

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [UK's relations with Turkey](#), HC 615

Tuesday 31 January 2017

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Members present: Crispin Blunt (Chair); Mike Gapes; Mr Mark Hendrick; Mr Adam Holloway; Daniel Kawczynski; Ian Murray; Andrew Rosindell; Nadhim Zahawi.

Questions 131-246

Witnesses

Rt Hon Sir Alan Duncan MP, Minister of State for Europe and the Americas, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Lindsay Appleby, Director Europe, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Examination of witnesses

Rt Hon Sir Alan Duncan MP and Lindsay Appleby.

Q131 **Chair:** Sir Alan, Mr Appleby, welcome to the Committee. Welcome everyone. This afternoon's sitting will be the final oral evidence session of our inquiry into Britain's relations with Turkey. Perhaps, Sir Alan, you will introduce yourself and Mr Appleby formally for the record.

Sir Alan Duncan: I am Minister of State at the Foreign Office, responsible for the Americas and Europe—including Turkey, obviously. On my right is Lindsay Appleby, who is director, Europe, which includes Turkey and—of particular relevance at the moment—Cyprus.

Q132 **Chair:** It is obviously very timely for you to come and give us evidence—"obviously" in the wake of the Prime Minister's visit and, indeed, the visit of this Committee. What do you think Turkey wants from her relationship with the United Kingdom?

Sir Alan Duncan: Respect, engagement at all levels and a clear understanding, which I think we almost uniquely have displayed, of the predicament they are in. They feel that they are under constant and regular assault from a number of directions: internally following the coup attempt of 15 July; and from the PKK and ISIS. In a minute, I imagine we will go into some of the attacks that they have had to suffer.

I think they see in us a strategic partner who understands the region and them. As a result, I am very pleased with the way your own Committee's



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visit went, and that you got such extensive and high-level access. Similarly, here we are three days after a very successful visit to Turkey by the Prime Minister—really the first one at that sort of level, of significance. It is very important and I am delighted that it went so well.

Q133 Chair: One of our principal assets for Turkey previously would have been our support for her application for membership of the European Union. Now that that pillar of our relationship has disappeared, what effect has that had on our relationship?

Sir Alan Duncan: No, I don't think it has disappeared. So long as we are in the EU—potentially a couple of years yet—we will go along with the principles that we would normally have adhered to and will play our part as a full member. That, in the past, has of course been to support fully Turkish accession—which is a long way off, because there are all the chapters to be opened and the discussions to take place. Even outside the EU, we will support their membership inasmuch as the EU and the candidate country reach the agreement under the rules of the EU accession process. We can illustrate that even post-Brexit we have made that view clear.

For instance, I was at the Foreign Affairs Council and all the conclusions of that Council a couple of months ago were vetoed by Austria, because they wanted to suspend all EU discussions with Turkey about accession. I spoke out very strongly in favour of the EU needing to understand Turkey, and that it would be right for discussions to continue—given that this is a very long-term process—and not just push Turkey out of the door. This was an unfortunate moment, but the Foreign Affairs Council published its conclusions anyway, as a president's statement instead.

What one has to appreciate, as with so many other things, is that a lot of these posture stands and policies are tied up with a lot of domestic politics and looming elections on mainland Europe.

Q134 Chair: What impact did the conduct of the referendum campaign—the use of the Turkey issue on both sides of the referendum campaign in the UK—have in Turkey, popularly and on Turkish decision makers?

Sir Alan Duncan: I think it is fair to say that we have well moved on from that, because the coup attempt came after the referendum. That coup attempt is the main issue in the psyche, mentality and attitude of the Turkish Government and indeed the Turkish people at the moment, and following various successful ministerial visits at all levels—I have been three times, the Foreign Secretary has been once, the Prime Minister has been once—any kind of upset there was has long since been overtaken by bigger events. I am very clear in my view that that is the case.

Q135 Chair: Turning from Turkey's view of relations with the United Kingdom, what is our priority for our relationship with Turkey?

Sir Alan Duncan: It is what the Prime Minister expressed at her press meeting with President Erdoğan on Saturday afternoon. We want a deep strategic relationship, which is of course political, but also based on trade.



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Therefore, the signing of the first phase of the TFX deal was a very significant step that could last for the long term. We work with them as well on important counter-terrorist issues against Daesh, ISIS.

As we leave the EU, Turkey is a very good example of the sort of deeper significant bilateral relationship that we would like to have and develop. I think it has got off to a very good, strong, post-Brexit-referendum start. Strategically, this is very important for us and, critically, for the region, because an unstable Turkey would contribute significantly to further instability in the region. Obviously, we would want to avoid that. They are a key player, the 18th largest economy in the world, and a very important partner. They are also important for the Cyprus discussions, of which we are a significant part.

Q136 **Chair:** You have mentioned the TFX, counter-terrorism and the size of the Turkish economy—I take it then that trade is a significantly higher priority than human rights in Turkey.

Sir Alan Duncan: No, I think that is a slightly unfair juxtaposition: it is probably only when we do have good trade that we can speak strongly about human rights. The Prime Minister did make very clear this country's view and its wish to see the rule of law and proper legal due process in Turkey following the coup attempt—by the way, I am hoping I will get the chance to explain what I think the significance of that really was.

Chair: I think you are going to.

Sir Alan Duncan: That is good news. If I might say so, I think it is so important because it sets almost everything else in its proper context.

Q137 **Chair:** I am sure you will not have any difficulty in answering this question: what do you think distinguished Britain's response to the coup attempt from that of other close allies, in the European Union and elsewhere?

Sir Alan Duncan: I have no difficulty in answering that question. Whereas everyone else was rather quick, from the comfort of their armchairs, to wag their fingers, we tried to understand exactly what the coup attempt really was. It was a searing, seismic political event. On my second day as Foreign Minister, I decided to visit, so I visited on the third day. This singled us out, certainly from the rest of the European Union but also from many other countries. We made a distinctive stand, which was to empathise ahead of in any way criticising, whereas others criticised straightaway and even now are very slow to empathise.

This is a country where the danger of a coup is very much ingrained in the mentality. They had one in 1960, in 1971 and in 1980. They live with this fear, so when it happens—and when it happens in the way it happened—it is bigger than anything else you could possibly imagine. We don't have this in our politics; they have had it and they have to live with the danger. If you don't understand it, you're never going to understand them or be able to have a proper relationship with them.



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Q138 **Chair:** So where do you think Turkey is going in terms of its democracy?

Sir Alan Duncan: I think that is still difficult to answer, because the post-coup-attempt trauma is not yet behind them. In addition to the coup attempt itself, as I was saying earlier, they feel seriously under threat from the PKK and ISIS. Five hundred people have been killed in terrorist incidents in the last year—

Chair: We're going to get into the PKK.

Sir Alan Duncan: Okay. Look, it's under challenge. It is a very difficult balance to strike to keep the stability of the country and indeed the institutions of democracy without doing some very tough things. They have had to do that first, but I think they are throttling back a bit already.

Q139 **Chair:** Okay. We'll get into more detail on the democratic stuff. Where do you think it is going economically?

Sir Alan Duncan: I have the latest figures somewhere here. It is a strong economy. It has had some regression. I have the economic figures hiding here somewhere, but whatever the latest GDP figures and all that in terms of percentages, the scale of the economy and its significance in the region is massive. This is a large, significant economy that cannot and must not be ignored.

Q140 **Chair:** Strategically, where is Turkey going? The position in terms of her relations with her neighbours now rather contrasts with the position four years ago.

Sir Alan Duncan: I suppose, thinking aloud, it is very difficult to look for tidy, easy options for the Government. Classically, they are described as the country in between Europe and Asia. They have Syria next door, they have migration pressure and they have an issue, of course, with Cyprus, so they will have to balance their interests in a very clever and thoughtful way against very many pressures.

I can quickly tell you just a little bit about the economy. Its average growth between 2010 and 2013 was over 5%.

Q141 **Chair:** No, no. We can get that data ourselves. What I am asking is where you think it is going now.

Sir Alan Duncan: The coup attempt and everything?

