

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Oral Evidence from the Foreign Secretary November 2017, HC 538

Wednesday 1 November 2017

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[Watch the meeting](#)

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

Questions 1-146

Witnesses

I: Rt Hon Boris Johnson, MP, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Sir Simon McDonald, Permanent Under Secretary, and Karen Pierce, Political Director, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

[Written evidence from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office- follow up letter to the Chair of the Committee.](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rt Hon Boris Johnson, Sir Simon McDonald, and Karen Pierce.

Chair: Foreign Secretary, welcome to your first sitting of this Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee. The Permanent Under Secretary and the Political Director are both very welcome as well. It is very kind of you to come. If it is all right with you, we shall kick off straight away.

Q1 **Nadhim Zahawi:** Welcome, Foreign Secretary. What do you see as the UK's key strategic priorities right now?

Boris Johnson: Thank you very much, Mr Chairman and Mr Zahawi. I should begin by saying that I am sure the whole Committee will join me in expressing our sympathy and condolences to New York after the terrorist attack. Again, we stand shoulder to shoulder with our American friends.

I realise that this Committee has been chafing at the bit to hear me over the last few months. I should explain that this has been an exceptionally busy time for UK diplomacy. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has been in the lead in dealing with the worst hurricane to hit the Caribbean in 50 years or more—the single biggest catastrophe to affect British people, with 500,000 of them in the path of Hurricane Irma—and we can be proud of the response. The Foreign Office mobilised 400 staff in London and dispatched more than 1,000 to the region. We handled 3,500 consular cases, co-ordinated aid and military assistance, and at the height of the operation, 1,100 British military personnel were deployed in the Caribbean, including daily aid flights mounted by RAF Voyagers and C-17s.

Chair: We welcome very much the effort that has been made—

Boris Johnson: If I may, I will come to our ambitions—

Q2 **Chair:** We only have two hours. We will be asking questions rather than expecting statements, if that is all right.

Boris Johnson: I was asked a very generous open question about the priorities for the UK and what we have achieved, and I will explain.

The objective of our Global Britain policy is to use all our overseas effort—military, humanitarian, development, political and diplomatic—to make the world safer and more prosperous, because that is in the interests of not just the world but British citizens. We have been dealing with failed states and ungoverned spaces that have become a breeding ground for terrorism at home and abroad. In Iraq and Syria, the UK has played a leading role in the coalition that has reduced the territory of Daesh by 90%. We led the world in the condemnation of Assad's regime's use of chemical weapons, and our assessment that that regime was indeed responsible has now been vindicated by a UN investigation. We have helped to build international consensus about the way forward in Libya—the Ghassan Salamé plan. We have held a successful conference on Somalia, binding the federal Government to the member states. British diplomacy—this

continues to be a key part of our priorities—has helped to maintain the JCPOA deal, which is not perfect but represents the best hope for preventing a nuclear-armed Iran.

At the UN, we have been working with China to put pressure on North Korea, rallying support for three sanctions resolutions so far this year, with the aim of finding a political solution to the crisis. We remain vigilant about the threat from Russia. We are helping to maintain stability in the western Balkans, and the UK will host a summit on that next year. The United States has reaffirmed its rock-solid commitment to article 5 of the NATO treaty. We have taken the lead in keeping our European friends firm in maintaining sanctions on Russia over its actions in Crimea, and I was proud to see the stepping-up of the UK military presence in Estonia when I visited our troops earlier this year.

To take account of Brexit and our priorities there, we are beefing up our bilateral diplomacy with our European friends, deploying 50 more diplomats with other EU members, and we are working to create the deep and special partnership between Britain and the EU set out in the Prime Minister's Florence speech. We are preparing, as a priority, to reach trade agreements with countries outside the EU, which according to World Bank forecasts, will account for 90% of global growth.

Next year, Mr Zahawi, we will host a Commonwealth summit, with a special focus on improving opportunities and education for women and girls. We are also taking forward a proposal the Government have for a near total ban on the ivory trade in this country.

So far, I have visited 52 countries since I last saw this Committee, in a 36-year-old plane, I am proud to say. I am proud of the work that has been done by the FCO officials in 268 posts.

I repeat a point I have made before: wherever I go, I am struck by the goodwill and admiration shown towards our country and by how our counterparts around the world want us to engage and do even more. They see what I see, that a global Britain is not just in the interests of this country but of the world.

