space to allow women to come out more into the political sphere and the economic sphere. That is broadly the approach that we take. I say again that it has a long-term focus.

Tim Holmes: I would endorse that and will summarise by saying that it needs to be led by young women and women's rights organisations in those contexts. Our support needs to be guided by them. They know what is best in terms of what is possible, and we can help them to bring experiences from elsewhere and enable them to raise their voice beyond where they might be comfortable to try to put issues on the policy agenda to have that wider-level change. Oxfam has a number of examples of working with incubators or labs from an economic empowerment perspective or from a political participation perspective to support women with technical and advisory support about the best way they can bring change to their own lives and to their communities, whether in the legal sphere or the economic, social or political spheres.

- Q103 **Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** In your answers and introductory remarks you have recognised that there are some countries in this region—Tunisia, Morocco and Lebanon have been mentioned, and we could perhaps include Jordan—where there is reasonable stability and some elements of democratic institutions and respect for human rights. Then there are others where there are authoritarian regimes, sometimes of a pretty unsavoury kind but sometimes of a less unsavoury kind. In the evidence we have had, we have heard, including from young people at a round table that they now tend to prioritise stability and internal security above democracy and human rights—perhaps not so much human rights but certainly democracy and democratic institutions. How do you think the British Government should be handling their activities in this region, both with regard to the group of democratic hopeful countries and with regard to the authoritarian ones? This is not about how your own organisations should operate, but about how you would like to see the British Government involved in this area. Are we right in thinking that there is not really a binary choice and that there are groups of countries that are rather different and need to be handled rather differently?

Philip Luther: The situations need to be handled differently. If you take countries such as Tunisia, Morocco and Lebanon where important reforms have happened in recent years, the UK Government can build on what they say is an important element of their foreign policy, which is building effective torture prevention mechanisms, and make that a focus of British diplomacy.

In each of those countries, torture has been a major issue in the past and remains an issue. There is even a bit of a regression in Tunisia, despite the gains made after the transition, partly in the context, which is always a dangerous context for human rights, of the security and counterterrorism operations. There are legislative reforms under way in Morocco, for example, and national preventive mechanisms are being established, or should be established, such as in Lebanon which, since 2008, when it ratified the optional protocol to the convention against torture, has not made progress on the national preventive mechanism.

The UK, with its own experiences and with that being part of its diplomatic strategy, can play an important role and should do so. It should also—this is an important element that runs through our commentary—call out regression when it happens, even if countries are on the path to reform. It helps no one, and it does not help stability where there is regression when it comes to torture, as happened in Tunisia, or there is repression of freedom of expression and civil society is being squeezed, as has happened in Morocco. That needs to be called out.

I will come back to the Gulf to finish. The Gulf is traditionally a place where Britain has far more leverage and historical ties. The UK has joint committees with the Governments of some of those countries, such as Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. There the question we would ask is: if, as the FCO says, human rights are mainstreamed, are human rights a standing agenda item on those joint committee agendas, and, if not, why not? Do human rights have a prominent enough place in the Gulf initiative that was started in 2011? Human rights should be more mainstreamed in the dialogue that happens at many different levels between the UK Government and those Governments.

The Chairman: Rebecca Crozier or Tim Holmes, security and staying alive against crazed gunmen and suicide bombers really is the first thing, is it not?

Rebecca Crozier: I am quite surprised by what the young people told you, because in some ways it runs counter to some of the things we have heard. We recently did some research in Tunisia on the Libyan border. We talked to more than 700 people who said that their main concern was not insecurity or terrorism, which is the Government's main concern in that area, but economic issues, such as having a job and a good education system. Human security issues are the primary issue. They want more infrastructure; they do not want more police.

The young people we have spoken to in the suburbs of Tunis are taking decisions that involve high levels of insecurity to themselves: getting on a boat to come to Europe, for example, or travelling to Libya or to Syria to fight. That is not because they feel insecure in their environment, although it is partly because of that. They are taking a decision that is going to make them more insecure because they do not have a voice and do not feel that they have a future or are being listened to. ISIS, for example, offers being part of the future and of building a state. Coming to Europe on a boat is worth the risk for the prospect of a future.

This discussion needs to be taken in context. Whether people feel that they will prioritise their own safety and security or see their security as more human security depends on who you are talking to. A lot of the young people who have spoken to us have told us that without a job or any prospects for the future or any say over the decisions that affect your day-to-day life you are not living anyway, so why not go and fight for Islamic State or get on a boat? Suicide is another option. There are high levels of suicide in some areas.

The Chairman: Tim Holmes, do you have anything to add to that?

Tim Holmes: Briefly, it is a probably a truism that every context is different and we need to deal with each context specifically. Of course, that applies to countries across the Middle East where reform has perhaps made some progress, but we all recognise that a lot more progress can still be made, whether it is in building the capacity of Administrations or in pushing through certain reforms.

I would also challenge some of the assumptions. I do not know whether you have seen the Arab youth survey, which has been produced for the past eight years, I think. It has come up with a number of interesting statistics. The question referred to two categories of country – those that are more stable and reform orientated and those that are more authoritarian. There is a third category: conflict-affected. In that survey it was, I think, Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon that felt that democracy should be prioritised over stability. That is not necessarily what you would expect. We need to treat some of these datasets or impressions that we get at a generalised level with some caution. I reiterate a point that I have already made about support for civil society. If we are going to categorise countries in the region broadly into those three areas, by supporting civil society in different ways related to the specific context of those countries, one can have the right level of entry and the short and long-term impact that is needed.

The Chairman: Lord Hannay, do you want to follow these questions up now?

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: No, that is very helpful.

Q104 **Baroness Hilton of Eggardon:** One of the most contentious issues in the region is our arms sales to Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. Some people are suggesting that we should be suspending our arms sales in favour of

human rights, or at least using the leverage that we have because of them to create better, more democratic societies in some way. Do you feel that the British Government should be doing more in this way or should be doing it more overtly and not just in private discussions behind the scenes?

