

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Violence in Rakhine State, HC 435

Wednesday 25 Oct 2017

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Members present: Tom Tugendhat (Chair); Chris Bryant; Ann Clwyd; Mike Gapes; Stephen Gethins; Ian Murray; Andrew Rosindell; Royston Smith; Nadhim Zahawi.

Questions 68-137

Witness

[I]: Rt Hon Mark Field MP, Minister of State for Asia and the Pacific

Correspondence from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office:

[Correspondence from the Foreign Secretary](#)

[Correspondence from John Virgo, Head of South East Asian Department](#)

Examination of witness

Witness: Rt Hon Mark Field MP, Minister of State for Asia and the Pacific

Q68 **Chair:** We welcome the Minister of State for Asia and the Pacific, Mark Field. Thank you for coming. If you will excuse us, we will start sharpish and try to be brief, which I hope you will be as well, but feel free to express fluidly.

Mark Field: Lovely, thank you, Tom.

Q69 **Andrew Rosindell:** Good afternoon, Minister. Thank you for joining us. To clarify your previous statement on this issue, would you tell the Committee if you now believe that the situation in Burma constitutes ethnic cleansing?

Mark Field: The phrase was initially used by the UN, rather more carefully than has perhaps been recorded in the press, when it said it seems as if there is a situation that amounts to ethnic cleansing. I hope I was clear in my statement in the House last week that I have always taken the view that as a term of art—and it is a term of art, as opposed to a legal term—“ethnic cleansing” also has in mind the idea of finality.

I made reference to my own family background. My late mother was from a part of Germany that is now Poland—Silesia—and in January 1945 she, as a five-year-old schoolgirl, along with 9.5 million ethnic Germans were ethnically cleansed. That decision was taken after the Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam meetings and the redrawing of the map of eastern Europe.

The issue at that juncture was about finality; there was a sense of heading into a particular area. As I said in the House, my late mother was from a part of Germany where my forefathers had been since the 1720s. She was unable until she was in her 50s to go back and see that place. I have never visited that part, which is just outside Breslau.

In my personal view, that was a factor in reluctance from the UK Government to push in that direction. There was also a sense that there has been movement—slow movement—from Aung San Suu Kyi, taking on board the idea that the Burmese civilians should be returned to Burma, rather than just being left in refugee camps on the other side of the Bangladeshi border.

However, I accept that unless we see action on that in very quick order, then I think the phrase “ethnic cleansing” should and does apply. I am comfortable with the idea that we should utilise that phrase at this stage. As you know, the French and the Americans have already done so publicly. Having done so last week, that is something that I would hold to.



Q70 Andrew Rosindell: You are saying that what we believe to be 600,000 to 1 million people being forcibly moved from their homes is effectively ethnic cleansing.

Mark Field: The UK Government's position is that this is now a situation of ethnic cleansing, yes.

Q71 Andrew Rosindell: Do you agree with Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International that the accounts we have heard so far are crimes against humanity?

Mark Field: That is a more complicated issue. That is a legal issue of genocide, and would have to be taken to the international courts as to whether there is genocide in place. In many ways, as I have tried to explain, we have done our best since 25 August to look at this diplomatically and in relation to the political side of things, as well as deal with what is a very urgent humanitarian catastrophe to a large extent.

As I have made clear, I have been to Rakhine. I went to Sittwe, which is the main city of Rakhine, albeit not directly on the border. It is heart-breaking to see what has happened and hear quite harrowing accounts from those who have been forcibly removed from their villages since 25 August.

I visited a camp that has been up and running for five years. As you implied, Andrew, this situation has not come out of a blue sky. Although there has been a serious escalation over the past eight or nine weeks, the additional 600,000 is on top of 400,000, some of whom have been in Bangladesh since the late 1970s.

Q72 Andrew Rosindell: Has the Foreign Office sought legal advice to clarify whether these are crimes against humanity?

Mark Field: This is an issue that the UN will have to determine. The issue of genocide is a UN-related issue; it is not something on which urgent work has been done yet. To be brutally honest, we are trying to work diplomatically, politically and in relation to the humanitarian crisis, and I think that the legal issues, important though they are, will have to wait until the initial crisis has been dealt with.

Q73 Stephen Gethins: Thank you, Minister, for coming along today and for your statements so far, which have been really helpful. May I build on some of the questions Andrew was asking? You mentioned genocide in terms of crimes against humanity, but genocide is not the only crime against humanity. Do you consider that other crimes against humanity have taken place?

Mark Field: It is likely that that is potentially the case. As I say, I think it is more important at this stage—I am hoping that the Burmese authorities will conclude their work and that a significant number of Rohingyas will be



returned safely to their own country, across the border. I accept that we are a long way from that being achieved, not least because one has to ask, what are they returning to? An insecure situation and villages that all the evidence suggests have been burned.

As I say, the voluntary and safe return of refugees is a central part of those ongoing discussions. If that is achieved, then the issues of discussion about ethnic cleansing, genocide or other crimes will disappear more into the background, but I accept that it will be an ongoing live debate.

Our energies are being spent on dealing with an immediate problem, rather than on the other issues to which you refer. That is not to say that there will not be legal and other minds here in London and in New York playing an active part in that regard.

- Q74 **Stephen Gethins:** I understand that. My colleagues will ask about some of the immediate humanitarian response but, on this particular issue, you mentioned earlier that it is for the UN to say whether or not there had been crimes against humanity. I suspect that the FCO, with its own legal team, would take its own legal advice on what is happening. Is that taking place?

Mark Field: I am not aware of it taking place at the moment. I have to say, this is ultimately a court-related decision—of course we will have lawyers there. My instinct is, again, that this will be for lawyers who are on the ground and able to take testimony. That process, as you know, has already begun in the UN context. I think that this is a decision that would need to be made—rightly have to be made—at an international level, rather than our own Foreign and Commonwealth Office going off at a particular tangent.

- Q75 **Stephen Gethins:** I know you want to move on, Chair, but to zero in on the legal stuff before we move on, I would expect that our response will be affected by what your lawyers are telling you in terms of the evidence. I take it that some work will be going on in the Foreign Office about this, given that we cannot always rely on the UN for legal definitions.

Mark Field: As I say, it is a court-related decision. I am not trying to be difficult about it. I am with you and there are clearly issues that we will have to face.