Q3 Chair: Thank you, Foreign Secretary. May we perhaps move away from the statement that was written for you on to the question that Mr Zahawi asked? That would be kind of you.

Boris Johnson: I hesitate to correct the Chairman of this august Committee but I wrote the statement myself.

Chair: I am delighted to hear it.

Q4 Nadhim Zahawi: Thank you, Foreign Secretary. You have outlined the strategic priorities or taken us on a canter round the world. In terms of our relationship with the European Union and the European countries, does it require a fundamental reassessment of our foreign and strategic position? Do you think it could require more regional missions? We heard from Lord Ricketts that, for example, in France you maybe want to talk to



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some big politicians in the regions.

You also mentioned that you have beefed up the human resource by 50. We heard, again from Lord Ricketts, that in many of the smaller countries we have got only one or two diplomats. He thinks an optimal number would be about five. If my arithmetic is right, you may need more than 50. Have you asked the Chancellor for more money?

Boris Johnson: It goes without saying that we in this Department are very happy with the work that we do; we do it very efficiently. I will remind you that we have a network roughly the size of the French network but we do it with 25% less financial support. Clearly, we are seeing an increase in our funding envelope overall. It is going up from about £1.2 billion to £1.24 billion over the spending period. We have some extra money for trade, which is important because obviously the work I have described in getting the new trade deals going is central to what the Foreign Office is trying to do.

As I also just said, we are beefing up our representation bilaterally in other EU countries. If I may make a comment about the way we did things in the past: we tended to put all our eggs in the Brussels basket. We tended to think that a lot of bilateral diplomacy, particularly with very important partners such as France and Germany, could be conducted through that prism and optic.

The effect was even more deleterious perhaps with smaller EU countries, where we thought, "Oh well, we'll see them at the FAC or at the Council meeting in Brussels; we don't necessarily need to engage in their capitals in the way that we might."

That is why we are putting in another 50 staff. We have upgraded seven ambassadors in European posts. All ambassadors in the 27 EU member states are now at SMS—senior management—level. I believe that will pay dividends for this country.

It was great to be able to see everybody at once in the EU context. By the way, we will continue, one way or the other, to see everybody in the EU context. But this, I think, will give us the presence and the throw weight we need in those other European capitals, particularly ones that have felt a bit neglected over the past few decades.

Q5 **Nadhim Zahawi:** You mentioned trade. Since the referendum, the Foreign Office has lost its responsibility for UK trade and Europe policies. What do you hold the Foreign Office's central purpose now to be, if those two bits have gone away, when it comes to our relationship with Europe?

Boris Johnson: I think that I have described the central role of the Foreign Office, which is to co-ordinate the massive overseas effort of this country. We are a huge player overseas—we are the second biggest military spender in NATO and a P5 member. If we look at the big humanitarian crisis facing the world, the UK is the second or third biggest contributor to relief there.



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The Foreign Office provides a platform. If you look at our representations around the world, sometimes you have a dozen different Government Departments represented on that Foreign Office platform. Altogether, I think we accommodate 29 Government Departments and agencies. We are proud to do so and we do so with great effectiveness. However, everybody on those platforms understands that it is the FCO that is responsible for the engagement with our domestic hosts—with the other countries concerned.

It is a job that is far from decreasing in importance; it is gaining in importance the whole time, and will continue to as the UK becomes ever more global in its reach and its trading operations.

Q6 Nadhim Zahawi: You mentioned that it had been a few months since you appeared before the Committee—it has been more than a year. What specific achievements are you most proud of during that time?

Boris Johnson: As I said in my opening remarks to you, of the things I would single out, I think it has been very important to get a clear understanding of how the relationship between the United States and the rest of the world is going to work and to be as useful as we can in helping to make sure that the incoming American President shares as far as possible the priorities that we think are necessary. I would single out the JCPOA, which is not dead—far from it; we intend to keep it alive. I would mention the commitment to article 5 of NATO, which is extremely valuable and reassuring for everybody on this side of the Atlantic.