Tim Holmes: Clearly the UK has legitimate security relationships in the region and with those Governments. The question for us is how those interests are best served. We see the UK's security interests as being damaged by arms sales where they are seen to be fuelling abuses of human rights and international law. It is also, as Philip said earlier, about delivering international legal commitments, so it stops being a choice. If we as a country have signed up to an arms trade treaty that requires certain things of us, it is about fulfilling that requirement. As you will be aware, the arms trade treaty says that where there is a *risk* of violations of IHR through the sale of arms we should be withhold those sales.

There are significant negative implications for the UK when it is seen as being in breach of that treaty. It is damaged in terms of the perception that it is one rule for one and another rule for another. Where the UK is seen as putting commercial interests above its international legal obligations, it is particularly damaging. We have allies that are seen to be careless, to put it mildly, about civilian safety and adherence to international law. There are reputational implications of this. We also need to think about where such activity against civilians is contributing to violent extremism and future fragility. From Oxfam's perspective, which I understand is shared by Amnesty—Amnesty will contribute further—the UK needs strictly to adhere to international humanitarian law and arms trade treaties.

Baroness Hilton of Eggardon: You say that we are diminishing our influence in the region by collaborating with Saudi Arabia and Yemen in the use of barrel bombs in Yemen, for instance?

Tim Holmes: There is certainly a strong risk of that. I would go further and say that there is a risk not just within the region but globally. If the UK Government has been one of the Governments driving the establishment of the arms trade treaty, and then when they are put to the test they crumble, it is of great concern, it is a precedent and it has implications for elsewhere.

Lord Purvis of Tweed: I know you cannot speak for the whole of the NGO international community, but from your own perspectives would you be in favour, as some have suggested, of expanding beyond simply the risk of human rights violations with the use of weapons so that the arms trade in the UK is linked to a higher ethical standard and we supply arms only to countries that have developing and improving good governance, such as anti-corruption measures, for example?

Philip Luther: I can speak only for Amnesty. We are not advocating exactly that. To be clear, if we take the two examples that were helpfully given on Bahrain, if the UK is supplying radar to the Bahraini navy, we

are not at the moment opposing that. Where we would have a problem is where the UK supplied equipment that could be used, as happens, for the oppression of peaceful protests in which individuals are killed or injured. I very much back up everything that Tim has said: that when it comes to arms supplies to Saudi Arabia we should emphasise the test in the arms trade treaty, which the UK has championed, about risk. From our perspective, the risk is so clearly there because not only have there been incidents in which UK weaponry has been found—in some cases we are talking about cluster munitions that were sold a number of years ago—but if you look more broadly there is overwhelming evidence that the Saudi-led coalition has violated international humanitarian law and committed, in some cases, what could be war crimes. Therefore, the danger is exactly as Tim put it: being complicit in war crimes. That has even greater consequences, not only reputational ones but potentially legal ones.

The Chairman: This is very strong language.

Tim Holmes: We are in a situation where potentially the arms trade treaty is not being implemented. The focus should be on fully implementing the arms trade treaty rather than on introducing additional criteria. It was a long-fought campaign to get it in place, so now let us make sure that everyone is held to account to deliver it rather than introduce new criteria.

Baroness Smith of Newnham: Slightly playing devil's advocate, while I can see that we should not supply arms to Saudi if they are then used in ways that create war crimes and whatever, beyond that is there not a danger that if we say that we will not supply arms to Saudi Arabia or Bahrain unless they meet certain criteria, we will not actually improve humanitarian standards in Saudi or Bahrain but will merely open the market to the Russians or other people who will queue up to sell armaments there? We might say that we will improve conditions, but we would not really be doing that.

Tim Holmes: My response is quite simple: the UK Government have signed up to the arms trade treaty, so they need to comply with its terms. If the UK Government no longer agree with those terms, they should renegotiate the treaty. The treaty requires the UK Government to fulfil those criteria.

The Chairman: Another slightly different question from Baroness Coussins. It might have to be the last.

Q105 **Baroness Coussins:** This last question is about corruption, which, it seems to be agreed across the board, is prevalent across the region. The issue certainly came up quite strongly at the round table with young people. It has also been the subject of other reports and seems to be present in just about every transaction, from getting a driving licence through to the highest levels of government. Can any of you give specific examples of countries in which your organisation is working where you have identified any political will to combat corruption? On the back of

that, what would you advise that the UK's priorities should be in this area?

Philip Luther: I will make two points. First, let me give one example: Morocco. Morocco has set up an anti-corruption institution, which is to be applauded. It is an institution that we have met. Diplomats from many different countries have also engaged with it, and I am sure the UK has too. So that is good. In setting up that institution, Morocco has therefore symbolically taken a stance on corruption. That institution helps with the reform of legislation, which can help longer term.

One thing we would say to counter that picture is that when individuals in Morocco are imprisoned for exposing corruption, that same institution—perhaps it is not strictly part of its mandate—is silent. The Government, of course, are behind the imprisonment of those individuals. Again, the setting up of that institution is great, but in order for it not to look as though it is window dressing it needs to be matched by an effort to ensure that people are not imprisoned merely for exposing corruption, even if it is highly embarrassing and highly damaging to the Government's reputation.

The second point takes us back to the Gulf. We have not done work specifically on the link between corruption and the exploitation in particular of the vast number of migrant workers. However, others have made a clear link, and we would say that migrant workers face problems connected with corruption and that there is a link between that and the ineffective safeguards in some places to ensure that they are not exploited. There has been a spotlight on the situation in Qatar because of the World Cup, and a narrative there that they are on the road to reform and are making legal changes to help to improve workers' rights. However, our analysis is certainly that that is far too slow and that the most recent changes to the notorious sponsorship law, which facilitated the exploitation of migrant workers, has been window dressing; it has not addressed the key problems of employers being able to withhold passports, workers needing exit permits and workers not being able to change jobs because of the employer's hold over them. That is linked to the whole world of corruption and to the terrible exploitation of migrant workers there.