- Q76 **Chair:** On that point, would you support a referral to the ICC?

Mark Field: It is something, as I say, that will definitely be part of our diplomatic armoury during the course of what is a fast-evolving situation. So yes, I would imagine very quickly, Chair, if we do not have evidence of people being able and allowed to return to their home villages, these sorts of issues will be part and parcel of the next set of pressures that we can bring to bear on the Burmese authorities.



Q77 **Stephen Gethins:** One final question. If you think the UN is leading—which department of the United Nations do you think should be leading on this? If it has not been referred to the courts yet, who would be leading on this? Who will be leading on it just now?

Mark Field: Sorry, I would rather not just spout something that comes straight off the top of my head. Clearly a range of UN agencies have an interest in this matter.

Q78 **Stephen Gethins:** As a final point, may I ask if there is any information about the legal definitions which you would want to share with the Committee? Would it be okay to do that, Minister?

Mark Field: There isn't really anything at this stage.

Q79 **Nadhim Zahawi:** Minister, whom do you hold responsible for the crisis? Is it the Burmese military, is it ARSA, is it Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian Government, or is it the international community? Who would you say is responsible?

Mark Field: It is interesting that you touch on that. Fundamentally, I think no one can deny that the Burmese military has created the current situation in Rakhine. As you know, in the latest escalation since 25 August, the paramilitary group ARSA had an attack where a dozen or so Burmese military were murdered in a consolidated set of attacks, and the reaction was utterly disproportionate and over the top. I am sure that the ARSA group was hoping for an overreaction of that sort. I am under no illusions that the responsibility for the suffering that we have witnessed during the past two months is with the security forces in the lead in Rakhine under Commander Min Aung Hlaing. I think that the security forces bear the primary responsibility to protect citizens and abide by international norms. That is why at the outset we called on them to do so.

You touched on the civilian Government. As you know, I met Aung San Suu Kyi on 27 September. Having spoken to people who have great, long-standing knowledge—academically and in other in other ways in this area—one concern that I have is their perception is that Aung San Suu Kyi is a useful figurehead who has allowed the military to act with impunity. Clearly, as the State Counsellor, she bears some responsibility. I would also say that there has been significant movement, not least in the aftermath of my meeting with her, and on 12 October with her public statements.

I must confess that I have read in great detail your very interesting evidence session. Mark Farmaner, the director of Burma Campaign UK, gave an interesting, thought-provoking view during his statement, which was, as you said, "We accepted the 2015 elections even though the Rohingya were going to be excluded. We accepted the census, again excluding the Rohingya." That meant that diplomats and the international community were so keen to move ahead, to see the first signs of

democracy flourishing in Burma after having been under military rule certainly since 1962 and arguably more or less since the creation of the independent country. Consistently—I think that this is something that we will need to reflect on—we have sent a signal to the military in Burma, particularly in relation to the relationship with the Rohingya, that somehow the Rohingya were, at very best, second-class citizens. That is something that we will need to reflect on and it is an interesting, thought-provoking element that came from your previous evidence session.

Q80 Nadhim Zahawi: Thank you Minister for that clarity. The bulk of the responsibility lies with the military, but from what you have said, clearly Aung San Suu Kyi has had a part to play, passive or otherwise. Clearly, it manages to put a veneer of—

Mark Field: She holds political office. Inevitably, there are certain compromises that come from that, of which she would have been aware on taking office, but perhaps not quite as aware as events have panned out. Her room for manoeuvre is limited; therefore I would say that, overwhelmingly, the primary responsibility is with the Burmese military.

Q81 Nadhim Zahawi: I am very pleased with that clarity. I am very conscious of the time and I want to get through my questions. You must have had that conversation with Aung San Suu Kyi about the responsibility that she holds and the primary responsibility of the military. What was the response and how was that perceived in your conversation with her? How did she take that?

Mark Field: I had 45 minutes with Aung San Suu Kyi in Nay Pyi Taw on 27 September. She is a very dignified lady. As you know, she is a woman in her early seventies. Her life's work has been about bringing Burma to some sort of democracy. She was only two when her father was assassinated. She sees it as her life's duty to lead Burma into the future. As a consequence, it is sometimes easy to be very critical of her. I do not think that she is clinging on to power for power's sake. She regards that as being her duty. I put to her: what opportunity did she have for room for manoeuvre, given the strength of the military? To be absolutely honest, the concern that one had, even in the private meeting that we had, was that potentially she was going to be restricted as to the openness with which she could address these issues. As I say, she is someone who is very passionate about trying to bring Burma into a democratic era, but her room for manoeuvre is very, very limited.

Q82 Nadhim Zahawi: Did she feel sadness, remorse, anger?

Mark Field: It was my first meeting with her; others will have met her on a number of other occasions. She is a lady of her generation in a certain sense. She doesn't easily show emotion. It can be quite frustrating in that sense. I don't think she is a modern-day western politician able to emote very easily, but certainly the feedback I have had from our own



ambassador, who has known her a lot longer, is that she is someone who is appalled by what is happening. I think she finds it hard to, as I say, express that emotion in her heart on her sleeve, but—

Q83 **Nadhim Zahawi:** I only asked because you said she was passionate about—

Mark Field: She is passionate about her country and, I think, her role in the country and her feeling that it has started on a road towards democracy. I think she feels that she needs to be at the helm to bring it further forward.

Q84 **Nadhim Zahawi:** My colleague Stephen Gethins dealt with the issue of the International Criminal Court, so I am probably going to skip that, Chairman; I think we have dealt with that.

My last question to you is this: do you think the UK failed to anticipate this crisis? There were plenty of signals there. And do you now wish that the Foreign Office had previously done more to deliver tough messages to the Burmese Government about their treatment of the Rohingya? Some evidence was presented to us that we were much more focused on the trade deals. In 2015, the UK Government produced a trade and export guide to Burma just before the International State Crime Initiative at QMUL produced a report warning about the genocide in Burma. Would you say that we dropped the ball there and did not—

Mark Field: As I alluded to in a previous answer, I was very struck by what Mark Farmaner had to say. The whole of the international community will have to think and reflect on what I think were some important insights. Yes; I don't think there is any doubt. One has to remember that many people, even on this Committee, were the keenest supporters of Aung San Suu Kyi. She was seen as a heroine, and I understand that that is why the disappointment has been so great for the many who did feel that way about her and who feel this about the way events have panned out. With her at the helm, rather like—dare I say it?—Nelson Mandela coming to the helm in South Africa in 1994, there was a sense that suddenly things could change, that there would be enough of an uprising from the international community. An element of that, clearly, was that Burma should not be a closed-door society. I think that the trade aspect should be seen in that light. The idea was that to bring Burma into the 21st century would also mean working together and having a strong trading relationship, not just for the UK but for the west as a whole.