If you look around the clock, I think it was important that we were able to get the international community behind the Ghassan Salamé plan for Libya. There are far too many actors in Libya who have tried to—how shall I put it?—come up with their own plans. I think it is important, as my friend Angelino Alfano, the Italian Foreign Minister, put it, that we should have a “reductio ad unum” in Libya to get everybody focused on the UN plan. I certainly think we played an important role in that. As I said to you earlier, I think getting people to focus on the atrocity at Khan Sheikhoun and actually getting the world to look at some sanctions on the Syrians responsible for Khan Sheikhoun on 4 April was a worthwhile achievement.

If you look at the European picture and where we are now, again I believe that the FCO has played a very important role in making sure that we help our partners to understand what we want to achieve and how we can get a Brexit deal that is in their interests as much as in the interests of the British people. That requires a lot of diplomacy and energy, but I think, after the Prime Minister’s Florence speech, there is a wide measure of understanding about what the UK wants to do, and I hope that they will very much be encouraged to move on to the second phase of the negotiations. That is clearly one of the things we have been pushing for and it remains a big objective for the remainder of this year.

Q7 Stephen Gethins: Thank you, Foreign Secretary, for coming along today. You mentioned earlier that you are recruiting 50 more diplomats, or just under two per member state. Will they be central, based in London, or



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will they be based out in the member states themselves?

Boris Johnson: They will be in post—but, Simon, you may want to answer.

Sir Simon McDonald: All that 50 are in the network.

Q8 **Stephen Gethins:** In the network—so they are already recruited and will be out in the 27 capitals.

Sir Simon McDonald: Yes. The posts have all been identified; recruitment has happened for some but not all; and the first wave are in post already.

Q9 **Stephen Gethins:** Yesterday Lord Ricketts gave us evidence along with Lord Hague and he said that we would need about five or six UK-based staff in every EU capital. Do you think Lord Ricketts was right?

Boris Johnson: We currently have I think four or five UK-based staff—

Chair: Lord Ricketts said one to two.

Boris Johnson: What we want to achieve is greater representation in other EU capitals, which is why we are putting in another 50 across the network.

Q10 **Stephen Gethins:** So do you disagree with Lord Ricketts? Do you think the 50 will be sufficient? Or do you think—

Boris Johnson: Fifty is what we are doing. I think it is a good increase. We are very confident in the abilities of our officials, in their dynamism and energy, and we think that they will be able to do a great job.

Q11 **Stephen Gethins:** I do not doubt their dynamism and energy. It is just in terms of the bigger job, whether we think that 50 more diplomats will be sufficient, and how much extra do you think that will cost?

Boris Johnson: To get back to my point, I think the 50 will be a great addition to our strength around the European capitals, and I think that is something that the Foreign Affairs Committee should in principle be applauding, rather than looking askance at it. It will have a cost—I have seen a figure here of another £8 million, but I defer to Simon as to whether that relates to the 50.

Q12 **Stephen Gethins:** North or south of 350 million quid a week, Foreign Secretary?

Boris Johnson: That, my dear Mr Gethins, is a typically polemical question that you are asking there, if I may say so. That will not return to UK control until such time as we leave the EU, which is a project on which we are also engaged, and we are getting our message across very successfully.

Chair: Sorry, Stephen, may we stick to—

Stephen Gethins: Sure. I will let the Foreign Secretary finish.

Boris Johnson: I have finished.

- Q13 **Stephen Gethins:** You mentioned the 50 more diplomats—okay, there seems to be some difference of opinion with Lord Ricketts there—but what about your earlier remarks that we would still be part of the Brussels talks? How do you see that panning out?

Boris Johnson: Obviously the UK will still be represented at the EU, but UKRep—we will no longer be within the Council chamber, but we will continue to interact with our friends and partners across the Channel, as you would expect.

- Q14 **Stephen Gethins:** But do you think we will still be part of those talks? Still part of the EU 27? Are you planning on a new format being set up? Are you—

Boris Johnson: No, no. For the avoidance of misunderstanding, Mr Gethins, I imagine that UKRep will continue to be a very substantial UK representation, because obviously we will want to engage with our friends and partners, but as you already appreciate, we will not be in the Council chamber, the Parliament or any of the other bodies.

- Q15 **Stephen Gethins:** Do you think that the permanent representation then will be bigger or smaller than it is at the moment?

Boris Johnson: We have no plans, as far as I understand it, at the moment to increase the permanent representation, but it is already a pretty large body of very capable men and women, as I am sure you know.