Q106 **The Chairman:** I have a final question. I should tell the Committee that the next speaker has not arrived, so we can ask more questions.

You are dealing with a region, particularly the Gulf, where there are societies and countries of untold wealth building cities that are 100 years ahead of us and that are pursuing fantastic new technologies and with enormous riches. At the same time, we have heard, particularly in your remarks on Saudi Arabia, which were not very friendly, that you are in a way setting yourselves above these Governments and criticising the way they are looking after their citizens' safety. They might say, "Our priority is the safety and prosperity of our citizens. These other issues are important, but we'll be the judges". What feedback and support are you getting from these immensely rich communities in pursuing your very

commendable work and concern for human rights, the rule of law, fair and good government and so on? Are you getting any support at all?

Tim Holmes: I can speak from a humanitarian and development perspective. Yes, these countries have a lot of wealth. They are relatively new to the game in supporting relief and development operations in countries in the region and elsewhere in line with international standards and under international co-ordination mechanisms. We have a number of issues relating to funding in countries where they are belligerent to the conflict. That is always a challenge.

Secondly, as I have already alluded to, there is a need for technical support in how best to make such interventions in other countries, from quite a traditional charity model to a more rights-based model, and for the learning that the UK Government and others have on how to have effective relief and development assistance.

Thirdly, there is also a need for effective co-ordination. An example is Yemen, where some Gulf states have chosen to fund the humanitarian and reconstruction efforts there but outside the UN system, which is causing a lot of chaos.

The Chairman: Rebecca Crozier, help or hindrance from the region itself?

Rebecca Crozier: My only comment is that the overwhelming need in the region from organisations such as ours is to support the democratic transitions, such as on participatory governance. That is where the UK can bring far more expertise and experience than the Gulf states do, which are obviously very wealthy but do not have that particular expertise. The response from civil society is a call for support particularly from UK-based organisations, UK funding and western funding to support them to set up systems and the civil-society oversight of democratic systems.

The Chairman: Mr Luther, the last word.

Philip Luther: I have two quick points to make. First, where we have engagement, such as in Bahrain, we get the feedback that being a critical friend, for instance in commenting on reforms, or providing input into reforms that are on the way, and the way they are working or not working, is appreciated at least at some levels. It might not look like it in public exchanges in the media, but that is the feedback that we get.

You mentioned Saudi Arabia. I guess the positive feedback tends to be more at a civil society level across the Gulf, and it is gratitude for the support. Members of civil society, particularly human rights defenders, have been put in jail or threatened with such actions in Saudi Arabia, so they are in a very difficult position. We need to challenge the Government's line that for instance clamping down in a heavy-handed way on demonstrations in the east of the country and executing political dissidents, as they have done, is a way of ensuring stability. This is what creates grievances among members of the Shia minority and others.

The Chairman: That is a very good dilemma to end on. Thank you very much for your views, which are very helpful. Your work must be very hard and, I suspect, very frustrating at times. We congratulate you on your motivation and efforts. I should have said right at the beginning that this was of course a public session, and there will be a transcript that you can look at later.

Examination of witness

Professor Umut Özkirimli.

Q107 **The Chairman:** Professor Özkirimli, welcome. Thank you very much for coming to see our Committee. We appreciate your presence very much. We want to share some thoughts with you and for you to share your thoughts with us on complex and important issues. This is a public session, so it is recorded and there will be a transcript, which you can alter, adjust and comment on as you wish.

Let us start at the heart of the matter, which is what really is driving Turkey's foreign policy today. Is there a reorientation or re-pivoting towards Europe and NATO? Just give us the general picture of what you think is happening.

Professor Umut Özkirimli: In many ways, it is very difficult to say, because it is shifting fast. If you are working in the area of international relations or political science and trying to follow Turkey from abroad, you have to check Twitter and social media every couple of hours to see what has happened. That even goes for foreign policy. What is going on right now? We can only offer a snapshot of the moment because, as I said, things are happening quite fast. A year ago, Turkey and Russia were on the brink of what many saw as war, when the Turkish air force shot down two planes. There was an embargo by the Russian Federation. Then, all of a sudden, we see Turkey and Russia working together to settle the Syria question and to obtain a ceasefire. It is very complex.

Right now what is more certain is that, yes, there seems to be some sort of distancing from the West. If you looked at domestic political discourse, chills would go down your spine, because it is very anti-West—anti-American and, to a certain extent, anti-British, although not with any content; it is mostly conspiracy theories. The ambassador in Ankara, His Excellency Richard Moore, has great public relations skills. He is very active on Twitter—he is almost a Twitter phenomenon—and is trying to respond to every threat and accusation that the Brits are behind this or that, including any kind of terrorist attack.

On the surface, there is a distancing, but in reality the options open to Turkey are not that great. First, Russia and any other partners in the region are not that reliable and a competition is going on for regional hegemony. Secondly, Turkey economically and in many other ways—politically and militarily—is very dependent on the West. It does not have natural resources such as oil. Most of its trade is done with the European Union. What would the implications be of completely cutting ties with the West? That is hard to tell, obviously.

The Chairman: How does that fit in with what is going on inside Turkey? We read about Gülenists and Kemalists, about the army having to be restructured by the civil authority and about the tradition of military influence in modern Turkey. How does that affect what you have just said?

Professor Umut Özkirimli: One thing that I should have said at the beginning is that I am not best known for my diplomatic skills, so I will try to be as straightforward as possible—I think that is also better for the purposes of this meeting. It is very complex, but in a nutshell, again, it is best to give the ultimate answer, which is that all these bitter feuds and political skirmishes are pretty much over. What we can call, in the terms of an academic, an analyst or an activist, a one-man authoritarian rule is in the process of being made. It has been in the making since 2013, but the constitutional change that is currently being voted on in the parliament will make this de facto change into a de jure change. We are talking about a regime change, in many ways. The President will have all the powers with no checks and balances. I am sure that members of this Committee are aware of the ongoing witch-hunt in Turkey with regard to civil servants but also dissidents and those who are thought to be affiliated with the Kurdish political movement. It is quite a gloomy picture, to be honest.