Q142 **Chair:** Yes, exactly.

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes, it has got pressures around. It has contracted, of course. Like many economies it is facing pressures but it has underlying strength that makes it very significant.

Q143 **Chair:** So, if you were an analyst, marking—

Sir Alan Duncan: Are you asking me to invest—whether I would put my pension fund into Turkey?

Q144 **Chair:** Is Turkey a buy or a sell?



Sir Alan Duncan: I think it is a buy.

Q145 **Andrew Rosindell:** Good afternoon, Sir Alan. The relationship between Turkey and the EU, as well as the United States, has deteriorated in recent months. In fact, it has been a downward spiral in the past few years.

Sir Alan Duncan: Sorry, I didn't hear. The what has deteriorated?

Andrew Rosindell: The relationship between Turkey and the EU and with the United States has deteriorated. At the same time, the relationship with Russia has actually improved. They have better relations with Moscow. From a UK perspective, are those developments something we can see an opportunity in or are they a cause for concern?

Sir Alan Duncan: I think it is very important for us. They are crucial as a major player in the Middle East. Obviously, Syria is the main issue. They matter, of course, because of the movement of people. Hence, the EU migration deal.

They are playing host to 3 million refugees, so they are the largest host country. Looking at the humanitarian dimension there, they are very important. Yes, I accept there has been some scratchy feeling between the EU as such and Turkey but certainly not between Turkey and us. With the United States, yes, there is the difficulty that Fethullah Gülen lives in the US so that inevitably is a difficult legal strain between the two countries.

Q146 **Andrew Rosindell:** Does that give us opportunities as we are leaving the EU and doing our own thing again and making our own policies? Does that mean there are opportunities there for the United Kingdom in our future relations with Turkey?

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes, we have made it very clear that we want to deepen and develop our bilateral relationship with Turkey. We think they are significant and we have stood apart from others in making that clear. We have essentially taken a very important strategic initiative that we want to maintain and sustain over many years—something for which the TFX fighter project will embed commercial interests. Our judgment in making it absolutely clear that we understand what they have been going through has been the right one. I am pleased to say that they appreciate it and we appreciate their appreciation.

Q147 **Andrew Rosindell:** Is it still the official policy of Her Majesty's Government to support the Turkish application to join the EU?

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes.

Q148 **Andrew Rosindell:** What would your advice to the EU be on that subject, at this point, bearing in mind that we are leaving that organisation?

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes, while we remain in it we are entitled to have a clear opinion and it would be our intention to act as full members of the EU until such time as we are not a member. While doing so, the EU has an accession application process with 35 chapters that have to be agreed, which in the case of Turkey is no doubt going to be a long process.



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Inasmuch as that process exists and Turkey wishes to join the EU, we would support their wish to join. There is more to it than that. The advantage of this is that it also means that the various standards and qualities of EU membership have to be adhered to and met. That is a good influence, given some of the other issues that I guess we are going to discuss, on where we would like to see Turkey go in general. Yes, this, I hope, should be seen by all involved as a positive process.

Q149 **Andrew Rosindell:** It is good thing that Turkey will eventually join the EU, then?

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes.

Q150 **Andrew Rosindell:** Okay. Finally, I have one further question on NATO. Is it your view that Turkey is secure in NATO, bearing in mind some of the things that are happening? Is NATO secure in Turkey?

Sir Alan Duncan: By "secure", I assume you mean in its membership—is that what you mean? Or do you mean in its national security?

Q151 **Andrew Rosindell:** In terms of Turkish membership, are they secure within NATO? And are the NATO countries secure in continuing to see Turkey as an ally in the way that we did before, bearing in mind some of the changes that have occurred?

Sir Alan Duncan: We would like to see a NATO that works well—obviously, that was discussed in Washington when the Prime Minister visited President Trump—and we would like to see Turkey remain a full member of NATO. Obviously, if it goes down certain paths that collide with the principles of NATO membership, then there would be some issues. For instance, they abolished the death penalty a few years ago and things like that could go wrong, but we obviously hope that they don't.

Given what Russian influence is trying to achieve, not only is NATO important but I think that Turkish membership of NATO is important. It would be a retrograde step if, for any reason, Turkey were not either a member or were not playing its part as a member. So they are in, that is good, and we have to work with them as a very important NATO partner.

Q152 **Chair:** Let me get that straight: if Turkey goes down the path of executing Gülenist coup plotters and PKK terrorists under the current state of emergency, that is incompatible with membership of NATO?

Sir Alan Duncan: That is not my call.

Q153 **Chair:** But that is your view—that it would be very problematic?

Sir Alan Duncan: Irrespective of membership of NATO, I think it would be problematic. Obviously, that would be for NATO, but in basic principle that would be my understanding.

I would also say that I do not think that that is where they are heading. It is fair to say that, from what I hope the Committee felt when it was in Ankara, from my three visits and other visits and from our understanding of what Turkey is trying to achieve, the sort of suggestion you just made



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is, I think, unduly alarmist. I do not feel that that is the path they are taking.

Chair: You were the one suggesting that that would be a problem.

Sir Alan Duncan: No! You were talking about rounding up Gülenists and executing people. Those are your words, not mine.

Q154 **Chair:** You did link it as an illustration of problematic issues. You identified the death penalty as a potential problematic issue.

Sir Alan Duncan: No, no. You misunderstood me. I was just realistically making a proper reference to the fact that there have been some political calls, but I do not forecast that those political calls will be turned into a reintroduction of the death penalty.

Q155 **Ian Murray:** Can I stick with this human rights and democracy aspect of the Turkish relationship with the UK? The Turkish embassy said that the relationship was based on shared values, but the Foreign Office response, in written evidence to us, did not mention shared values at all. Where do you think the Turkish state is with regards to human rights? Do they share the same values in terms of human rights as the UK?

Sir Alan Duncan: They are facing very serious and specific threats to their country. They have, of course, taken serious action in response. In my discussions within Turkey and with embassy representatives here, they would be at pains to point out that they are adhering to the rule of law as it is written in Turkey.

Yes, they have arrested thousands of people, but a lot of them have been released. There is a proper civic or judicial process for appeals, which is leading to reinstating institutions and releasing people. In a way, this question always needs to be set against the nature of the threats they have been facing. So one can share values, but they are sharing very different circumstances.

We in the UK are unable to contemplate in our own politics something happening to us in the way that it happened to them. So, yes, we have our values; they also have values, but they are dealing with a very different set of threats from anything we are ever likely to face. We are not going to have the Army, or elements of the Army, turn on us, I hope.

Q156 **Ian Murray:** But it sounds as if you are dismissing the fact that 130,000 public servants have been sacked, the UN is reporting ongoing torture, particularly in the south-east of the country, media organisations have been closed and journalists and opposition MPs have been jailed without charge. Although you indicate that there is an ongoing process for people and institutions to be reinstated, the feeling on the ground is that that is merely window dressing the problems in Turkey. What is the official Foreign Office position on those kinds of acts against what we would describe as fundamental human rights?

Sir Alan Duncan: It depends what they have done, of course. I say again that they face a very different set of circumstances from ours: the coup



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attempt, constant terrorist attempts and clear and systematic infiltration of the entire apparatus of government by a group of people who, as a state within the state, try to overturn the state.

I accept, and anyone would, that the scale of arrests and detentions is massive and needs to be explained and justified. I judge that a lot of people are now being released and there is a judicial process for assessing those who have been arrested. Various institutions have been reinstated.

I agree that this is—"alien" is the wrong word, but not comprehensible to us as we sit here in this Parliament, but we have not faced what they have faced. We say, privately and indeed publicly, that we want Turkey to adhere to the rule of law, but we also urge people to understand what they have had to go through and that they have to hold Turkey together as a functioning country that does not fall to bits or behave in an even worse way.

Q157 Ian Murray: But if you do not mind my saying it, Minister, you have a very similar response to these very serious allegations as the Foreign Secretary had yesterday about the President of the United States. It seems that you are happy, as the Foreign Office Minister responsible for Turkey, to accept that these things are happening within a very difficult set of circumstances and are therefore acceptable.