- Q16 **Stephen Gethins:** May I ask just one more question, Chair? Obviously there will be a big change in the relationship with the 27 other member states. This is obviously not a question for officials but for you, Foreign Secretary: how much planning was done on this, on what we need, before June 2016?

Boris Johnson: To the best of my knowledge, before June 2016—in other words, before the EU referendum—I do not detect evidence of any planning. But—

Stephen Gethins: I said that it was a question not for officials but for you.

Boris Johnson: You will readily appreciate, Mr Gethins, that I was not then a member of the Government.

- Q17 **Stephen Gethins:** No, but you were a senior member of the Leave campaign. As an independence campaigner, I campaigned on that—we failed, but the plans were there. Were there no plans in place prior to June 2016? Had no thoughts been given to what this might mean for the Foreign Office?

Boris Johnson: That is really a question for the Leave campaign. If you want me to answer on behalf of the Leave campaign—



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- Q18 **Chair:** No, I don't, Foreign Secretary. You are here as the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, not as a spokesman for the Leave campaign, so can we stop that?

Stephen Gethins: Of course. It would just be nice to get the Foreign Secretary's background and his thoughts on this.

Chair: I understand, but I think that is refighting an old battle, which I think—

Boris Johnson: Which you lost.

Stephen Gethins: Not in Scotland, Foreign Secretary—two thirds.

- Q19 **Chair:** Some people have spoken about having observer status or permanent observer status at the PSC. Do you see that as in any way something to aim for?

Boris Johnson: Permanent status at the PSC, did you say?

Chair: Yes, observer status at the PSC.

Boris Johnson: If I may say, those are interesting conversations that can take place about exactly how we might want to relate to the EU foreign and security policy and how we might want to interact. It is for negotiation and discussion.

I think the important point for this Committee to understand is that we approach our friends and partners in a spirit of humility here. We make an unconditional commitment to their security, we obviously feel that we have a lot to offer and a lot to give, and historically we always have done, but this is really not something where we want to push ourselves forward. It is something we are happy to discuss in a friendly, collegiate way. We want to be useful, we want to be bolted on, if that can be appropriate. We want to be, as it were, a flying buttress supportive of the EU kirk, but we are not particularly fussy about exactly how the masonry interlocks, if I can put it that way.

- Q20 **Mike Gapes:** Yesterday, the former Foreign Secretary, Lord Hague, said that the Political and Security Committee is key and that, "There is no way round that...If you are not in on the agenda and politics of the Political and Security Committee, it is very difficult to influence on a daily basis". I understand that the PSC meets twice a week and the Committee of Permanent Representatives meets once a week. Lord Ricketts, as well as Lord Hague, emphasised the importance of being in the room. Baroness Ashton also used the same phrase of being in the room when she described her experience of being the High Representative and Commissioner for our country. Foreign Secretary, is it our intention, even if we leave the EU, to be in the room of the Political and Security Committee, the Foreign Affairs Council and the Committee of Permanent Representatives?

Boris Johnson: These are very relevant and pertinent questions. I can tell you that, at the moment, there is no Government position—we have



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not decided what we want to seek. I have tried to give a general account of how it would work. My own feeling is that it would be very difficult for us to remain in any EU institution or in any EU body that went beyond the purely intergovernmental. Just to give the Committee guidance intellectually so that you can see where I am coming from, where it is possible to create intergovernmental structures that do not entail any role, for instance, for the European Court of Justice, or any federal machinery, then UK support and UK participation in that new structure may of course be very desirable. But we need to work out exactly how the UK could be supportive and be useful.

I think it is very important, when thinking ahead to how it will work, to recognise that the UK does represent about 20% of EU defence spending and about 25% of aid spending. We are a very significant player and partner, and we want to be useful and supportive, but if I can just anticipate your interjection, Mr Gapes—

Mike Gapes: No, let me ask the questions, please.

Boris Johnson: We do not want to prejudge how that relationship will be taken forward.

- Q21 **Mike Gapes:** We triggered article 50 several months ago. The referendum was almost a year and a half ago, and yet the Government still does not have any idea. Is that what you are saying? You published a paper in September, setting out some suggestions on co-operation, but a number of issues in that paper were still unclear. How are our European partners supposed to know what issues they have to consider as regards possible observer status within meetings, or some other arrangement, if we do not have clarity about what we want?

Boris Johnson: If I may, perhaps I can put it the other way round.

Mike Gapes: No. Please answer the question.