It is very easy with 20:20 hindsight to be very wise after these events. I am not suggesting that there weren't things, and as I say, I think elements of the evidence session—

Q85 **Nadhim Zahawi:** There were plenty of signals.



Mark Field: Well, it's going to make me reflect. Obviously, as you know, I have been a Minister for only four months, and a lot of my own bandwidth has been on this issue, along with the DPRK and other things, in that time. I think, yes, we should reflect for the future. That said, I very much believe that what the FCO has done in the aftermath, since 25 August, has been to lead the way, and not just from the humanitarian side, important though that is. I was in Geneva on Monday at the UN, as we were having a big pledging conference there. Over \$300 million of further pledges were made for the plight of the Rohingya, and I have made it very clear that that has to be money that is not just earmarked for Bangladesh; we have to try to get as much of that into Rakhine as is possible.

But also, in diplomatic terms, on 28 to 29 August we initiated the first discussions with the UN, at a time when the UN was talking just about DPRK-related matters. We have had two closed meetings and an open meeting. We are in the throes of continuing that work, working with all 15 permanent and other members of the UN to try to work towards an ongoing solution, and there is much that we want to continue to do, which I suspect may come up in future questions.

Nadhim Zahawi: I am very grateful to you.

Q86 **Royston Smith:** You said, Minister, that Aung San Suu Kyi bears some responsibility and that she is a figurehead—I think your words were “useful figurehead”. We know that people are disappointed in her. In fact, you mentioned one of the witnesses from last week, Mark Farmaner, who is equally disappointed. This is not a question that I asked him or he asked me, but, in the light of what has happened and Aung San Suu Kyi having the Nobel peace prize, should she keep it now or should it be withdrawn?

Mark Field: I will be honest with you, I am much more focused on trying to achieve what we can now. My instinct is yes. I am not sure what the process is to withdraw a Nobel prize—I do not think it is for the UK Government to decide, and it may not even be possible at all. Let's focus on trying to ensure that we continue to give whatever support we can to Aung San Suu Kyi. We have made it very clear that we stand ready in whatever way we can to bring about the idea of stopping the violence, making sure that every last aspect of Kofi Annan's Rakhine advisory commission report is implemented and also that we get refugees brought back to Burma at the earliest opportunity. We want to do all that we can in that regard.

I am not suggesting that issues like this are entirely a sideshow, but whether Aung San Suu Kyi has the Nobel prize withdrawn, whether her portrait no longer hangs up at St Hugh's College Oxford and whether she is no longer a freeman of the City of London do not seem to be what should be our primary responsibility. I accept that there are people who feel that is a very important signal of international distrust and disapproval



of what has happened. But I do believe, more importantly, that we have got to act and try to move forward. I am still hopeful that we can get some significant movement here, and Aung San Suu Kyi can lead the way by delineating herself from the military without entirely undermining her position—I am not saying that is entirely easy—and doing so in such a way that she can lead, to ensure that large numbers of refugees are able to return to their villages in Rakhine.

Q87 Ian Murray: I have a quick follow-up question to Mr Zahawi's questioning. Much of the evidence we have received in the inquiry so far has said that this crisis was highly predictable. From your answers to Mr Zahawi's questions, I am not clear if you think the Foreign Office missed the signals, deliberately ignored the signals or, in hindsight, should have done more about the signals that were coming through, given the UK's influence in the region. Perhaps the lessons that will be learned will be the need to identify what is happening in parts of the world where the UK has influence and to try an early intervention strategy rather than crisis management when the crisis has happened. Would you agree that that is a fairly accurate statement?

Mark Field: As I say, it is very easy to be wise with hindsight. I think all of us bear responsibility. The international community as a whole wanted to see Burma coming away from the decades of military dictatorship, with Aung San Suu Kyi regarded as a leader rather like, as I say, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King: someone, in the international community's view, of unimpeachable ethics who alone would be able to lead this.

I think it is fair for us all to say that we invested a lot of goodwill in that leadership and I do not think we should be too self-critical. As I said, it is easy to look with hindsight. We do need to look back at precisely the way in which, in the midst of that move towards any sort of democracy, a blind eye was turned to the ongoing plight of the Rohingya, of which we were aware some time before. Clearly there will be a big post-mortem on all of these matters, and it is right that that should happen, but I do believe that we need to look very firmly towards the future.

One of the things I have said—it was my parting shot in my statement in the House last week and it is something I feel very firmly about—is that it is very easy for us today to spend a huge amount of our time and energy on the humanitarian issues, critical though they are. Anyone who has been there—as I say, I have been to the Rakhine side as opposed to the Cox's Bazar side of what is happening. This is a humanitarian catastrophe, and the international community needs to come together. The danger is that, by focusing on the humanitarian aspect, we crowd out the diplomatic course, which will continue in the weeks and months to come, and indeed the political solution. The worst case of all, in my view, would be this: if we do our best to work with the Bangladeshi authorities to build ongoing,



long-standing, sustainable settlements on the Bangladesh side of the border, in a sense the military Government will have got their own way. In many ways the worry is not so much what happens in Burma, but the lesson that will be learned for the future by other military dictatorships that will think, "Right, we can act with equal impunity and we will get similar results." That is why we need to focus on those issues. I am not suggesting for one minute that we do not look at ourselves in the context of that, but we should not take our eye off the ball about what we need to do diplomatically and politically on the Burmese issue in the months to come.

There are so many issues in the modern world of diplomacy that are not new issues. Look at the behaviour of Kim Jong-un in North Korea today. The simple point is that he is acting as a rational actor given what happened to Gaddafi. Gaddafi was brought on board in 2003 and was let down within eight years and killed. The lessons were loud and clear. Future dictatorships and future leaders will look at the way in which we behave and the way in which we action this; therefore the humanitarian issue, important though it is, is not enough.