Sir Alan Duncan: It is very difficult for any of us to know absolutely exactly what is going on, you or me, so it is a very difficult area of judgment. I think that stability for Turkey is absolutely crucial in the region. It goes back to a fact we will come back to, which is that the scale of the coup attempt was absolutely seismic.

We cannot just instruct, govern, tell them to do things and things like that, but by having such a good relationship we are sitting down with them frequently at all levels and saying, "Look, we have been with you at your difficult moment, but don't overdo the reaction. Do things properly in a way that, of course, addresses the threat you face, but we would like to help you explain to the world what you had to face, and if we are convinced you are right, we will help you". But we have to understand what Turkey has gone through.

Q158 Ian Murray: Have you, in your three visits—indeed, has the Prime Minister this weekend—raised these issues in private?

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes, on every single occasion.

Q159 Ian Murray: And do you think it is more effective in Turkey to raise these things directly in private or should there be a much more public condemnation of what is potentially going on?

Sir Alan Duncan: Well, this is public.

Q160 Ian Murray: You do not seem to have condemned very much, so far.

Sir Alan Duncan: I think that time needs to play this out. Again I say that I think there has been insufficient understanding in many quarters,



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particularly within the membership of the European Union, about what Turkey had to face and still faces.

Q161 **Ian Murray:** The President said in a speech on International Women's Day that women who didn't have children were incomplete. That does not seem to be in the context of the current political situation that could be described of sacking public servants or the jailing of opposition MPs. Does that indicate that the President is taking the country in a more conservative Islamist direction?

Sir Alan Duncan: No, I have not seen the exact translation of that, so I do not think it would be right for me to comment on whether that has been fairly expressed in the UK.

Q162 **Ian Murray:** What is the Foreign Office official position on the referendum and the constitutional changes that the President is pushing though?

Sir Alan Duncan: First of all, this is going through a democratic process. It is likely to lead to a referendum in April, which in itself is a democratic process. It will change the nature of government and structure of government in Turkey to a more executive presidency in place of the current prime ministership. But ultimately it is going through a democratic process of approval or rejection in Turkey and it is up to Turkey to decide how it is going to be governed.

Q163 **Ian Murray:** You used the terminology "democratic process" because this is going to a referendum. But do you not accept that it is much more difficult for a referendum to be democratic if there is no opposition media, no ability for journalists to speak out and no opposition MPs who feel able to speak out? So the referendum is going to occur in a bubble of lack of freedom of speech, freedom of expression and freedom of association in terms of the state of emergency. Therefore, it can be a democratic referendum only in so far as democracy is allowed to operate in Turkey.

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes. It is not exactly the same system as ours for our referendum, but again I think it is ultimately for Turkey to decide. Should you wish to take a view that differs, that is your right, but in the end we judge that we will work with a country deeply and over the long term which we consider to be very important as a strategic partner.

Q164 **Ian Murray:** Will you suggest to the President that he hires a red bus with a slogan on the side of it for the referendum?

Sir Alan Duncan: I might have to consult the Foreign Secretary on that.

Q165 **Ian Murray:** The UK seems to have a much quieter voice in Turkey and the US with regard to human rights and democracy at the moment, particularly with the new Administration in the US. Is it the case that the Foreign Office position with regards to trade and trade deals is trumping anything else at the moment on making strong representations that some actions of those Governments are wrong?

Sir Alan Duncan: No. I think it is that we judge engagement to be far more constructive than admonition, if you like. For almost every reason I



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can think of, engagement is going to be more constructive and productive over the long term, and that is the policy that we are advocating.

Q166 **Ian Murray:** Do you think that damages the UK in the eyes of the rest of the international community?

Sir Alan Duncan: No.

Q167 **Chair:** We have just signed a deal to sell fighter aircraft intellectual property to a country whose president wants to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. That does not look terribly good.

Sir Alan Duncan: I have a got note here on Shanghai somewhere, but it is buried among the many piles of papers.

Q168 **Chair:** The President of Turkey says he wants to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and we have just decided to sign what I presume is the first contract of many around a fighter aircraft.

Sir Alan Duncan: We haven't; the contracting parties have. This is a commercial deal between BAE and TAI—

Q169 **Chair:** So there is no Government MOU.

Sir Alan Duncan: The Government was, as I understand it, a witness to the signature—

Lindsay Appleby: And there will be a Government MOU.

Sir Alan Duncan: There will be a Government MOU, yes. But we have not signed, if you like, the detail of the commercial contract.

Q170 **Chair:** It doesn't look terribly good, does it?

Sir Alan Duncan: It doesn't look terribly bad or good. What doesn't look good?

Q171 **Chair:** Given the strategic direction that the President of Turkey has said that he is contemplating for his country.

Sir Alan Duncan: I think what you are suggesting is that BAE is going into this with its eyes shut, which I would suggest is unlikely to be the case.

Q172 **Chair:** Are you confident that provision of this aircraft will meet all eight of the consolidated arms export criteria?

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes. This is a NATO ally, don't forget. We are dealing here with a NATO ally, a member of NATO.

Q173 **Mike Gapes:** You have already touched on this. We had lots of discussions when we were in Turkey with many people, particularly about the coup. Whom do the FCO—the Government—hold responsible for the 15 July coup attempt?

Sir Alan Duncan: This is a very complicated phenomenon in Turkish Government and society; it will probably take years to analyse this and to



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get to the bottom of it. As I said earlier, this is a country that lives permanently in a state of anxiety about potential coups. It is one where it has been known for a long time that there are alternative structures and, if you like, cadres of people within the apparatus of Government and society.

It is clear, and if you were to talk to Turkish authorities they would openly say, that they found a whole private electronic communication system whereby all these people could communicate, which has allowed the Government to identify a lot of the people about whom many had said, "How come you suddenly knew who they were?" That is what they would say.

Q174 **Mike Gapes:** May I press you, because this is very important? We were told that the coup was carried out by what the Turkish Government called the Fethullah terrorist organisation, an organisation that calls itself Hizmet and what everyone calls, for shorthand, Gülenists. Why did the FCO brief to us a written submission that we should not mention the Gülenist organisation at all?

Sir Alan Duncan: I haven't re-read that submission, which I think was some weeks ago—

Mike Gapes: It was after the coup—

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes, but—

Mike Gapes: The coup was in July; the written submission came to us after that date, but the submission does not refer in any way to the Gülenist organisation.

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes—

Mike Gapes: Why did it not mention the Gülenist organisation at all, given that it is so significant in Turkey? You yourself said that there was a state within a state.

Sir Alan Duncan: The reason is that the letter to us about the remit of the Committee mentioned a number of things, and it was in response to that list that the Foreign Office gave its written submission. So this did not fall into what those who wrote the reply saw as relevant evidence. It is as simple as that. But I am here and I can—

Q175 **Mike Gapes:** Yes, and so you can answer the questions—I have a very specific one. Do you believe that the Gülenist organisation was responsible for the coup?

Sir Alan Duncan: I think the answer has to be, in large part, in terms of significant involvement, yes.

Q176 **Mike Gapes:** What evidence is there for the link between Fethullah Gülen himself and those who carried out the coup?

Sir Alan Duncan: You are asking for absolutely emphatic answers to what is a very—



Mike Gapes: No, I am asking for what information you have—

Sir Alan Duncan: Hold on. I am giving you an answer as best I can give an honest answer. In the same way as you ask about the Gülenist organisation as such—were they involved—and I have given you as clear an answer as I think it is fair to give, the trouble is that the nature of that organisation itself is not entirely clear. A lot of it is hidden; it works underground and it is inevitably below the radar, so it is a complicated phenomenon to analyse.

Likewise, I am not in a totally authoritative position to say, “Yeah, they take all their instructions every day, twice a day, from Fethullah Gülen”. I can’t say that. But in a way, the fact is that there was a massive organisation here that did try to overturn an entire democratic structure.

Q177 **Mike Gapes:** Your submission to us didn’t mention this massive organisation at all. Do you believe that the Gülenists were a state within a state?