Boris Johnson: I will answer the question, if you will allow me. I think that this is one of the areas in the conversation, and there are many, where the UK has something to offer, where we have a lot to contribute and historically have contributed a lot, and that is appreciated by our friends and partners.

If you can imagine the negotiations, Mr Gapes, we do not necessarily want to go to our friends and partners now with an elaborate structure for how the UK will participate in the common security policy, CSFP, CSDP and all the rest. That would put us in the position of demandeurs, as they say in Brussels. They would say, "You want to be integrated into our arrangements in the following way? Well, as it happens, we have a perfectly good set of systems for co-operating with third countries on CSFP and CSDP, and we do it like this, and that's what you're going to get." I don't think that would necessarily be in the interests of the 27 or in the interests of the UK. At this stage, we are content to begin a discussion with our friends and partners without spelling out in detail what we insist on.



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- Q22 **Mike Gapes:** Perhaps at some point we might get the papers that are under debate this afternoon, and they might give us some more information about the Government's position.

Chair: Mr Gapes, I think we will leave the Foreign Secretary to answer—

Boris Johnson: I have been very frank with you, Mr Gapes, and tried to explain our thinking on this. The UK is a major player in these areas, as you will appreciate. It is something where we must be humble and must accept that our friends and partners will want us to continue to be useful to the joint European effort, but we do not want now to spell out to them exactly what we think is necessary, because that is a matter for them to decide, as well.

- Q23 **Mike Gapes:** Can I ask specifically, then: what is our proposal with regard to the European Defence Agency and the European Defence Fund after—if—we leave the European Union? What specific proposals do we have?

Boris Johnson: We will continue to participate in all such agencies as they may be useful to the UK. That is something for decision and negotiation. If it becomes impossible as a result of our ceasing to be on the European Defence Agency, if it becomes impossible as a result of our ceasing to be a member, what we will seek is for UK defence concerns to be properly treated.

- Q24 **Ian Austin:** May I just ask one question? How do you think people who voted to leave would respond to your saying that we will be able to remain members of those defence agencies, even though we are not members of the EU?

Boris Johnson: What I said was that that is for negotiation and it may be that it is impossible for us to stay in either of those bodies in the way that we do now.

But on the European Defence Agency, what we will seek to do is to make sure that UK defence interests—UK defence industries—are not remotely prejudiced.

- Q25 **Chair:** You make a valid point on that, Foreign Secretary. May I just ask a point of precision, please? You quite understandably said that you did not want to, as it were, situate the estimate and therefore place us as demandeur for the PSC. You have just effectively done that for the European Defence Agency. Do you think we should be members of bodies that at the moment require EU membership, or do you think those negotiations are for later?

Boris Johnson: For the sake of absolute clarity, if I can answer Mr Austin, what we seek to achieve, irrespective of how we do it, is the protection of British interests and to come out of the EU. That is what we are going to do.

- Q26 **Chris Bryant:** You used a metaphor earlier about a flying buttress. A flying buttress is no good unless it is attached to the church. It cannot



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buttress anything unless it is attached to it, so how do you intend us to be attached to the European Union?

Boris Johnson: I was speaking of the—the foot of the buttress is outside, and it is certainly true that the buttress helps to prop up the church. Exactly how the masonry interlocks is—

Q27 **Chris Bryant:** They have to touch.

Boris Johnson: They have to touch, but—

Chris Bryant: Because everybody's interpretation—

Chair: Allow the Foreign Secretary to answer.

Boris Johnson: Perhaps I could give you an example, Mr Bryant. On common foreign and security policy, there are about 18 European defence collaboration initiatives under way at the moment. In at least a couple of them, the UK is in charge—we have command. We would have to see, and we would have to work—this was my point to Mr Gapes. We would have to explore with our friends and partners to what extent they wanted us to remain committed to those joint ventures. I suspect that they would be very happy for us to be involved in some way. The exact structure—the way you do it—is yet to be determined on either side. What I would steer the Committee away from is thinking that we could be in some way integrated, either into the PSC, to be totally frank with you, Mr Tugendhat, or into any federal bodies of the EU in the way that we currently are. What I am inviting you to consider is that there could be a future in which—imagine a flying buttress: supportive, contiguous, adjacent, useful, but not integrated. That is what I am asking you to envisage. And—

Q28 **Chair:** Forgive me. So you're saying the buttress is British and the mass inside is being said in French and German.