Q88 **Chair:** Minister, may I ask a brief question about your meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi? Did you use the term "ethnic cleansing" with her?

Mark Field: I did. I think I used it in the context of, "This is the currency within the international community. How would you comment on it?" She was pretty dismissive of the whole idea that there was any ethnic cleansing going on. She made what was, to a very limited extent, a fair comment, which was to suggest that intercommunal violence had applied to other parts. Certainly, my experience in Sittwe was that there were Buddhists and, indeed, Hindus who had been forced out of their villages and had seen relatives murdered, but obviously not in anything like the systematic way the Rohingya have been victimised since 25 August and for decades past.

There was a sense of denial at that stage. My own view, from diplomatic telegrams from our ambassador there, and from conversations the Foreign Secretary has had with Aung San Suu Kyi, is that she has moved away from that hard-line position that she expressed to me on 27 September.

Q89 **Chair:** Minister, would you then argue that the ARSA is in fact a serious threat to Burmese security?

Mark Field: I have had conversations about this with many folk who know more about the issue. ARSA is, arguably, an organisation of only 300 or 400 people—obviously, 300 or 400 people having weapons and the like can be very dangerous in a society even of 50 million. The bigger, longer-term worry—something I picked up from my conversations in New York; I was the only western Minister to speak at the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation—was that this would be seen as a lightning rod for a lot of



other radicals. In particular, with the Syria and Iraq campaigns now ending, there was a sense in which a number of the participants there might now alight upon coming to the Bangladesh-Burma border to try to wage some sort of jihadi operation. The sense is that ARSA is a relatively small organisation and relatively unsophisticated in its means; however, it could become the nucleus of something much more dangerous in the years to come.

- Q90 **Ann Clwyd:** I have just come back from an IPU conference in St Petersburg, and the situation of the Rohingya was an emergency item on the agenda. There were about 1,500 MPs from all over the world, including Burma. The Burmese did not speak, as far as I know, and the general view of the conference was pretty clear. I heard a correspondent on the radio talk about Aung San Suu Kyi's attitude towards the Rohingya. I have no direct quote for this, but they suggested that she was in denial about the Rohingya being Burmese in the first place. I wonder whether you detected that or whether any of your people on the ground were aware.

Mark Field: That is something that many have observed going back some years, both in public pronouncements and privately. In my conversation with her, she did refer to "our people" coming back, which was interesting.

As you know, part of the difficulty the Rohingya face, not just in Burma but in Bangladesh as well, is that they are not considered to be citizens; they are considered to be stateless. One of the fundamental planks of what the Annan Commission is trying to achieve is that that issue will have to be resolved. I cannot deny that; I don't see how we get a resolution, without a resolution of the status of the Rohingya as citizens of somewhere. Their being stateless is obviously a disastrous situation.

That was one of the lasting things that struck me from my conversation with Aung San Suu Kyi—that she spoke of "our people" coming back across the border.

- Q91 **Ann Clwyd:** That is interesting. Would you say that the UK has been successful in securing its goals at each of the UN and EU meetings on the crisis?

Mark Field: I think we have been reasonably successful. As you know, we have led the way as far as ending any military co-operation. One or two of our EU neighbours have been a little slower to go down that particular route. The US today has come out very strongly in relation to any military co-operation as well.

Ann, I was going to say you are an old hand, but that is not meant in a disparaging way. You are very experienced in this field, probably rather more than I am. Diplomacy can be painstakingly slow, even in the context



of a fast-evolving situation, as we have seen here over the past eight or nine weeks. Sometimes there can be frustration.

Our feeling, when I spoke with Matthew Rycroft, our then representative at the UN, was that we needed to move, in private meetings first as the pen holder, and then get to a public meeting. Many people might ask why we are not making a headlong rush towards a UN Security Council resolution. The truth, as brought up in the debate by David Lammy, is that, as it stands, if we were to rush in that direction, such a resolution might be vetoed by the Chinese and Russians. We need to bring people with us.

Q92 **Ann Clwyd:** Would you bring it to a vote?

Mark Field: Not at this stage. We want to try to utilise diplomatic means as far as we can. As I said, this is a fast-evolving situation. I think we need to have unity as far as possible in the international community.

I am not ruling out that, at some point, we might have to take a view that there is now such a united front that we need to bring this to the boil. I think there would be a worry if we had a vote. The advice we get from New York is very firm on this. If we were to move this to some sort of Security Council vote now, the risk is that it would end up being vetoed maybe by the Chinese or the Russians. In so doing, there would be a very firm step back. This issue is evolving quite quickly as we speak.

Ann Clwyd: Could I run through a tick list very quickly? You could say yes or no.

Chair: Mike just wanted to interrupt on one small point.

Q93 **Mike Gapes:** On Syria, where there is equal public concern about what is happening, the Foreign Secretary does not have any inhibitions about saying that we have put a motion to the Security Council, the Russians have vetoed it in the past, and we condemn the Russians.

The public in this country and internationally—I hear from large numbers of constituents—want to know that we are prepared to try to do something vocally and outspokenly. Why can't we put this to the test in the Security Council?

Mark Field: The ideal scenario, Mike, is that we should try to get unity on this. I don't think we are dismissing the prospect of that. The situation in Syria is quite different. Russia is a military player and clearly will veto anything.

Q94 **Mike Gapes:** I understand that it is different. There is a humanitarian disaster in Myanmar/Burma for the Rohingya. There is a humanitarian disaster in Syria. We seem to be prepared to put a motion to the Security Council on Syria but we are not prepared to do so in this case.



Mark Field: As I say, the difference is that Russia is a participant and will clearly veto anything as a military participant. The issue is that, yes, we can put a Security Council resolution that is, dare I say it, relatively bland, making the humanitarian point, which could be passed.

The real issue is not just the humanitarian side; it is dealing with what is going on in Burma and bringing the Burmese military to account. At the moment, to be honest, that would be difficult to get through as a Security Council resolution, but it is a fast-evolving situation and we are hopeful that we will be able to move in the right direction. We need to try to bring the international community with us.

I am not suggesting for one moment that as this situation evolves we will not take a view that we will test this and veto if necessary.