The Chairman: We will come on to Kurds and, indeed, Syria later.

Q108 **Lord Jopling:** Turkey has for a long time aspired to join the European Union. I was in Istanbul only a few weeks back and I would have thought that that aspiration is totally dead, but it is still a member of NATO. I wonder whether you would say a word about how you see its membership of NATO, given that Mr Erdoğan is looking for more and more power, which is not in the spirit of NATO. Could you see Turkey divorcing itself, or being divorced, from NATO over the years ahead?

Professor Umut Özkirimli: You are definitely right in your observation regarding the European Union. The membership negotiations do not seem to be going anywhere. In the past, five or six years ago, the European Union could play a carrot and stick role in relation to democratisation or economic stability in Turkey. That has now disappeared from both sides. First it was Chancellor Merkel and Sarkozy and then it was the accession of Cyprus. When I am asked questions about this, I usually say that the European Union is no longer a factor. What would hurt or at least make Erdoğan reflect for a few more minutes is NATO membership. The Government try to portray Turkey as a regional power and they think that by developing friendly relations with Russia they may not need NATO. Once again, we are talking about the rule of two strongmen, neither of whom are entirely predictable. What will happen if the deal breaks down on the Kurds in Syria, something that we will come back to?

The authoritarianism may not be the main problem at the end of the day from a realpolitik perspective, but stability and security are. The Erdoğan Government are not at the moment able to provide this. There is a terrorist attack every other week by any group that wants to organise a

terrorist attack anywhere in the country. Intelligence is in tatters, to be honest. We have our families and loved ones there, and we are living in constant fear. We are trying to judge—because when something happens a gag order is imposed immediately—who might have conducted the terrorist attack, whether it was against civilians or against police or security officers.

As far as I know, there is no clause for excluding or getting rid of a member of NATO, but Erdoğan is using anti-NATO rhetoric. It is escalating. Especially after the new year attack at the well-known nightclub when 39 people were killed, not only pro-Government newspapers but Erdoğan himself accused the United States not only of not helping Turkey in its fight against terror of breeding Daesh or Islamic State in the first place. I would prefer to call it Islamic State because it calls itself Islamic State. The rhetoric that is used is not about the West, but they say, “We’re members of NATO, we’re supposed to be allies, but we’re left alone”. That reached its peak after the July 2015 coup when it was clear that the West was a little hesitant in realising what happened—to be honest, we do not know very well—and it started to become much more visible as the months passed. Two weeks ago, it was at its height. Anti-NATO sentiment is huge.

Baroness Smith of Newnham: You suggested that most Turkish trade is with Europe. You have said that Turkish membership of the EU seems to be off the agenda—and I wish you could have come and said that during our referendum campaign when it was being used against the UK staying in the European Union—but Turkey has for the past 50-odd years been part of the customs union. How far does that affect Turkey’s relations with Europe, and are there lessons for the UK if that is where we might end up?

Professor Umut Özkirimli: I have been following the recent debates in Britain. First it was the Norwegian type of membership and now there is talk of a Turkey-type of membership. It is in many ways apples and pears. Turkey is quite dependent on the European Union. We know to a certain extent that pro-Brexit politicians would probably not tell us this, but Britain is dependent on the European Union, too, but it is not the same. Almost 50% of Turkish external trade is with EU countries and, as I pointed out, there are no natural resources. Turkey is highly dependent on natural gas from Russia and Iran, but this does not solve the problem. If they shut down the gas, Turkey would have to turn to Germany or some other big country.

In that sense, the customs union is not something that can left behind and Turkey does not want to do that. That is said openly. In the past, the customs union was seen quite unfavourably as something to stall Turkey’s membership, just a toy. Right now, it is seen as a positive thing because of the euro crisis in Europe in 2008, the refugee crisis and—seen from the Government’s perspective and from a Sunni Muslim perspective—rising populism, far-right feeling and Islamophobia. All these things are acting as deterrents.

Financial problems are huge. That is why I have to check Twitter every two hours. The dollar rate is breaking records every two hours. As I came into Parliament, it was 3.82 USD/TL. To put that in perspective, it is the weakest the Turkish lira has been against the dollar in the past six or seven months, the second part of 2016, and the Turkish lira is the currency that was most devalued among developing countries. Everybody thought that Mexico would suffer most after Trump's election, but the Turkish lira devalued more. This is the beginning, the economists say. There are not many independent economists left in Turkey, but all the credit-rating institutions say the same thing: there is an impending crisis. So the customs union is a must. To what extent that will set up a model for Britain, it is difficult to tell.

The Chairman: That is another issue, as they say.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: The picture that you paint, which I recognise very well, is one of Turkey with an awful lot of enemies at the moment in its own eyes. It now characterises the Kurds virtually wall to wall as enemies, not just the PKK¹ but more widely. The Gülenists—in this country we all have some difficulty understanding what it is suggested they have been doing—seem to be regarded as a fifth column of very great importance that has to be rooted out. IS² has clearly become a major enemy, and now you say that Turkey is talking about the West as being the enemy as well. This is a pretty poor prospect for a country which, as you say, does not have very good natural resources and depends a huge amount on external trade. Do you think that this is just a passing phase? How do you see, for example, President Erdoğan looking at the new US Administration? Is he likely to look at Mr Trump as a fellow strongman, and could he say that now that President Obama is no longer there he does not have to talk a lot of anti-western talk? How stable is the situation? It looks very bad at the moment. Is it set to continue and get worse or could there be some quite surprising changes?