Boris Johnson: As you will know from your long experience as a diplomat and a military man, Mr Tugendhat, one of the most interesting cultural changes in the EU over the last 20 years is that, notwithstanding our imminent departure from the EU, they speak English now. And they will continue to speak English, in my view, given the composition of the 27, long, long after we have gone.

Q29 **Chair:** Monsieur Macron's English is very good, but his culture is still French.

Boris Johnson: If I may say so, Mr Chairman, you again make an extremely good point. Without wishing to flatter you excessively, you know very well that the EU Commission and the federal institutions of the EU, though they are remarkable and capable in many respects, do still have a very dominant culture that derives from some of the grandes écoles in Paris. It was one of the great tragedies of British membership of the EU that we were unable to keep up our representation in Brussels. It declined under both Labour—

Chris Bryant: To return—



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Boris Johnson: If I could just address the very good point made by the Chairman, it declined under both Labour and Conservative Governments. Only 3.6% of EU officials were British.

Q30 **Chair:** Foreign Secretary, that is a history lesson, and an interesting one, but can we move on?

Boris Johnson: It's not—it's true today.

Chris Bryant: The Government paper—

Chair: It will go to zero now.

Boris Johnson: Well, that is a very interesting point, too. It won't. That is a very interesting point. If I could just come back on that—

Chair: Can we move on, please?

Q31 **Chris Bryant:** The Government paper on these issues—on future diplomacy after we leave the European Union—has 58 sections on the problems that will have to be addressed at that point. There are many issues, such as the ones that you, Foreign Secretary, alluded to today, on which we have won foreign policy arguments around the world through and because of our membership of the European Union. That is in your own report. Then it has a very short section that sets out what the Government hopes we will achieve out of the negotiations in this area. We had Lord Hague and Lord Ricketts before us yesterday, and their understanding of that report—I think this is the common understanding—is that it suggests that the Government is seeking observer status in the Foreign Affairs Council in all the relevant meetings. As I understand it—just for clarity—you are saying that that is not the truth.

Boris Johnson: I think I was being asked whether we want to be members of the PSC.

Chris Bryant: No—observer status. You were asked three times.

Mike Gapes: In the room.

Boris Johnson: There are all sorts of ways in which we could make sure we know what is going on, whether we are in the room or outside the room. The important point is that we won't be members of the—

Q32 **Chris Bryant:** We understand that. Do you want observer status or not?

Boris Johnson: Well, if we are accorded—let me go back to the very frank answer I gave to the Committee Chairman. We believe we have a lot to offer. We have massive experience in these areas. We are the European power that is most committed overseas. We are a global actor. It is very much in the interests of the EU to have us involved. Precisely how we do it—the exact nature of our relationship with our friends and partners—is something for mutual discussion. Whether we are going to be there in the room as observers or outside the room in some sort of Antici group, as I think it used to be called, we will work it out. Whatever happens, we will come up with a mechanism by which we can show—this is the crucial



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point, which was made in the Florence speech and has gone down so well in other European capitals—our unconditional support for European security and defence. That is the crucial point that we need to get across. Exactly how we do it—exactly how the masonry of the buttress interlocks with the church—is for discussion, but we are going to be there and be supportive.

Chair: May I pass back to Mr Gapes very briefly, and then Mr Rosindell?

- Q33 **Mike Gapes:** One final question. The Government paper in September referred to the issue of sanctions. How will the Bill on sanctions and financial crime give the FCO the powers we need to continue to co-operate with EU sanctions? We are not clear about what our future trading and financial services relationships with the EU will be, so how can we continue participating in the sanctions regimes?

Boris Johnson: I think I see where you are going, Mr Gapes. I think matters will be quite readily resolved once we get agreements on the main dossiers and put together a free trade agreement and an agreement on financial services. It is perfectly true that we are bringing in our own sanctions Bill. That is legally necessary, because at the moment our sanctions regimes are deployed through the EU. We will need to have our own sanctions regime to implement them as a matter of national policy. The Committee should be in no doubt that it will give us the flexibility to implement sanctions where perhaps our EU friends and partners are more reluctant. It will also enable us to do things differently—perhaps not to put sanctions on things that they deem to be sanctionable, although at the moment I can't think of any examples. What we will certainly want to do—I want to get back to the general question that has been posed this afternoon—is to concert that sanctions policy with our friends and partners to achieve the maximum possible diplomatic and political impact. Indeed, if you think of the 27 plus one, taking the EU and adding the UK—remember that the UK is 16% of EU GDP—that is a double blow that countries will have to spend twice as much diplomatic activity in avoiding. We will work to intensify that overall European sanctions effect.