Sir Alan Duncan: I think, from where I sit, if I were asked to say yes or no, I would say yes. Is it absolutely crystal clear? That is impossible to answer. I think there is a court process here, which will decide: extradition requests, that kind of thing. That is a court process. I am a Foreign Minister, not the world’s greatest expert on Fethullah Gülen. But that is the judgment I have offered the Committee.

Chair: Yes, but your Department has evidence.

Q178 **Mike Gapes:** You must have briefings—from our embassy, or perhaps intelligence sources—about these things.

Lindsay Appleby: It might be helpful to explain from a kind of official perspective, in the Foreign Office, what kind of information we do have and what kind of information we don’t have on the coup. We know quite a lot about the individuals who seem to have been involved in the coup, because that was quite evident by their actions; we know much less about the organisations to which those individuals belonged.

Many of the key individuals, by the nature of an attempted coup, were from the military. It is not consistent with membership of the military to be a member of an alternative organisation, so it isn’t clear how many of the military people were Gülenists, nor is it clear the degree to which the organisation—or the multiple organisations that make up Gülenism—were themselves directing or driving any of the activity.

Q179 **Mike Gapes:** Have you seen the publications that the Turkish Government produced? The glossy brochures, the pamphlets, the lists of names, the references to chief of staff and various other people?

Sir Alan Duncan: And the video.

Q180 **Mike Gapes:** And the video—we have seen all that. They make a very strong case that the Gülenists were responsible for the coup. On the basis of the information you have, do you believe that that is the case?



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Lindsay Appleby: On the basis of the information that I have and on the basis of what we have looked at in the Foreign Office, it is very clear that there were lots of people identified as Gülenists who were involved in the coup. But we don't have clear information, or an analytical base, to assert definitively one way or another whether the organisation as a whole directed the coup attempt. That is precisely the sort of evidence that we have been asking for from the Turkish Government, when they bring to us individual allegations.

Sir Alan Duncan: Is Momentum run by the Socialist Workers Party? There are lots of overlapping—

Mike Gapes: Let's talk about serious politics here. A final question from me: the ruling AKP party of President Erdoğan and the Gülenists were once allies. We were told that, in fact, one of the reasons why they were so influential within the state structures was that they actually were facilitated for a period of years, previously, when the secularists—the Kemalists—were going to be removed. It was part of a process. Why did the relationship between the AKP party and the Gülenists go sour?

Sir Alan Duncan: That predates me—do you want to answer, Lindsay?

Lindsay Appleby: Yes. I think a certain amount of it is on the public record, which is that they fell out over objectives that the Government felt the Gülenists were pursuing within Government. They had different views about the detention and arrest of individuals within the military and there was a set of allegations about misuse of funds or a set of allegations about individuals within the Government, which were also a source of disagreement between Gülenists and the AKP.

Q181 **Mike Gapes:** You are talking about 2011, 2012?

Lindsay Appleby: Going further back than that, I think the relationship began to separate. Essentially, I think they were organisations that appeared to have some goals in common in terms of a conservative agenda and how they saw the positive role that Islam could play in society. However, it became increasingly clear that they had very divergent objectives as well, so it was more an alliance of convenience than them fundamentally having the same aims.

Q182 **Ian Murray:** Just to stick on this evidence for a while in terms of the Gülenist movement, we heard at the very highest level in Turkey when we visited that the Turkish Government had sent 80 boxes of evidence to the State Department in America to have Fethullah Gülen extradited to Turkey, but the US State Department decided not to act on that. Why do you think that is?

Chair: And how much of that evidence has been shared with you—the Foreign Office?

Sir Alan Duncan: We have certainly not had 80 boxes. You will appreciate this is part of the extradition process between Turkey and the United States, which is a matter for their judicial processes to consider.



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Q183 **Ian Murray:** But 80 boxes of evidence seems quite a substantial body of evidence to be able to at least start the extradition—but the US State Department has decided not to act.

Sir Alan Duncan: I don't know. Obviously, the nature of the State Department has changed since then. Whether this will be studied again, I don't know. We can but ask the question. I am afraid that is a question that obviously has to go to others who will have been handling it. I cannot give an informed answer about why they have not taken it further.

Q184 **Mr Hendrick:** Mr Appleby indicated that quite a number of people from the military were arrested during the coup. While that does not implicate the Gülenists, at the same time, it does not say that the Gülenists were not involved.

May I ask you, Minister—or Mr Appleby through you—about a story that is circulating that Erdoğan actually knew that the coup attempt was coming? The story is that, obviously, he made some preparations for it, although clearly the strength of the coup effort was enough to cause great disruption, and that since then he has managed to arrest anybody and everybody who he sees as an opponent of the regime, whether or not they were implicated in the coup.

Sir Alan Duncan: The first part of your question plays into what some people would consider conspiracy theories—that he knew it was coming and was ready for it but decided to wait to stamp on it in order to milk it for all it was worth, consolidate his position and all that kind of stuff.

Q185 **Mr Hendrick:** That is an exaggerated view of what I have said, but—

Sir Alan Duncan: Okay, but it is a perfectly accurate view of what a lot of people say about conspiracy theories. Let us take half of that—I don't think it is right. I think they were totally shocked by this.

Q186 **Chair:** Think or know?

Sir Alan Duncan: I think I would say I know, because I met the Prime Minister three days after the coup attempt in a bombed-out Parliament after his convoy had been under attack, his front escort car had engaged fire and he had had to do a handbrake turn and drive for his life. That does not strike me as a set-up job. I was sitting in a bombed-out Parliament with an absolutely shocked—I would even say traumatised—Speaker of the Turkish Parliament, and I saw other people who were involved in it as well. This was just three days afterwards.

By the way, one of the reasons I went was out of a sense of a duty of care for our own embassy staff. The embassy is very close to the presidential palace. They had had all the jets flying overhead and explosions within yards of where they were. It was a terrifying experience for them, and all credit to them for the cool and composure they kept then and have kept since. But it did give me a first-hand and early experience in Ankara—incidents took place in both Ankara and Istanbul—of what happened.



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To me, they were in complete trauma. This very nearly succeeded. The British equivalent, Mr Murray—we were discussing this earlier—would be a regiment of the Army driving tanks up Whitehall, shooting people on Westminster bridge, trying to kill the Queen and the Prime Minister, bombing Parliament while it was sitting and taking over the BBC. That is what happened in Turkey.

Q187 **Mr Hendrick:** What about the aftermath—arresting anybody and everybody, thousands of whom I am sure had nothing to do with it whatsoever?

Sir Alan Duncan: I think that they saw this as—

Q188 **Mr Hendrick:** An opportunity.

Sir Alan Duncan: No—well, I think as an existential threat.

Q189 **Chair:** “A gift from God”, I think, was President Erdoğan’s term for it.

Sir Alan Duncan: I think it was a moment when he could say, “Just look what I’ve been talking about.” Okay, look—we all accept that the numbers are massive, but they are throttling back. A lot of people who have been arrested have been released. A lot of institutions that were closed down have been reinstated. I hope that is the continuing direction of travel, but they also believe that they were able to identify—they knew of the phenomenon, not necessarily the nature and state of the threat, but when the threat then expressed itself as it did, they knew what they were dealing with.

Q190 **Mr Hendrick:** But there are Turkish students who were in this country at the time who have had their funds cut and students who should have been coming to this country who have been stopped from coming. Clearly the number of people they have arrested far exceeds the number of people who they know, on the basis of evidence, could have been involved.

Sir Alan Duncan: I think that anyone would share the concern that they do appear over-extensive. That is why we make representations when we go, and say, “Hold on. Are you really sure about this? Tread carefully. Make sure you adhere to the rule of law and the highest standards.” They, in turn, would argue back, “You’ve got to understand how serious this was. There are proper processes of redress. People are only imprisoned or detained on the say-so of a judge”—all that kind of stuff. But of course we have concerns, and we say so.