Professor Umut Özkirimli: That is the question that I was dreading most and I was hoping to have last. What I say will be pretty much speculation, since we do not know and the situation is changing quite fast, but I have prepared for question the best I could. The picture is pretty much like this. You do not have to be a Turkey expert to see the changing trends. I was writing a book with two Swedish colleagues comparing—again, it is apples and pears—Sweden and Turkey through the model of discourse. Sweden was presented as the model of a social democratic welfare state and Turkey as a successful combination of Islam and democracy, hence a good model for the Middle East to emulate after the 2011 revolutions. We said to ourselves, on an informal note, that if we had published that book back in 2011 or 2012 we would have been ridiculed today. Sweden has closed its borders, the far-right party is third in the Parliament, and we know what is happening in Turkey. As you

¹ Kurdistan Workers' Party

² Islamic State

summarised, it is pretty much everywhere. That is the discourse that the Government and the pro-Government media are trying to cultivate.

We are currently engaged in a second independence war. The beginning of their rewriting of the nationalist narrative is that we are creating a new Turkey through another independence war because everybody is against us. This was the motto of Turkish nationalism from the beginning. It was the Kemalist motto too. I was raised in primary school with the expression, "The Turk has no friend but the Turk". It is still the same. The Government are openly and unabashedly an Islamist Government who are trying to undo the secular premises of the republic without being ashamed about it, but on the other hand they are pretty much sticking to the same nationalist discourse. It may be a non-secular version, but it is the same thing.

Let me squeeze Trump in here and see what could happen. For some odd reason—I think it is misguided—the Turkish Government were very positive when Trump was elected, mainly because of their hostility towards Obama but also probably because they thought that it would play into their hands. Trump, at least at the rhetorical level, is pro-Russia—or let us say has a softer attitude towards Russia in all these things. That caught many experts, including Turkish nationals, by surprise, given Trump's rabidly anti-Muslim rhetoric. So I do not think that this will last long once Trump assumes power, given his appointed Cabinet, who are well known for their anti-Muslim stances. It is very hard to predict, because we are talking about two unpredictable actors; we do not know what will happen with Trump and we do not know what could happen with Erdoğan.

One thing that could be said in favour of Erdoğan as a politician is that he is very pragmatic. Aside from his ideological beliefs and world view, which he tries to implement within Turkey and to a certain extent abroad, he can change very quickly—as we have seen with Russia and Israel. After the flotilla incident, there were no embassies anywhere. Actually, Turkey had zero friends with its foreign policy attitude.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Zero enemies.

Professor Umut Özkirimli: That was made fun of in various outlets. At the end of 2012 Turkey did not have ambassadors in four or five countries: Libya, Egypt, Syria, Israel—you name it. But now Israel has sent a new ambassador to Turkey and they are having talks on a regular basis.

The same goes elsewhere. There is a little military base in Iraq, for instance, and the Iraqi central government in Baghdad threatened Turkey and told it to pull its soldiers out. Turkey said that it would go to war over it but last week made a deal to withdraw its soldiers. How could you predict that? Mainly because—this is the big answer to your question—a dictatorship in Turkey is not sustainable, precisely because of a lack of resources and the heterogeneity of the population. This is valid in other cases as well. We see the price—either collapse or a lot of repression and

brutal violence. Turkey is probably not a country that would allow violence to rise to that level against the Kurds, the Alevis and the dissidents. And, as I said, the economy is completely dependent. So something will probably change. But will or could the change include Erdoğan? We cannot tell.

- Q109 **Lord Reid of Cardowan:** Thank you, Professor. What comes across is the unpredictability of Turkey's position when it comes to external relations. This is partly because of internal alliances, alluded to by the Chairman, of the apparent opposites of Islamic-based values apparently allying with secular values, of the Kemalists and Eurasians and so on, particularly in the military—the unsustainability and unpredictability of that alliance—and partly because of external events. So in the middle the question is where the UK stands on this. What is the view of Turkey at present and what is the health of the UK-Turkey relationship? What role, if any at all, does Turkey think we could play in the region, as well as with Turkey, or does it now take the view in the wake of anti-Americanism and anti-western sentiment that “This lot should stay out”?, and for historical reasons: “They brought down the caliphate and so on and they are now doing the same again”? Is it as bad as that? How healthy is the existing relationship, and what should the UK attempt to do about it?

Professor Umut Özkirimli: I will just give you the Government's picture. It might be only my own reflection, but it is pretty much as with the EU. The UK is no longer seen as a major actor, for two reasons. One is the reluctance of the UK to engage in the Middle East, especially with the Syrian question, which was very dear to Erdoğan's heart, first for ideological reasons but now for practical reasons. What happens with Kurdish autonomy? The jihadists now flowing into Turkey are creating a problem. In the past, the borders were completely porous. Now the question is how many sleeper cells there are in Turkey. This is not something that Turkish intelligence or the Government know. If a member of the riot police can kill the Russian ambassador in the middle of Ankara at an exhibition, it reflects a serious lack of intelligence and capability. There is talk of Turkey becoming—not militarily or economically at first, but in other senses—a failed state. Could it become one and would it be allowed to become one? Perhaps Libya could, but what about Turkey?

I was following domestic debates, knowing that this would be one of the first questions I would be asked. The second reason is that now, from Turkey, when you look at Britain both from the opposition's perspective, whatever is left of the opposition, and the Government's perspective, the UK has its own problems. Obviously, as you can imagine, the appointment of Boris Johnson as Foreign Secretary was not the most popular thing the UK did, precisely because he was very involved in criticising Erdoğan. He was the winner of a defamatory poetry competition in the *Spectator*. I do not know whether these words should be on the record, but he mentioned Erdoğan's name alongside goats—let

us put it that way. Then all of a sudden Boris Johnson ends up being Foreign Minister.

His visit to Ankara made things a little better and I think that the Prime Minister will visit Ankara soon, trying to soothe fears that the European Union will not keep its part of the refugee deal. In that sense, Erdoğan would look at the United Kingdom as an ally. It always has been in the past. The few pro-Turkey countries in the European Union included Britain, Sweden and Italy until a change of Government. So Britain was among Turkey's friends. But, all of a sudden, with the rise of this nationalist rhetoric and mind-set engulfing the whole country in different ways, the historical fears and the skeletons in the cupboard that were completely forgotten started to reappear. Do they want Britain or the United States to get involved in Syria—and, if so, how? Because the main question is not whether to be involved in Syria but who you support in Syria. In the last couple of months, it seems that they have come to a point of transition with Assad. Even though they are not saying it publicly, it may be imaginable. But the support that has been given to the PYD,³ the Syrian Kurds, in Iraq and Syria constitutes a major problem.