Q95 **Chair:** It is pretty much two months to the day since this latest crisis started. How long should we wait for unity?

Mark Field: I do not want to put a time-flag on it, but action needs to happen quickly. I don't think anyone would disagree, given the enormity of what has happened.

Q96 **Ann Clwyd:** What about a global arms embargo? Yes or no?

Mark Field: Again, the concern would be that to have such an embargo as a resolution would be undermined by other players. Having a global arms embargo would be an ideal scenario, if we could be sure that it would become global, but if it doesn't do that, then it doesn't really achieve—it might make us in the west feel that we have done all that we can, but surely it is better to try to work through diplomacy to give an effective voice to this, rather than rushing in with a quick vote.

Q97 **Ann Clwyd:** What about the reinstatement of a UN special rapporteur on Myanmar?

Mark Field: It is an issue that I will discuss with the UN. It is not something that is currently being pursued.

Q98 **Ann Clwyd:** What about imposing financial and travel sanctions against individuals such as military figures?

Mark Field: I am sure that is something that is being actively debated. I was very struck by your evidence session with Professor Jones. His view was that we could go ahead with visa or indeed financial sanctions, but the nature of the regime was such that that would have relatively little impact.

It is also fair to say that a number of the Burmese military have travelled to European countries recently—to Germany and Austria—and felt that there was some credibility at least, so to have some sort of travel ban might provide a certain amount of leverage. I am not disputing that. But again, I was struck by evidence in the previous session. The argument



might be made that sanctions were lifted too soon in 2011, when the first signs of democracy were there, and the evidence suggested that going down the sanctions route would be less effective than it might be in the case of other states.

Q99 **Ann Clwyd:** Some of us did argue at the time that it was too soon and that it would have been better to wait and see.

What about banning investment in and business with military-controlled companies?

Mark Field: As you know, in relation to our own relationship with the Burmese military, there is no military training going on. It was to do with ethics. Even the prospect of that, and the optics of that, was seen as bad enough that we needed to stop that in double-quick time. Obviously, I am sure that this is something that we will continue to look at fairly actively. So yes, it is something that, again, if we can get international agreement on, I think would be a positive step forward.

Q100 **Ann Clwyd:** Sometimes we have to go it alone.

Mark Field: I do see that, and there are moments when one does go it alone. I accept that, but I think that at the moment the sensible thing is to try to have a unified, international theme on this. One thing that I was again very struck by is that some of the initial rhetoric after 25 August saw elements of the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation moving in a particular direction that seemed to be slightly at odds with the UN. I am glad to say that we are now working very firmly together.

Q101 **Ann Clwyd:** What about leading international action to resettle the refugees elsewhere? We had a meeting with Bangladeshi politicians and we put some of these questions to them. We didn't really get many answers. I don't know how much enthusiasm there is.

Mark Field: To be honest, Ann, the focus of the energy now is on not giving any sort of olive-branch idea to the Burmese that lets them think that they can get away with it. The idea of resettling the Rohingya elsewhere means that essentially we are closing our mind to the idea of them returning where they should be returning, which is to their Burmese homeland. I am sure that in months to come, if there is no satisfactory resolution to this, the international community will return to the issues that you have raised, but the focus at the moment, rightly, should not be deflected from the view that the Rohingya should be going back to the land of their forefathers, Burma, rather than being resettled elsewhere.

Q102 **Royston Smith:** Minister, given the UK's vocal and active support for Burma's democratic transition and the large amount of development money that we have dedicated, are you disappointed how little the UK has been able to influence anything for some time, particularly in the last few months?

Mark Field: I am not as pessimistic as your question suggests about the influence that we have already had and the influence we might continue to have. The diplomatic process can be very frustrating—I have no doubt about that. From afar, it looks as though we have not had as much influence as we would like and there has not been a rapid resolution to this problem, but I think there has been a sense that Aung San Suu Kyi has moved quite significantly in her public pronouncements.

The real issue now is whether those words can be turned into deeds. That may be less a matter of her will than of her ability to achieve it. I very much hope that we will see some significant progress. We have made it very clear what we expect. Work is already going on to try to implement the Annan report from the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State and to work with ideas like model villages, so that those Rohingya who wish to return can do so at the earliest opportunity.

In answer to a question I was asked earlier, we secured an EU agreement on 16 October to suspend all senior Burmese military visits to the EU, and a review of defence co-operation with consideration of further measures if there is no progress. While the focus of most of our work has been in the context of the United Nations, we are also doing work at EU level.

Q103 **Chair:** It is slightly noticeable that some European Union members have a definition of arms sales that is not identical to ours.

Mark Field: I think that is the case. We well know that you are too polite to refer to any particular European country. None the less, it is a worthwhile exercise to work within both the EU and the UN to try to bring about international agreement on these matters.

Q104 **Chair:** Of course, not inviting somebody is not quite the same as banning them from coming.

Mark Field: I see that, but insofar as we are looking at ways in which we can get some useful leverage against the Burmese military—we have talked about visa bans, financial penalties and the like—this could be a useful means.

Q105 **Chris Bryant:** Listening to you, I am struck by the sense that we cannot do this, that or the other thing because we want to have some useful leverage. That is exactly the position that Aung San Suu Kyi is in, isn't it? We end up being as complicit as she is.

Mark Field: No, I don't feel that. As I have made clear to Mike, even if we feel in the final analysis that the Chinese and the Russians would veto a UN Security Council resolution, we would not necessarily rule out going down that route once we have exhausted reasonable diplomatic routes.

Q106 **Chris Bryant:** Do you not see the point I'm making?



Mark Field: I do see the point you are making. Ultimately, we are dealing with very difficult international affairs. The reality of the situation is that we all invested huge amounts of hope and goodwill in Aung San Suu Kyi and the idea that a new chapter was being born in Burma. Surely it is in everyone's interest for those fledgling bits of democracy to flourish and not to be entirely snuffed out. You may think that it being compromised by the situation, but I think it is an issue of sensible, painstaking diplomacy. None the less, we should invest as much time as we can in trying to make that democracy work.

Q107 **Chris Bryant:** But you made a comparison with Nelson Mandela coming to power. If we thought that what was happening in Burma was the same as what happened in South Africa, that was utterly naive.