Q191 **Daniel Kawczynski:** Can I take you back to the earlier point you made at the start of your speech on the clear difference between the United Kingdom’s approach and that of the European Union in assessing the coup? You outlined the differences, but there have been some very condemnatory and evocative statements emanating from the European Parliament with regard to the coup itself, which are clearly at odds with what you are telling us. How do you feel that will impact on the EU’s relations with Turkey in the short to medium term?



Sir Alan Duncan: Well, they are going to have to work that out for themselves. This is an exaggerated metaphor, but there is the danger of shooting first and asking questions later. I think what was important with the Turks was to ask the questions and understand first, before criticising later. The EU was overcritical too quickly and eventually visited and admitted that it had overdone the criticism at the start. That will of course have a bearing on accession talks, but it also offended the Turks.

A lot of people in Turkey were saying, "Oh, well—in which case, why do we want the EU?" We'd rather see regional harmony and sensible, grown-up talks. We don't want to see either a damaged EU or a damaged Turkey. But there are also elections and other pressures in the domestic politics of some of the EU countries, which is allowing some politicians to use Turkey as a reason for seeking domestic popularity.

Q192 **Daniel Kawczynski:** During our visit to Ankara and Istanbul, we were asked on many occasions about Brexit and the opportunity for bilateral relations in a post-Brexit world. You touched upon that. Clearly, as you said, we are going to continue to be members of this entity for the next two years. How do you see the Turks assessing our role in trying to help the EU within those two years to have a more realistic perspective of the situation in Turkey?

Sir Alan Duncan: There are obviously conflicting influences about whether people are going to listen to us within the EU when we are about to leave it. Yet we have expressed a distinctive view about Turkey, and we are still in the EU. We can shape the debate.

When I was at the Foreign Affairs Council before Christmas, I made it very clear in my statement that the EU needed to understand Turkey before they started criticising it. That, in itself, made an impression that has shifted the dial a little bit.

In terms of trade, our relations, as with so many countries outside the EU, stand to do very well in free trade agreements and all that kind of stuff. Of course, there are some members of the EU who are like-minded with us on this and on many other issues as well.

Q193 **Daniel Kawczynski:** In terms of the Gülen movement, it is not just the Turkish Government. Other entities have told us that they consider this movement to be terrorists. Would you publicly say that yourself? Would you use that term yourself to describe the Gülen movement?

Sir Alan Duncan: No. I don't think that we can say that we have evidence of the sort of activity that would entitle us to call that a terrorist organisation. We have not proscribed them, for instance, but then we have not had any direct experience with them. They haven't planted bombs in the UK or something like that, for instance. We are perhaps a little bit removed from the phenomenon to classify them in that way. Certainly, from the evidence that we have got, we would not do so at the moment.

Q194 **Daniel Kawczynski:** Right. So in terms of the threat that is posed to the stability of this very important strategic partner for the UK, would you



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say that the Gülenist movement is a greater threat or a lesser threat than ISIL and the PKK?

Sir Alan Duncan: I think it is invidious to graduate threats such as those, when they are potentially each in their own way heinous and ghastly, as so many of the terrorist attacks on Turkey are. I will say again that 500 people have been killed in the past year by PKK and ISIS and, of course, in the coup 240 people were killed. To rank them as PKK the worst and then the Gülenists and then ISIS is really unpleasant and inappropriate. None the less, it illustrates the fact that Turkey faces a multifaceted series of constant and perpetual threats.

Q195 **Chair:** Do you think those coup plotters are still a threat to Turkey?

Sir Alan Duncan: I don't think I am equipped to judge that. I would like to think that the threat has seriously diminished because one thing is evident: it is a credit to an aspect of Turkish democracy that the popular reaction against the coup attempt was so overwhelming and openly expressed that I would like to think that they would never dare to try it on again. There was a quasi-pluralist/democratic element to the reaction of the coup in terms of the popular opinion, cross-party unity, parliamentary resolve and issues of that sort. I witnessed that and it was actually very moving.

Q196 **Daniel Kawczynski:** Let me press you a little further on the Gülenist movement. You have said that you are not in a position at the moment to proscribe them as a terrorist organisation. Bearing in mind how strongly held the views of our Turkish allies are in the allegations that they are making, what is your Department doing to investigate that movement and its long-term plans in Turkey? Clearly, there are very serious allegations against that movement by a strategic NATO ally of ours.

Sir Alan Duncan: I think that will take us into difficult territory, because you're sort of asking us to investigate a significant phenomenon in another country, where the Turkish Government are sovereign and democratic. If we were given evidence, we would obviously offer it. I imagine there will be evidence in those 80 boxes given to the Americans, so maybe something clearer will emerge. I think the Committee has taken evidence from Gülenists, who will no doubt put an alternative point of view, and the Committee can reach its own conclusions.

What is clear is that the coup attempt involved many different elements of military and civil society. It was therefore an extensive and multi-layered phenomenon—not just, for instance, one renegade squadron that took to the air with missiles. It was big stuff, on lots of layers and was massively planned throughout civic society and some aspects of the military.

Q197 **Daniel Kawczynski:** This is my last question. In terms of the post-coup management of the judicial process, clearly there are people who are lobbying us about the way in which journalists and judges are being treated, and there are allegations in our media that there are excesses in prosecutions. In terms of our own media, what are you doing to try to explain and share with our constituents the sheer scale of what happened



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in Turkey, as a way of trying to explain why these steps are necessary from the Turkish Government's perspective? Or do you feel that they are excessive?

Sir Alan Duncan: It is not my job to be a spokesman for the Turkish Government. I am obviously speaking for Her Majesty's Government, but I am using the judgment of what we have learned, what we know and what we judge to be in UK interests. I have been very outspoken in making it clear about what I thought the coup attempt actually was. A lot of people rather brush that as a rather one-day incident and then focus only on the reaction, which they see as an overreaction. I see our role as engaging very closely with our Turkish counterparts, which we do both in Ankara and here. There are things that are changing: a lot of people have been released and a lot of institutions have been reinstated.

Q198 **Chair:** How many?

Sir Alan Duncan: Institutions? The list I have been given—I must advise that this is not a Foreign Office list, but from consultation with my Turkish counterparts, but I can give it to you afterwards if you like—says 92 private education institutions, 10 student dormitories, five radio and TV channels, 17 newspapers and various foundations and things. The period for detention has also been significantly reduced, from I think, off the top of my head, 90 days to 30. Things like that.

There are institutions with which the Turks are working. For instance, in the face of some of the more aggressive or higher charges, they cooperate with certain relevant international mechanisms, such as the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and the UN Committee against Torture.

We would say that the Turks have the right and, indeed, the responsibility to act against the perpetrators of the coup and those who might be planning terrorist attacks, but they have to do so within the framework of an acceptable rule of law and the sort of standards of justice and due process that we would expect.

Daniel Kawczynski: Lastly, Sir Alan, from your extensive knowledge of international affairs and specific countries, do you agree that in the long term it is more effective for us to build a relationship of trust with the Turkish Government and lobby them on human rights issues bilaterally as we build that trust, rather than some of the megaphone or foghorn castigation that some people expect this country to enter into?

Sir Alan Duncan: I will take your words as your words, but I would say that, by and large in my political life, that has always been my opinion. I think it broadly reflects the policy approach we have adopted and are adopting at the moment with Turkey.

Q199 **Chair:** I want to get a bit of detail: does your data agree with ours that more than 130,000 people have been sacked from their jobs following the 15 July coup by executive decree?



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Sir Alan Duncan: We can check the figures, but that sounds roughly right as the start of a process. Our figures are—

Chair: Okay, go on.

Sir Alan Duncan: More than 97,000 public servants have been dismissed, 15 universities and more than 1,000 private schools have been closed for alleged Gülenist links.

Q200 **Chair:** How many? 15,000 schools? Or was that teachers sacked?

Sir Alan Duncan: No. Fifteen universities and more than 1,000—not 15,000—private schools have been closed for alleged Gülenist links and 178 media outlets have been closed, some obviously very small. So I do not quite recognise your figure. Turkey has 3,390,000 civil servants in total and Turkish official figures say that 3% of these—about 101,000, so a bit more than our figures—have been suspended, of whom 20,000 have subsequently been reinstated. It was also put to me this morning that 293 judges and prosecutors have also recently been reinstated because they have gone through the domestic remedy process, which does exist for redress.