The Chairman: I will stop you there, because we want to come on to Syria and the Kurds in a second, but you have given a very clear view about the UK. Thank you very much.

Q110 **Baroness Coussins:** Moving on to Syria, how stable would you assess the alliance between Turkey and Russia on Syria to be? After all, it was quite a surprising alliance to emerge, given that Turkey and Russia had been on opposite sides on Syria until then and the series of flashpoints and provocations during 2015 and 2016. Do you think that this alliance can last? What would Turkey's red lines be in negotiations both on the ceasefire and on future arrangements in Syria, whether to do with Assad's position or with other issues?

Professor Umut Özkirimli: Turkey seems to have only one red line, which is possible or potential Kurdish autonomy in Syria. That will take not the form of independence—not for geopolitical reasons but because the Kurds themselves do not ask for it—but some sort of autonomy within an independent Syria. If Russia and a resuscitated Assad continue their line, first, do not interfere with Turkey's attempts perhaps to get into a clash with the Syrian Kurds over, for instance, Manbij, the next step after al-Bab, which it has been trying to take for some time. Erdoğan openly claimed two weeks ago that the next stage will be to take Manbij from the PYD. The United States is trying to secure an evacuation of Manbij. The Kurds said that it did, but the Turkish Government said that the Arabs left behind were Kurdified and are pretty much affiliated with them. That is one thing. What would Assad do? In order to harm Turkey and get rid of Turkish influence in the region, he withdrew his army from the Kurdish areas after the Arab revolutions, deliberately leaving that area to the Kurds so that they have their own problems and do not continue to support the rebel groups.

³ Democratic Union Party (Syria)

Let us just assume that this drags on and Assad slowly re-establishes control over the main areas of Syria. What would happen? We know from the historical record that the next step will be the Kurds. He is not going to leave them, as in Iraq, to be on their own. If that happens, this alliance between Russia, Syria, Turkey and Iran might last quite a long time, for strategic, not ideological, reasons. They will all have their own enemies. Putin's strategy is to keep Assad in power and to secure his bases on the sea front. We have seen how fast Turkey can leave its resistance to an argument and change sides in exactly a year. In 2015, Russian planes were shot down, yet last year the Russian ambassador was shot in the middle of Ankara and there was no uproar by Putin, who we know can invade countries over one-tenth of that. The shooting has been investigated by Russian intelligence, but there was nothing, and one week later we had the deal over Syria in the way that the Russians want it. The deal has been broken on the ground several times, but it is holding better than the previous ones because Turkey has withdrawn its support from some of the rebel groups and is trying to keep them in check, so it might last. This would be the most worrying thing, I guess, from the perspective of the UK and NATO. Whatever Trump may say or tweet, Putin is probably not a good friend of the western allies or worldview—you name it.

The Chairman: Are you saying that Turkey, which used to be a deadly enemy of Assad, is now in the interests of other forces suddenly finding that it is not the deadly enemy of Assad and will work with Russia because there is more to gain on that side? Is that what is happening?

Professor Umut Özkirimli: Yes, in a word. Obviously, rhetorically, Erdoğan is still not admitting that in front of the cameras, but from the deals we know what is happening right now. The deal that has been signed is very vague when it comes to transition.

We should not forget that three or four years ago Erdoğan and Assad were very close friends as well. They were going on family holidays together. Things started to change in 2011, when Erdoğan, counting on their personal relationship and on Turkey's political and military clout, thought that he could influence the direction of change in Syria. When this did not happen, Erdoğan in many ways lost his calm and they became sworn enemies. That is why Turkey is suffering. Most of the ills that we associate with Turkey today are caused by Syria. Three or four years ago, it was said that the third world might come out of Syria. Of course it will probably not happen, but the point is that it created a lot of ills and it is plaguing the whole region and the whole country precisely because of what is happening. ISIS carried out attacks in Turkey before but never claimed them. Now, they are not only claiming what they are doing, but they are publishing. The latest issue of their weekly magazine had Erdoğan's profile picture on the tip of a gun—to be assassinated, basically. We know that fears of that kind are mounting. Erdoğan is very well protected.

The Chairman: As the Kurds come into it in every way, Lord Inglewood.

Q111 Lord Inglewood: You have covered much of the ground that I was going to ask about, but if we think about the Kurds we obviously think about them in two distinct bits: the Kurds in Syria and the Kurds in Iraq. As far as Iraq is concerned, we have received evidence that the general consensus is that some form of good autonomous governing relations within existing borders should pertain. Is that an assessment you would agree with? That being the case, what would be the Turkish assessment of what such arrangements might be? How does this relate—you have already touched on this—to what is going on in respect of Kurds in Syria and the Turkish attitude towards them? There are obviously Kurds in Turkey as well.

Professor Umut Özkirimli: That assessment is pretty much correct. Right now, Turkey would not oppose some sort of governing autonomy in northern Iraq with the Kurdistan Regional Government. That also shows the erratic nature of Turkish foreign policy, because we know quite well that when the Gulf War happened and the no-fly zone was created, Turkey had pretty much the same fears as it has today about Syrian Kurds. In time, it found a way to accept the Kurdish reality and they became major trading partners. This is a mutually beneficial relationship. Right now, the only thing that Turkey says no to openly is a change of borders in Iraq. In that sense, but in many other respects, this whole end of Sykes-Picot discourse is pretty thin. It is just mythical, a headline. Turkey is not opposing any kind of autonomy. Seeing this, Barzani, who had earlier this year declared that he would hold a referendum about independence, first postponed it until the American election and has now postponed it indefinitely. He still keeps it as a political instrument to use for domestic purposes, but the referendum about independence is not going to be held; at least, there is no date for it. Some kind of de facto autonomy is something that the Kurds in Iraq—the Kurdistan Regional Government—seek and that the Turks would say yes to.