Mark Field: No, I don't think people felt that it was exactly the same, but there was a sense in which Aung San Suu Kyi, rather like Nelson Mandela, was regarded as someone who could be the saviour of the nation and take it into that new chapter. There was a view that, if there was to be some democracy, who was better to lead that in Burma after over 50 years of military dictatorship?

Chris Bryant: Hmm.

Q108 **Royston Smith:** We decided to end military training courses for the Burmese military. Do you or the Department, or whoever, regret providing those military training courses in the first place? Was that the right thing to do?

Mark Field: I think there is a bit of a misunderstanding about how those courses operated. It was not military training in the sense of teaching soldiers how to fight or use arms. It was language training and training about ethics—general training for the military, rather than military training, if you understand the distinction I am trying to make. Equally, I can understand that the public would take the view that to continue it at the current time would be wrong.

Q109 **Royston Smith:** In that case, if the training was about governance and ethics, surely we should continue to do it—to teach them to behave them in a way that we think is more acceptable.

Mark Field: The reality is that the actions of the military are seen as being beyond the pale. Their actions over the last seven or eight weeks—

Q110 **Royston Smith:** So we have cancelled the training because we don't want them to come because of their behaviour, not because any of the training is good, bad or indifferent?

Mark Field: We feel that some of that training is good, but clearly, going back to the broader issue, there is a sense that there are elements of the military that are more pragmatic and more likely to side with Aung San



Suu Kyi. It is difficult to get a clear understanding of what is happening, but the military are commanded by people who have an absolutely orthodox hard line on the Rohingya that they are bringing to bear. I think that the decision to stop British taxpayers' money being expended on ongoing training courses with an organisation whose leadership we so strongly disapprove of—notwithstanding the good work that training might be doing further down the ranks—was the right one.

Q111 **Chair:** May I ask, for clarity, whether that decision was taken by you, the Foreign Secretary, the Department generally, or by the Department with the MOD?

Mark Field: It was made at Secretary of State level. I believe it was announced by Secretary of State Fallon, but that was obviously in conjunction with the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs as well.

Q112 **Ann Clwyd:** For clarification, there was a human rights component in the military training, wasn't there?

Mark Field: There was. When I say ethics, I mean ethics and human rights.

Q113 **Ann Clwyd:** Can you explain that component?

Mark Field: No, I cannot. I did not have an idea of exactly what the programme entailed. All I would say is that it is a relatively standard programme that we provide to militaries in other parts of the world as well. In the circumstances, I think you will understand why it was felt right that we should discontinue it at this stage.

Q114 **Mike Gapes:** You have said several times that you want to have a united, unified international position. What role do you think China could constructively play in the resolution of this issue?

Mark Field: We continue to have a lot of ongoing discussions and conversations with China in relation to all the issues. That also applies to India, of course—another near neighbour of Burma and a large power and influential country in the region. As you know, China has significant equities, not just economically but in relation to the ongoing refugee problems that emerge in that country. As I alluded to earlier, intercommunal violence is not, I am afraid, an issue that has affected the Rohingya exclusively. The Rohingya issue is more extreme because of the numbers, because of the military's acts and because they are regarded as non-citizens. But, obviously, there are ethnic Shan, Karen and Christians who have been under threat. There are other non-Rohingya Muslims in other parts of Burma, not in Rakhine.

Clearly, one issue that impacts on the Chinese is, if Burma becomes a failed state with potential refugee problems, that will end up on their

border. That is one of the issues when I have been talking in Beijing. Though I did not discuss this issue to any great degree when I was in Beijing at the end of August, one thing they feel strongly about in the Afghanistan-Pakistan situation is a land border between the two countries that could impact on them.

- Q115 **Mike Gapes:** Going back to Myanmar/Burma, why should China have the same interests and values towards the situation there, given that on human rights issues globally we are not always at the same place as the Chinese? Why do you think that the Chinese are likely to agree with our view of the help for the humanitarian situation there, given the traditional Chinese view of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries? They don't take it kindly, for example, if we talk about the situation in Tibet or human rights in China; we get pushed back. Why should we be dependent on the Chinese view to solve this issue?

Mark Field: I am not saying that we are dependent on the Chinese view. I have not had a chance to read all aspects of Xi thought, but I think it is probably fair to say that, although the traditional Chinese view, to which you rightly refer, was one of non-interference, there is a recognition that they now desire to be more of a player in international affairs, whether through the UN or through other bodies.

Above all, as you will know from your knowledge of China, their concern about disorder and chaos is very profound. The idea of large-scale refugee problems in their backyard would be of great concern to the Chinese authorities.

- Q116 **Mike Gapes:** That may be the case, but surely from their point of view that concern would be dealt with by having an authoritarian military regime that would stabilise the situation, rather than a pluralistic, democratic regime moving towards respect for human rights. It is a different value system—that is the point I am making.

Mark Field: I understand that and it is an issue one has to take account of. I think there is enough open communication between not just our Government but other members of the P5 and China on this issue. There is obviously the US and France, but other members of the current Security Council include the Swedes and others who are very active in this affair. There is enough ongoing dialogue to feel that it is worth continuing those sorts of conversations.

You make a fair point, Mike. I am not suggesting for one minute that we should be held to ransom by one other member of the P5 that has a different world view on this matter, but I think there is an opportunity for some co-operation. It is a path that, at this juncture in a fast-evolving situation, we are keen to pursue.

- Q117 **Mike Gapes:** Can I ask you about what is being done and what could be



done to deal with the refugee crisis? What are we doing to stop the camps in Bangladesh becoming permanent?

Mark Field: With a large number—600,000 more people—emerging in that country in the past two months, there needs to be a sense of having a sustainable situation for those who are there. The risk of that is that, if you make sustainable and liveable enough conditions, permanence emerges. Certainly, that is not what we are intending to do.

One thing I have been keen on, including in a number of bilateral talks with UN agencies and the International Red Cross on Monday in Geneva, is the need to be clear in focusing as much of our energy and finance on what is happening on the Burmese side of the border. In other words, to build things up in Rakhine. I think there is an appreciation from the international community to do that.

Q118 **Mike Gapes:** Which UN agencies are we engaging with? Is it just the UN refugee organisation, or are there any others?