Q201 **Chair:** Talk to us a bit more about that domestic remedy process. It was mentioned to us by the President when he presented to us, but slightly contradicted by evidence we then took directly from people who were on the wrong end of the system.

Sir Alan Duncan: I might have to write to you about this, if I may, because I would not want to give you a statement that is not accurate.

Q202 **Chair:** I would be grateful if you would write with further details on that, but would you also give us your estimate of how many of that 130,000 or whatever have actually been found guilty of a crime by a court? Mr Appleby might have the data.

Lindsay Appleby: Let me shed a little light on these figures, because I think we all struggle with deciding exactly which figure to use. Part of the challenge is that it depends on when your starting point is. Because, of course, individuals being dismissed or suspended from public office was an issue that was going on before the coup and has continued.

Q203 **Chair:** Can you confirm that 60,000 were purged before the coup?

Lindsay Appleby: I do not have that figure in front of me.

Q204 **Chair:** Does it sound right to you? It is what we were told by the Gülenists who gave us evidence.

Lindsay Appleby: Again, it depends what we mean by the word “purged”. There is an ongoing process, a whole range of administrative processes, in the public sector. Such administrative processes exist in lots of countries. Teachers and judges are dismissed or suspended for a range of issues and different groups attribute that to different motives. So, for example, if you tot up all the people who are dismissed or suspended from a job in Turkey, given the large number of public servants there are, if you attribute all of



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that to a single purge, then that is the figures you are hearing from some of the Gülenists. On the other hand, these are a mixture of administrative processes and judicial processes, and so, as you unpick those processes and determine what stage you have got to on them, it then becomes very difficult. Obviously some teachers, for example, are reinstated after something that might be unrelated to their membership of the Gülen movement. There is a large number of people being investigated in the Turkish public sector.

I explain that only to explain that the figures are quite difficult to pin down precisely. That is why you hear differences between 130,000 or 97,000.

Q205 **Chair:** The social impact of this is huge. If you sack 100,000-odd people, half a million people—you include their dependents—then do not have an income. This is massive, let alone those who find themselves incarcerated and on the wrong end of the Turkish police and security forces in custody.

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes. As an analysis, I think that is undeniable. There are consequences and counter-consequences.

Q206 **Chair:** So what do we do? Are you satisfied with the scale of the reinstatement arrangements and the boards overseeing the decision to sack these people? We were told by the President that the process had begun and it certainly struck me—I cannot speak for my colleagues, because we have not concluded our inquiry—that the process was immature, to put it mildly, and needed beefing up at pace in order to put the people who had been wrongfully dismissed back in a position in which they could provide for their families as fast as possible. Does the British Government agree with that analysis? What is it doing to get that message across to the Turkish authorities?

Sir Alan Duncan: It would be a bit high-handed of us just to say we are not satisfied because the numbers are so large. What matters here is the process and the extent to which it is a proper process of justice or not. I think again we have been very clear that we do have concerns about the scale of this and that it is difficult for anyone rationally to look at it and think that necessarily everyone in these tens of thousands of people is definitely guilty. There must therefore be a process to find out if people have genuinely behaved improperly or have been caught up in this unfairly.

Look, I totally share what I imagine will probably be the entire Committee's concern at the scale and reach of this. That is why I would like to see this—and I suspect it will—throttle back, if you like, and for a lot of people arrested probably to be released, which appears to be happening already.

Q207 **Chair:** But it is the reinstatement process. The President explained it to us, but it certainly struck me that they have not really begun to get serious about this, given the number of people they have dismissed. You are the first western Minister to come forward and say that you believe the FETÖ organisation is responsible for the coup. I believe that buys you



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some space with the Turkish Administration to make the case rather publicly that they need to get on and address the reinstatement. Will you do that publicly now? Or, indeed, are you doing it privately?

Sir Alan Duncan: I think one sort of moves on to reinstatement. I think there was a decree on 22 January¹, so it has only just happened. But I think I share your view. If people have unreasonably been caught up in this and it would be proper for them to have their jobs back, it would be good to see a process in which that can happen.

Q208 **Mr Holloway:** There was a slightly chilling moment when we were in Ankara when one of us asked a group of foreign businessmen whether they would employ someone who had been fired for being a Gülenist and not one of them said they would.

Chair: Hence the scale of the reinstatement challenge for people who have found themselves dismissed.

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes, and the climate around this. I totally understand what you are saying.

Q209 **Nadhim Zahawi:** Sir Alan, thank you very much for coming to the Committee. Why did the peace process between the Turkish Government and the PKK collapse?

Sir Alan Duncan: You are probably a far greater expert on this than I am. If I may, I might turn to Lindsay Appleby, who has a greater grasp of the history of this than I do.

Lindsay Appleby: Well, I think the Turkish Government would argue that the PKK's unwillingness to disarm undermined trust, and they would point to preparations that they believed were taking place.

Q210 **Chair:** We had the opportunity to hear the Turkish position at length. What is your assessment?

Lindsay Appleby: Our assessment is that the PKK is a terrorist organisation. Our assessment is that the immediate cause of the resumption of conflict was the PKK declaration of the end to the ceasefire. That is what precipitated the violent incidents in December 2015, tipped the situation over the edge and made it extremely hard for any democratically elected politician to justify continuation of peace efforts with an organisation that was actively engaged in terrorism.

Q211 **Nadhim Zahawi:** Do you agree with the Turkish Government's position that politicians in the HDP are complicit in supporting the PKK and acts of terrorism?

Lindsay Appleby: We are clear that there are parliamentarians in Turkey who are doing their job, including HDP parliamentarians. The Government has made a set of allegations against individuals. It is very important that there is evidence against those individuals. We think that the withdrawal

¹ Correction by the witness: the decree to examine dismissals was 23 January (not 22 January)



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of parliamentary immunity is a very serious step. That is how I would answer your question. There would have to be compelling evidence to back up those claims that have been made about the involvement of any democratically elected politician in acts of violence. That is not to say, of course, that it is impossible that that happened. It could have, and the British Government would certainly condemn any involvement by anyone in acts of violence, whether they were a Member of Parliament or not.

Q212 Nadhim Zahawi: We heard that the HDP was calling for immunity to be withdrawn from parliamentarians for other reasons. Is that true? Do you have such information?

Lindsay Appleby: I don't think I can comment on that. There were a lot of rumours—some true, some not—about the circumstances that led to immunity being withdrawn.

Q213 Nadhim Zahawi: Sir Alan, what can the UK do to restore the peace process? Clearly, the best outcome is a process, as we found out in Northern Ireland. Could we in some way share our experience—perhaps more formally—from the peace process in Northern Ireland with our Turkish counterparts?

Sir Alan Duncan: I have always been pleasantly astonished by the influence the Northern Ireland peace process can have for the good in other parts of the world—Nepal, Colombia and to some extent Burma. It is a brilliant, historic example of how confidence and trust can be built up to the point where two venomous enemies can sit around the table and even share government. There may be some advantage there. Whether we have, as they say, enough skin in the game at the moment is far from clear, but if ever there was another argument for good engagement with Turkey, it is that one day we might be able to have some kind of positive influence on this issue.

Q214 Nadhim Zahawi: Finally, does the Foreign Office consider the response from the Turkish Government and their security forces to the PKK proportionate to the threat from the PKK?

Sir Alan Duncan: Obviously, we proscribe the PKK. We consider them a terrorist organisation. The exact methods of resisting their threats is not something that I have studied in great detail. They can of course defend themselves but, yes, they have to be proportionate. Can I say whether they have or they have not? I do not think I am equipped to say that they haven't, at this stage.

Q215 Chair: Mr Appleby, you just said that the PKK declared the ceasefire over. On what date did that happen?

Sir Alan Duncan: July 2015.