Then we come to the clashes within the Kurdish political movement, because Barzani and the PKK/PYD, or the Syrian Kurds, are sworn enemies.

There have been many attempts to come together around the table, which would be a nightmare for all the countries concerned—not for Iraq anymore, since there is nothing left, or Syria, but for Iran and Turkey—because if these two forces came together, stopping Kurdish independence or the establishment of an independent Kurdistan would be very difficult. This is how they are playing their hand, because there is a struggle for hegemony within the Kurdish political movement about who will lead or dominate the movement. There are basically two contenders: one is Barzani and the other is the ghost of Ocalan—let us just put it that way, since he is in prison—but the PYD is implementing his political programme to a large extent.

The assessment is correct. What will happen will, I guess, depend to a large extent on the West. The UK and the United States will play a major role, because if they support pro-independence or pro-autonomy movements in either country, first, relations with Turkey will get even

worse, and, secondly, the Kurds will probably stop being the largest nation without a state, which is a demographic fact.

Lord Grocott: Looking at the Kurdish communities in Iraq, Syria, Iran and Turkey, as far as I can see the Turkish Government have different policies towards the Kurds in each of those four countries. That is quite a difficult thing to explain domestically, I imagine. You can understand it, I suppose, as a minority within your own country, but can you give me a brief portrait of the Turkish Government's attitude to the Kurdish communities in each of those four countries?

Professor Umut Özkirimli: They are friendly with the Kurdistan Regional Government in northern Iraq, led by Barzani, and they are not that friendly with the Opposition led by Jalal Talabani and other movements, the Gülen movements. So far, they do not control the Kurdistan Regional Government. So as long as their relations are good with Erdoğan, the Iraqi Kurds are not considered a threat, because Barzani is also quite at odds with the PKK. In that sense, Iraq is fine. Iran is not something that they would want to go into. It is a smaller minority and it is under tight control. The Iranian version of the PKK, the PJAK,⁴ was defeated militarily by Iranian forces a year or two ago, so that is a no-go area and is not on Turkey's agenda.

In Syria, there is a problem, for a number of reasons. It has the longest territorial border—it is about 900 kilometres—and apart from 100 kilometres it is all controlled by the Syrian Kurds. The relationship between Syrian Kurds and Turkish Kurds is not only political and institutional. We are not talking only about the PKK and the PYD; we are talking about families. That is why there is this organic unity between the two organisations. A Kurdish family living in Turkey might have a son fighting for the PKK in the Qandil Mountains in Iraq and another son fighting in Kobani. This is what happened. For the Kurds, the battle of Kobani has become a mythical founding moment for symbolically right reasons. It was called the Stalingrad of the Kurds.

The Syrian Kurdish issue is completely different. The Kurds are a minority in Turkey, but they are a sizable minority. We are talking about 15 million people—one fifth of the population. We do not know the exact number, but that is the estimate. It is the largest Kurdish demographic concentration in the four countries. You have a movement that has organic links of political and kinship relations in Syria, and that movement is claiming to practise—let us focus on claims—Ocalan's project of democratic autonomy, with some sort of confederation of states where there will be municipal councils and all. It is a threatening idea.

One of my research areas—actually, my main area—is nationalism, the state and all that. Ocalan's ideas are threatening for many in the region because he denies the existence of states. He is a nationalist but he does not accept the concept of a nation state. He says that we can aspire to

⁴ Kurdistan Free Life Party

cultural and national autonomy within different political structures and non-state structures. So for instance if Assad goes to Salih Muslim and says, "Okay, let's make a deal. You rule your own country, you do your education, you use Kurdish, of course, but in external relations and foreign policy you will be related to me", the Kurds will not even waste 36 hours agreeing to that. They made that deal in the past, when the whole revolution started, but once they saw the opportunity to establish their autonomy, they parted ways. However, they never clashed with the Syrian army. They did not touch each other, and they fought against the same enemy, Islamic State. It was a different situation with the rebel groups.

To sum up, two things are very important for Turkey. The first, as I said before, relates to what will happen in the future regarding Kurdish internal factional dissent and whether Barzani and the PKK could come to terms and join hands and go for some sort of autonomy. It does not have to be a large Kurdistan, by the way. They are speaking of a more independent federal situation in Iraq and then an autonomous region in Syria. Iran is a pipe dream—it is not going to happen—but Turkey will be alarmed because it has the largest minority, and with two Kurdish entities on its borders it will be really hard to control. That is why, like Israel, it is building a wall. It announced today that it will be finished in April. It is will stop the passage not only of jihadis—that is, of course, one of the aims—but Kurdish fighters who move in between.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: To follow this up and to get a slightly clearer picture on the Syrian Kurds, is the Turkish attitude towards them very hostile? Is it caused by their links with the PKK, or is it because they are Kurds? One is remediable and the other is not. Is it conceivable that if the Syrian Kurds not only did a deal with Assad for some regional autonomy but renounced their links with the PKK, the Turkish Government's attitude would move towards their attitude to the Iraqi Kurds, or is that just unthinkable?

Professor Umut Özkirimli: It is conceivable, and not only for political correctness purposes. Of course, everyday racism or political racism is widespread in Turkey towards several minorities, such as Armenians, and there is rising anti-Semitism, but Turkey has worked very well with the Iraqi Kurds over many years. In fairness, we know that Erdoğan was the only politician in republican history who attempted at least to start some sort of opening and a peace process. Whether he really meant it or whether it could have been done that way, he was the only person who could talk openly about this, appear on the stage with the most famous exiled Kurdish singers, or allow broadcasting in Kurdish—okay, it was at 6 am for half an hour, but still. These are small steps, but at least they are steps in the right direction.