Mark Field: The UNHCR, the UN refugee organisation, but there are a number of UN—and therein, again, is one of the problems. As you will be aware, there is a great distrust from the Burmese authorities, from Aung San Suu Kyi downwards, towards the work of the UN. That is one of the reasons that one of the other lines of open network and communication is with ASEAN, Burma being a member there. Certainly, the Indonesians are doing a very good job behind the scenes of trying to work together to provide a trusted international voice in Rakhine that the Burmese would accept.

Q119 **Mike Gapes:** To be clear, is this discussion about the repatriation of people from Bangladesh back to Rakhine being dealt with on a bilateral basis between Bangladesh and the Burmese authorities, or is the UN involved in that, too?

Mark Field: There is bilateral work; there is UN work. A number of countries, particularly Indonesia within ASEAN, are very keen to try to open as many lines of communication as possible. We are working at all levels. Where I am with you entirely on this, Mike, is that unless we get repatriation at an early stage, the perception from the Burmese military—and in the international community—will be that they have got their own way. It is, in my view, of utmost urgency to get some repatriation—we need to do that—but of course part and parcel of that is having villages in which people can live. Many have been burned. Rebuilding will not necessarily take quite so painstakingly long, provided that the international community has access to Rakhine.

Q120 **Mike Gapes:** You have said: “The security forces should ensure that the Rohingya feel safe to return.” How can people who have been burned out of their homes and seen their relatives, friends and neighbours murdered feel safe in the hands of the Burmese military?

Mark Field: I am making the case that, in order to go back, they will need to feel that sense of security. That security will obviously be not just from the Burmese authorities but, presumably, from the UN or ASEAN or other international authorities being able to provide that sort of reassurance.

Q121 **Mike Gapes:** I was at a meeting here last night where somebody from the International Rescue Committee described the situation and said that people they had spoken to had made it very clear that they did not wish to return because they did not feel safe.

Mark Field: I am absolutely sure that that applies to many, many of the Rohingya who have been displaced. I cannot deny that.

Q122 **Mike Gapes:** Isn't the reality, then, that unless there is a dramatic transformation in the politics of that country, these people are not going to be returning for many, many years?

Mark Field: I accept that. I think that must be right. There needs to be that dramatic transformation, or a recognition that the international community will, at least within the context of Rakhine, have enough leeway to be able to provide that transformation.

Q123 **Mike Gapes:** So in terms of those people's future, even though it may mean a victory for the regime and the people who are driving them out, isn't it time that we had an international package, with a number of countries saying, "We will take people; we will give them support"? Otherwise, they are going to be stuck in one of the poorest countries in the world without any support and there will be the danger of extremism and radicalisation, as we have seen in the Palestinian refugee camps in the Middle East and elsewhere. This is potentially a ticking time bomb unless the international community acts urgently.

Mark Field: You are right: it is a ticking time bomb, and we are all very much aware of all the implications that can emerge from that. Listen, I appreciate your impatience about these matters, Mike. The reality is that if we do as you say at this stage and say, "Fine, this is now too difficult a problem; we're not going to repatriate people or let people come back," we will send a very clear signal that the Burmese authorities have won. I am not saying that we will not be down the route that you are describing before the world is too much older, but in what is a rapidly evolving situation I think the right approach is to utilise whatever means we can within the international community.

That is not just a matter of raising the sort of money that we were able to raise from the international community in Geneva on Monday; it is about, through active means, bringing the Rakhine Advisory Commission report into play. The fundamental aspect of that is for the Rohingya to be able to return across the border to Burma. While all of the caveats that you have brought into play are perfectly reasonable, and you are right in your



analysis, I do believe that at this stage the focus of our energy should be on getting repatriation.

You have laid out a path that may well be the one that has to be taken in future. I just think that it is undesirable at the moment to start going down that route, because once you do so, inevitably the incentive for many of the Rohingya will be to leave Burma or Bangladesh, whereas it is surely in the interests of all concerned that they should be able to return as peaceably as possible to Burma.

Q124 **Chair:** Minister, would it be fair to say that the repatriations a decade or so ago—two decades ago, was it?—from Bangladesh to Burma were not successful?

Mark Field: Sure. I think the scale of this current issue over the last two months puts that into a very different light. Tragically, that scale has also meant that what was, I'm afraid, probably regarded by the international community as a very localised little problem on the border between the two countries now has global ramifications. Part of that goes back to what Mike inferred, which is that obviously the issue of radicalisation in camps is very much at the forefront of people's minds.

Q125 **Chair:** Would it also be fair to say that in all these issues there is a certain element of "Time makes the law"—in the sense that the longer you can keep a displaced population out, the more you can redistribute the land and the harder it is for anybody to come back anyway?

Mark Field: Sure.

Q126 **Chair:** And you then get into conflicting rights, making it very difficult. One of your suggestions seemed to be—maybe I misheard—that there could be some sort of UN or ASEAN or combined role in providing security to returned refugees.

Mark Field: I think that would certainly get around the very real issue, which has been rightly pointed out, that many of those people who have been displaced over the past eight weeks don't feel in any way safe enough to return to Rakhine, let alone to the villages they have left behind.

Q127 **Chair:** Given that there is a role for a neutral body to monitor or possibly even provide security in Rakhine, would you see that as perhaps one of the elements that the British Government could help with? Would they be able to begin to pull together such a group and perhaps provide its organisation and maybe even help put it into Rakhine?

Mark Field: I think it probably makes sense that this work would be done under a UN umbrella, but I don't deny the difficulties in getting access across that border, given the stranglehold that the Burmese military have

on their country, particularly in parts of Rakhine that are adjacent to Bangladesh.

Q128 **Chair:** Do you think it is something that you could perhaps raise directly, or ask the Foreign Secretary to raise, with Aung San Suu Kyi?

Mark Field: I would be only too happy to do so. Obviously, in the international discussions we are having, I am sure this is one element that will be discussed with Aung San Suu Kyi and others. I know that the Foreign Secretary spoke with her at the weekend and intends to speak again before too long.

Q129 **Chair:** Perhaps you could raise with her the idea of having some sort of UN/ASEAN body help monitor and perhaps even provide security.

Mark Field: Yes, I am sure that is something we will wish to discuss.

Q130 **Ian Murray:** You have talked a lot about the international community and the role of the UN. The ASEM conference is coming up and these issues could be raised there. What are your goals there on this particular issue?