Lindsay Appleby: On 12 July² the PKK's overall governance body declared an end to the ceasefire. On 20 July there was a Daesh bombing



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of a pro-Kurdish youth event and, allegedly in response to that, on 22 July the PKK killed two policemen. I think that is the sequence of events.

Q216 **Chair:** That 12 July statement—can you give us more data on it?

Lindsay Appleby: My understanding is that it was on 12 July that the PKK's overall governance body declared an end to the ceasefire.

Q217 **Chair:** That is not my understanding and it was not the understanding of this Committee in advance of the report we wrote in March, so I would be grateful for further evidence that you can produce on that, because the course of events that has underpinned our analysis so far is that President Erdoğan began a peace process—the ceasefire and two years of negotiation—and then he, or the AKP lost the election in June 2015. At that point he went sour on the peace process. There was then the bombing in Suruç for which the PKK blamed the Government for being in league with Islamic State. The two policemen were murdered in response to that. Then the Qandil mountains were bombed in response by Turkish forces and it was President Erdoğan who said in August that he had put the peace process in the refrigerator. To date, the Committee and I have been unaware of a statement by the PKK on 12 July to say that the ceasefire was over and that they were the ones returning to conflict. So, Mr Appleby, I am sure you are certain of your facts and everything else, but we would be grateful if you could give us further and better particulars on that 12 July statement.

Lindsay Appleby: Subject to the Minister's guidance, we could certainly provide you with more detail about it, but that is exactly my understanding, and our understanding, of what the sequence of events was.

Sir Alan Duncan: We will dust down the files.

Lindsay Appleby: That is one of the reasons why I wanted to bring that out in the evidence; I think the PKK's behaviour is clearly a very important part of understanding how hostilities resumed.

Q218 **Chair:** How important is it that a peace process is restarted?

Sir Alan Duncan: Whenever there is conflict it is important that there should be a peace process if there possibly can be. Obviously this is very vexed. I am no great expert on the PKK, but regionally it is massively complicated—it is not just an internal Turkish thing by any means. Quite who the interlocutors can be at this stage, or until a very late stage, is I think unclear.

Q219 **Chair:** You have just told us that you have been impressed by the strength of the Northern Ireland experience as a model in this respect. Is there a role for the United Kingdom in offering our good offices as enthusiastically as we can to the Turkish authorities to assist them in getting this peace process back on track?

² Correction by the witness: The PKK's overall guidance body announced the end of the ceasefire on 11 July, not 12 July.



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Sir Alan Duncan: With our regional and military experience, our historic reputation and now our ever-deeper engagement with Turkey, certainly these questions ought to be put on the table. Why not? To say, is there any way we can help? It is probably very early in that process. With a war raging in Syria next door, there are many other focuses for their attention, but we as the UK will always look for a path to peace if we think it could exist.

Q220 **Mike Gapes:** Can I just pick you up on one point? Mr Zahawi asked about the HDP. What is the relationship, according to your assessment, between the HDP and the PKK? Is there one?

Sir Alan Duncan: It is of course suggested that there is. On the other hand, HDP MPs, if that is what's in your mind—

Q221 **Mike Gapes:** No. I am asking about the HDP as a political coalition, because it is a group with different political parties and, as I understand it, is a combination of secularists, socialists, liberals and Kurds.

Sir Alan Duncan: The best I can say is that it is not clear. I cannot give an emphatic yes or no: it is just not clear.

Q222 **Mike Gapes:** We were told that there had been some intimidation of voters in the Kurdish areas in Turkey to vote for the HDP. We were told that the PKK effectively was in control of some areas and therefore had intimidated people to vote for the HDP. Do you have any evidence of that?

Sir Alan Duncan: I think we would work on the assumption that that is probably true, but perhaps Lindsay can—

Lindsay Appleby: One of the tragic realities, where you have a situation of conflict and armed groups operating, is that there is often very little space for legitimate civil society. There is intimidation of voters to vote for particular political parties. Clearly, to vote for a Kurdish party is more likely to be acceptable for the PKK than to vote for another party. You wouldn't imagine that the PKK would be wildly enthusiastic about votes for the more nationalist Turkish parties.

Q223 **Mike Gapes:** We met a number of politicians, Members of Parliament, when we were in Turkey, including members of the HDP—one of whom I sat next to, Ziya Pir, who was about to have to go to a court hearing. His passport was being taken away. He is not a Kurd. We met another at the HDP office, whose name was Ayhan Bilgen, who we understand has been arrested this weekend. Have the British Government got any views about the arrest of Members of Parliament of a democratic political party, which has received 10% in the most recent elections and 13% previously?

Sir Alan Duncan: There are some circumstances in which a democratically elected MP can be arrested—it is also true in this country—but we expect a proper process to be followed, particularly when it comes to Members of Parliament who have been democratically elected. I think the Turkish view would be that some HDP MPs have been detained because they were asked to make certain depositions about their links



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with terrorism. There were one or two who did, who have not been detained. Those who didn't have been, because judicially they have been deemed to fall foul of the law. I don't think that we are in an easy position to judge on which side of the line this falls, but that is the explanation that they would offer.

Q224 **Mike Gapes:** Have we made any public statements, as a Government, about the arrests and imprisonment of HDP MPs?

Sir Alan Duncan: I don't think we have, because we have not specifically made public statements about individuals, but more generally about the process, the standards and, indeed, the scale of what is going on. The HDP are in a slightly different situation because of the alleged links with PKK.

Q225 **Mike Gapes:** The United States publicly expressed deep concern in November last year. Why haven't we?

Sir Alan Duncan: I am being advised that we did support a statement on 7 November, actually.

Q226 **Mike Gapes:** Which said what?

Sir Alan Duncan: It was the EU statement on exactly this.

Q227 **Mike Gapes:** So we signed up to an EU statement, but given our close relationships with Turkey and the fact that we are leaving the EU, we have made no UK public statement.

Sir Alan Duncan: It is often judged that sometimes statements are made collectively in order to have more impact, and that is what we chose to do.

Q228 **Mike Gapes:** I understand that, and I am well aware of the EU process, but I am asking whether the British Government in their own right have made any statement about arrested Members of Parliament.

Sir Alan Duncan: I am not aware that we have, because we chose to do it through the EU statement.

Q229 **Mike Gapes:** When we were in Turkey, we also met some people who had tried to get access to arrested people. I was told that lawyers were finding it very difficult sometimes, and although they were supposed to get access within 24 hours, it was up to four or five days before they could do so. Are we aware of that? Have we made any representations about that?

Sir Alan Duncan: Again, we have always argued in favour of proper judicial process. That will include, by definition, the right of access to detained people and anyone who is in prison. We have not specifically said, "Hey, this is taking four days when it should be one," but if that is the case, it sounds to me like something people are perfectly entitled to call for.

Q230 **Mike Gapes:** Let me shift the focus to Syria. When we met members of the Turkish Government and Turkish Members of Parliament from right across the spectrum, there was a view among a large number of them



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that there was a close association between the Syrian-Kurdish PYD and YPG and the PKK. Some went so far as to describe the PYD and YPG as the PKK. What is our view? How do we regard the PYD and YPG?

Sir Alan Duncan: It is complicated. Obviously the PKK is proscribed. We are aware of the reports and alleged links with the YPG. In the context of Syria, this is of course very complicated. Lindsay might like to add something.

Lindsay Appleby: In terms of how we have approached this challenge, we have been very clear in any and all contact we have had with the PYD—the political wing—that links with the PKK are unacceptable because it is a proscribed terrorist organisation. The reports of the links exist, and I think they are a source of significant concern.

Sir Alan Duncan: If I might add, we have urged the YPG to distance themselves from the PKK.

Q231 **Mike Gapes:** I understand that, but if there was evidence—the Turkish Government clearly believe they have very strong evidence, because they argue that the YPG is the PKK—of such a link, would we move to proscribing the YPG and the PYD as terrorist groups on the same basis that we proscribe the PKK?

Sir Alan Duncan: I would be reluctant to speculate in the way that you are leading me to. In terms of the principles behind any such decision, we need clear evidence.