I have studied in England, and we know how long it took for the northern Irish question to be settled—and can we say that it is completely settled now? All these questions linger on. The Kurds may for some reason deny their links with the PKK at some point—which they do, by the way; they

say they are different. The West does not accept the PYD or the YPG⁵ as a terrorist organisation, even though everybody knows the organic links between the two groups. They are organic links in the sense that the PKK receives soldiers and when it checks the IDs of the fighters they capture that they are either Turkish or Syrian citizens. It is pretty much half and half. I mean, it is not even.

So it is conceivable, if things evolve in a direction that would satisfy the Turkish Government, but would it ever happen? That I am not so sure about. Would the Syrian Kurds deny all links with the PKK? That would mean also denying most of the things that they are building right now, such as local autonomy. There are various violations of human rights—I know both sides of the problem—but we should also mention that this is the most progressive political project in the Middle East right now, with women chairs and gender equality at all levels. PYD forces in Raqqa include women soldiers. Much has been made of this. There are pictures in glossy fashion journals about fashion. H&M even tried to devise a series based on the khaki uniforms of the PYD women fighters. It was accused of being sexist, and it was removed. So it is not very easy to deny all links to the PKK.

The Syrian Kurds have already renounced military and political links, but ideologically or symbolically it is not possible. Two days ago, the *Washington Post* ran a piece by its main Middle East correspondent about the training by the Kurds of rebel forces fighting against ISIS. They are not only trained militarily. Wherever you go, you see Erdoğan posters. There is a huge cult of personality. His books are a must for reading and curricula. The Arabs form only a quarter of that amorphous thing called the SDF—the Syrian Defence Force—which the Americans created to placate Erdoğan. Three-quarters of the force are Kurds, and one-third are very sympathetic to these ideas. They say, “Yes, that’s not a bad idea. Why not?” It is conceivable, but it is very difficult, and what will happen to the 15 million who are captive within the borders of Turkey?

- Q112 **Lord Reid of Cardowan:** I think my question may have been answered. It follows on from the one asked by Lord Grocott. If Erdoğan accepts—indeed, in some way supports—the KRG in Iraq, if he is content with the Iranian position, where although the Kurds do not have autonomy, Rouhani has gone out of his way to build chemical facilities there and to allow Kurdish language classes and so on, and if he is prepared to tolerate something inside Syria that resembles the KRG, why does he not envisage that being possible inside Turkey? I think your answer was that he tried at one stage, but it came to nothing. Is that the case, or has it now gone beyond any possibility, even if there is autonomy for the KRG in Iraq, the YPG in Syria and the benevolent centralised dictatorship in Iran? Even if that is the case, is it your view that it would now not be possible to return to try to reach some form of accommodation with the Kurds within existing Turkish borders?

⁵ People's Protection Units

Professor Umut Özkirimli: There are two answers to this question, so I have not answered completely in many ways. I will try to be as quick as possible, because it is very complex. He did try, but neither side was that committed to peace. I am on the side of those who see that the peace process was obliterated by Erdoğan when he realised that peace was making him lose votes, which was very apparent in the 2015 election. He lost 9% of the votes, most of which went to the Kurdish party. For Erdoğan, it was just a strategic thing, and when he saw that it did not work, he went back to war to win the nationalist votes, which is the second answer to your question. Even if he wanted to right now, with all the wreckage or havoc that has been created there, with whole cities obliterated—it is not only Erdoğan's fault obviously; it was the PKK's decision to move into the cities—and the suppression, which was brutal, there is no going back any more. That would probably be my answer.

I do not know whether you are approaching a conclusion, but what will happen in future in Turkey? Even if Erdoğan goes, which is something that most of us—the more objective and the more activist—believe, apart from the pro-Erdoğan, historical analogies are always problematic, but we are approaching the sort of polarisation in society of post-World War II Germany and all that. Even if the political system went back to a secular or some other more democratic model, the societal rift that has been created in recent years along different fault lines—secular, pious, Sunni, Alevi-Sunni, Kurdish-Turkish—is so deep that it will take years to overcome. That is the sadness of the situation.

- Q113 **Lord Jopling:** I think we have covered a lot of what was in my question, but perhaps I could put it this way. To what extent are there discussions in Turkey about the rising influence of non-state actors and discussions about frontiers? When I was in Istanbul recently I was struck by the huge number of people who were placed under arrest and incarcerated following the coup. How much discussion is there in Turkey on all these issues, or is it all clamped down on? Are you saying that Mr Erdoğan's future may not be a very long one, which makes me wonder whether you would be happy going back there?

Professor Umut Özkirimli: I say this for strategic reasons. His future may not be a long one. There is the conjunction of the refugee crisis, Islamic State, and the economy, which is a big question that we do not know the answer to, but despite that he may last for a number of years. The constitutional changes that he is trying to make would allow him to stay in power for ever and do whatever he wants. How much is there left to discuss? I am afraid there is nothing, and it is getting worse by the day.

My closest friends—academics and journalists—are in prison. I have not been to Turkey since June. My family is there, but I cannot risk going, because right now the authorities do not need a court order to confiscate your passport. They can accuse you *ex post facto* and just keep you. First they take your passport, then all of a sudden, at 6 am, the police come and take you and put you in jail, and the new state of emergency allows them to keep you without access to an attorney for 10 days and to take

you into custody without telling you the reason for a month. This is unheard of in any democracy or even in a state of emergency. People are in jail, but they do not know why they are in jail. Are they accused of being Fethullah Gülen supporters or PKK supporters?

Unfortunately, it all comes down to one person, which for someone who believes in the force of statutes and institutions is very difficult to stomach. If this one person controls the media, the judiciary, the Executive and the legislature, we are bound to discuss the fate of that one person. What happens if he leaves? We do not know. I tend to say that it cannot be worse, but that would probably just be wishful thinking.

The Chairman: Professor Özkirimli, we have to halt there. You have helped us to edge forward a little in the labyrinth of Turkish politics and Middle East politics, and we are very grateful to you for wisdom. Thank you very much indeed for being with us.

Professor Umut Özkirimli: Thank you for your invitation.