Mark Field: Which conference?

Ian Murray: The Asia-Europe Foreign Ministers' meeting. Are you attending?

Mark Field: I am not sure. As you know, it is difficult for any Minister to get away during parliamentary term time.

Ian Murray: I am happy to pair with you.

Mark Field: There is no doubt that, whether we are in St Petersburg or wherever, this issue is absolutely at the forefront of any international discussion.

Q131 **Ian Murray:** What will the UK Government ask the people who attend that conference to do?

Mark Field: I think I have given you a pretty strong indication as to what we are trying to achieve. In the near term we want people to be able to return. We want to see an end to the violence. Sadly, there has been some evidence that, although after 5 September it did deplete, there has been more violence since then. We want full humanitarian access to Rakhine for the international community. In the medium term, the idea is that refugees are able to be repatriated and returned home safely and voluntarily by encouraging Burma and Bangladesh to agree, and to implement the process to do so. Essentially, when these humanitarian disasters happen, all too often we start with a blank sheet of paper, but we actually have a template—Kofi Annan's report—and we want to see every article of that implemented at the earliest opportunity. We know

what we want to try and achieve. It is very clear what the goals of the report are. As I say, I believe that addressing the issue of citizenship will be central to providing a sustainable long-term solution.

Q132 Ian Murray: That meeting is happening on the ground in Burma next month. If there is no suitable conclusion from that meeting, or no suitable progress, will you then take much greater steps towards the UN with some of the issues that were raised by Ann earlier? In diplomacy there is a whole matrix of things that can be done. My overall impression, if you don't mind my saying, Minister, is that it seems there is not enough urgency, while hundreds of thousands of people are flooding across the border with relatives burning behind them.

Mark Field: I think it is very unfair to suggest that. I can understand why you feel that way. I can assure you that a huge amount of work is going on, and I am proud that the UK Government have done a lot of that work, whether it is on the humanitarian side or on the diplomatic side. I don't think there is any lack of urgency on these matters. It is frustrating that we have not been able to achieve more; I don't deny that.

Q133 Ian Murray: So is it the international community that is the problem?

Mark Field: No, it is events on the ground. It is very difficult to get access. That is the reality of the situation. I absolutely accept that a huge amount of work needs to be done in Bangladesh to deal with the very immediate humanitarian problem, but the only way we will get a solution is by being able to get access across the border into Rakhine State and into Burma. It has been far more difficult to persuade the authorities to do that. That is the only way we will get a solution, by implementing the aspects of the Kofi Annan report to provide a sustainable future, and by recognising that the problems of Rakhine are no longer an issue between the Bangladeshi and Burmese border, but now have an international dimension to them.

Q134 Chair: Minister, you said earlier that you did not have a blank piece of paper in the Annan report. Of course, it is not a blank piece of paper either in the sense that we have seen over many decades other abuses in Burma. I can certainly speak of the Karen people and there are others. Would it be fair to say that the British embassy in Yangon is not quite staffed to see these triggers coming? Or is there anything further that we could do to make sure that when such triggers occur we are ready to respond rather than waiting for such extreme moments?

Mark Field: I was in Rangoon and went to Nay Pyi Taw to see Aung San Suu Kyi who was up in Sittwe. It was a three-and-a-half-day trip. I was impressed by our team there. I am sure there is always an argument, particularly at this particular time of crisis, that we could always do with more staff. I certainly felt that all the people I spoke to from our embassy



clearly had strong access to those to whom they really needed to have day- to-day access. If you are trying to imply that we have been sleepwalking—

Q135 **Chair:** No, I am not trying to imply that at all. I am implying that these indicators require quite a lot of work and that there is often a resourcing element to it. Would you argue that the embassy could do with more resources to ensure that, should similar events occur again, not just in Rakhine, we are more sensitive to the initial movements and the first tremors of the earthquake?

Q136 **Mark Field:** I am sure. As you know, almost wherever one goes in the world, one could make an argument that we need to have more staff. My personal view is that, if we are going to make a success of Brexit and the whole idea of global Britain, we need to ensure that we have as much on the ground as possible. A lot of that will be about diplomacy as well as trade relations.

I think we have got pretty significant resource on the ground in Rangoon, not just the FCO but DFID and DIT as well. I don't think there has been a sense that people have been asleep at the wheel at all but rather the opposite. We have got some people who have been aware of the concerns.

If there is one observation one would make—I would not call it a criticism—they, like a lot of other people, invested a lot of goodwill in the Aung San Suu Kyi relationship. Watching our ambassador there—a very impressive man, Andrew Patrick, who was previously our No. 2 in Kabul and is now coming to the end of his term, having done four years—he clearly has invested a huge amount, not just in the Aung San Suu Kyi relationship but in trying to see that Burma becomes a success story for the future.

I think he is personally desperately upset by what has happened. He certainly felt that a lot of the co-operation between our two countries in trade, cultural and educational terms stands to turn to dust before too long with this terrible crisis.

Q137 **Chair:** Those of us who have worked with Andrew Patrick in the past think very highly of him. Could I ask finally about the future of the UK-Burma relationship? As you rightly say, we have invested an awful lot in it, not least through Aung San Suu Kyi and the various visits that many Ministers and senior officials have made. Indeed, our own Committee staff have been there to support various programmes.

This is clearly an important relationship as far as we are concerned, but it is one that does not appear to be going in the direction we would like. Can you look 10 years out and give me a best-case and a worst-case scenario?



Mark Field: I would rather not. Obviously, the worst-case scenario would be for the country to become inward-looking, backward, a military dictatorship, closing off borders, being a place that the next generation of young Britons would not want to visit. That would be the absolutely worst-case scenario; that would be calamitous.

As I say, we have invested a lot in trying to see moves towards democracy. I go back to my initial words, reading your previous session. There were some instructive thoughts there about, perhaps, in that headlong rush we turned a blind eye to some of the issues that have come back very quickly to bite.

The positive scenario would be to see significant repatriation and a sense of the issue about statelessness and citizenship being resolved. Indeed, from the perspective of Rakhine at least, essentially to see as much of the implementation of the Kofi Annan report as is possible.

Chair: Minister, thank you for coming. We are grateful for your time.

Mark Field: Not at all. Thank you.