Lindsay Appleby: We approach proscription on a case-by-case basis, on the basis of the evidence that is put forward. We do not tend to answer hypothetical questions about proscription.

Sir Alan Duncan: As you probably surmised.

Q232 **Mike Gapes:** I won't ask another hypothetical question. Do the UK Government agree with the United States policy of supporting the YPG in the fight against Daesh?

Sir Alan Duncan: The starting point is that it is entirely for the United States to manage its own relationships. The situation in northern Syria is complex, and obviously we want maximum co-operation in the fight against Daesh. The nature of this question may change, depending on what the incoming President decides to do.

Q233 **Mike Gapes:** The YPG have been fighting. They have played a key role within the liberation of areas around Sinjar. They have also captured territory in borders of Turkey in northern Syria. You have said, Mr Appleby, that we have contacts with the PYD—and the military wing of the PYD is the YPG as far as I understand it. In those contacts, have we gone beyond just having discussions? Do we actually give any advice, assistance, help or material or logistical support to the YPG, the PYD?

Lindsay Appleby: The conversations we have had with the PYD are about politics, about them separating themselves from the PKK and about the



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future of Syria. In those conversations, we have been clear with them—as we have with everyone else—that we strongly support the territorial integrity of Syria. We cannot comment—I’m sorry, I know this will be disappointing—on the operational decisions that the US military has taken.

Q234 **Mike Gapes:** But we are in coalition with the United States. We have a coalition that is fighting Daesh in Syria and that coalition includes Syrian Kurdish forces, the Syrian Democratic Forces and the YPG. Is that correct?

Lindsay Appleby: Our position on the SDF is on record.

Q235 **Mike Gapes:** We support the SDF?

Lindsay Appleby: We work closely with the SDF.

Mike Gapes: The SDF includes the YPG. It also goes wider than that. It includes Syrian Arab Forces.

Chair: Three quarters of the YPG.

Mike Gapes: Some 75%, yes. We are in coalitions with groups that are fighting against Daesh on the ground. We require them to succeed in order to defeat Daesh in northern Syria and we are in coalition with them, we are in coalition with the United States. The United States is providing support to those forces. So the coalition that we are in thinks that it is appropriate that we should support them. Tell me if you disagree with that statement.

Lindsay Appleby: I agree that the Syrian Democratic Forces are important partners for the coalition in the counter-Daesh campaign. Their work on isolating Raqqa is important. We work with them, and we need to make sure that the right plans are in place to secure and stabilise these areas once they are liberated.

Q236 **Mike Gapes:** And the Syrian Democratic Forces includes YPG Kurdish Syrian forces—is that not true?

Lindsay Appleby: I am not an expert on Syria. It is the Syrian Democratic Forces that we work with, not the YPG.

Q237 **Mike Gapes:** Okay; I think we are into semantics here. Let me try one last question. We were told that the Turkish Government have evidence, including serial numbers of weapons that have been supplied by the United States to the YPG. Do we have any sight of that evidence? Have we seen any evidence? And these weapons have then gone on to the PKK: via the Syrian Democratic Forces through the YPG and then on to the PKK. We were told that very strongly by Turkish Government voices. Do we have any evidence of that? Have the Turkish Government sent that information to us?

Lindsay Appleby: I am not aware that the Turkish Government have sent that evidence to us. I am aware that they are having discussions between the US Government and the Turkish Government about that.



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Sir Alan Duncan: I certainly have not seen any evidence of weapons going from the YPG to the PKK; but then I am not directly responsible for Syria, as such, so I probably wouldn't have done anyway.

Q238 **Mike Gapes:** Perhaps you could send us a note, if you have any information, or get someone else to send us a note if you cannot do it yourselves.

Lindsay Appleby: Covering precisely what—just to be clear?

Mike Gapes: The question of whether weapons provided by the United States to the Syrian democratic forces and the YPG have been used by the PKK. Have they got into the hands of the PKK and been used, as a result, against targets and facilities—

Chair: Turkish officials have told us in terms that weapons have passed from the YPG to the PKK, supplied by the coalition—presumably the United States.

Mike Gapes: And they even told us they had the serial numbers.

Q239 **Chair:** Do you have that evidence?

Sir Alan Duncan: I think you would expect me to say—

Chair: We will take a letter.

Sir Alan Duncan: No, you would expect me to say that in wanting to cooperate fully with the Committee, should there be any constraints on what we can or cannot say, I have to follow the appropriate guidance.

Mike Gapes: You will no doubt tell us that we will not get the information; I understand that, because that is quite often—it is standard; but we will pursue the matter.

Chair: We will accept information under any constraints you care to place on it.

Q240 **Mr Holloway:** Before we go on to Euphrates Shield—perhaps this is a question for Mr Appleby, just coming from what Mr Gapes was saying: is there a problem in terms of the vetting of these tens of thousands of moderates who are in opposition in these militias?

For example, the guy who kidnapped Anthony Loyd and Jack Hill of *The Times*—Hakim, who shot Anthony Loyd the heroic journalist—is in and out of Syria now, operating in one of these militias. Is there a problem here? Is this something that is on your radar?

Also, you are probably not the person to answer, Mr Appleby, but perhaps someone could, in the FCO: what are people trying to do in terms of bringing this fellow Hakim to justice? After all, he did sell the French journalist to ISIS as well, probably.

Lindsay Appleby: We are moving quite a lot into Syria policy space, and Operation Euphrates Shield; while obviously it involves the Turkish military, is very—



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Mr Holloway: We are not on that, at the moment; it is just about the vetting of militias and the Anthony Loyd and Jack Hill kidnapper. It is probably for someone else to answer, as I said.

Sir Alan Duncan: I think it is, actually. Forgive me; we have done our best to be ready to anticipate all the questions, but this is going much more into Syria.

Q241 **Mr Holloway:** In terms of Euphrates Shield, so far the Turks have been dealing with ISIS. Won't it be a bit awkward if they turn their attention to the YPD?

Sir Alan Duncan: I understand the picture you are painting of possible conflict with US policy and things like that. I am not sure it is helpful to speculate, and, again, it is not specifically my brief as a Minister. I am not sure there is more I can say than that, at this stage, but I see what you are driving at.

Q242 **Mr Holloway:** Again, this is probably a Syria one: at present, Erdoğan is telling us about the plan to create a 5,000 sq km safe space in Syria. Do you have any idea where that space is and, also, who would defend it? Again, it is a Syria question so you may not be able to deal with it.

Sir Alan Duncan: The broad answer to your series of questions is that our main focus would be to urge Turkey to keep the focus on fighting Daesh and that we, I think, can find the maximum unity and purpose in all of us trying to focus on that threat.

Q243 **Chair:** The President of Turkey has said he intends to attack the YPG in Manbij. Presumably there is some kind of British view as to what our response is going to be. You must have had some discussion about that.

Sir Alan Duncan: Again, this is very Syria focused.

Q244 **Chair:** No, this is not Syria focused. This is the Turkish armed forces whose leader is saying is about to attack an ally of the United States and, by extension, ourselves in the war on Daesh. We have not thought about it; we don't have a view.

Lindsay Appleby: Can I help the Minister answer that?

Sir Alan Duncan: No, you don't need to help me.

Chair: Let Sir Alan answer Mr Holloway.

Sir Alan Duncan: All I am saying is, for the purposes of this particular inquiry, that is not something on which I have focused in my briefings, so I don't want to give you an inadequate answer by pretending that I am going to give you the full policy position of Her Majesty's Government on this at the moment.

Q245 **Chair:** I would be grateful if you invited the Foreign Secretary or Mr Ellwood to write to us to explain our position if the Turkish armed forces attack coalition allies, instead of going after Islamic State. Mr Holloway, are you happy?



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Mr Holloway: I would just say that it is perfectly rational for the Turks to be worried about the Kurds because when the music stops there could be a de facto Kurdistan.

Q246 **Chair:** Anyway, Sir Alan and Mr Appleby, thank you very much indeed for your evidence this afternoon.

Sir Alan Duncan: Our pleasure, thank you.

Chair: That concludes the proceedings for this afternoon and the meeting is now adjourned.