Chair: Thank you.

- Q34 **Andrew Rosindell:** Foreign Secretary, do you not think that we should look at this the opposite way, in that we will not be in the room with them but they will not be in our room either? We are a global nation with security second to none in terms of our intelligence, our defence and our global outreach. Surely we should present it that they need to be in our room as well, rather than as if we are excluded from their room.

Boris Johnson: I think you make a very good point. Actually, we have a wide measure of co-operation already with our European friends and partners. I believe that there is a French brigadier in charge of a British—

Chair: Deputy commander.

Boris Johnson: I defer to the military experience of the Chair. There is a senior French officer at any rate somewhere up in Yorkshire commanding



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our troops without any particular objection. I have seen plenty of examples around the world where we work very closely with our European friends and partners. We want to achieve that, so I applaud the sentiment that you expressed. We need to be working together.

- Q35 **Ms Ghani:** We are moving on to Global Britain, Foreign Secretary. I hope that is not just a soundbite but a policy. What are your Department's specific objectives and how will you and your Department measure progress on delivering Global Britain?

Boris Johnson: The idea of Global Britain is that people think that Brexit is all about turning inwards, negatively and all the rest of it. I refuse to accept that. On the contrary, a lot of us who campaigned both for leave and for remain think that we should be more outward looking and more open than before. We should be open to the rest of the world and we should be engaged with the rest of the world. That is what Global Britain is all about. We want to get over to the British public that that is in their interest as well.

Often, people do not realise the way in which a peaceful and a prosperous world is in the economic interests of the UK. If you look at the state of the southern Mediterranean for instance or what is happening in north Africa and the middle east, the region is turmoil by comparison with what it was like 30 years ago. That is having a negative and depressing effect on the economy of the whole region. If we can help to sort that out, that will be good for the Mediterranean world and it would be good for the UK as well. It is a great pity that we have only just been able to start flights again to Tunisia, and we still cannot fly to Sharm el Sheikh. We saw what happened to Monarch Airlines; unquestionably, a factor in the failure of that long-standing British business was the difficulty of flying to some of those destinations. If you can make the world safer you can also make it more prosperous for British people. That's the name of the game.

- Q36 **Ms Ghani:** Leadership and measuring progress are key if we are to face outwards and show the rest of the world how it can be done. How have we measured progress in dealing with the Rohingya crisis? The US declared it was ethnic cleansing before we did and is prepared to put in sanctions.

Boris Johnson: No one should understate the crisis in Burma or the threat to the Rohingya and the suffering that they have experienced. About 608,000 have been expelled and they are obviously undergoing a great deal of hardship. The UK, I think, has given about £155 million of humanitarian aid. I had better check that figure, but it is a large sum of humanitarian aid. I am not sure it is £155 million.

- Q37 **Chair:** It is a decreasing amount now. It is about £50 million this year.

Boris Johnson: It is increasing fast. It was £47 million, forgive me, to that particular crisis.

What we do not believe is that you can, simply by denouncing the Government of Aung San Suu Kyi, magically transform the situation. Of



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course it is ethnic cleansing if those people are not allowed to return to their homes. That is clear. That is why we say that the Government at Yangon—sorry, Naypyitaw—should make sure that we get humanitarian aid, observers and the Annan plan implemented, but what I do not want to see in Burma is a total undermining of the civilian Administration. The country has only just emerged from a military dictatorship. That is what we have been working for.

Q38 Chair: The Minister of State, Mark Field, mentioned the possibility of bringing in UN observers to Rakhine province. Would you agree that that was a suitable option?

Boris Johnson: Any independent observers would be vital. That is certainly something we insisted on with State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. We need some way of seeing what is going on objectively, because clearly the Government in Naypyitaw tell a different story. They say that ARSA is responsible for the terrorist violence, the torching of villages and so on. We do not believe that.

Q39 Chair: Will you raise it in New York, Foreign Secretary?

Boris Johnson: We are raising it in New York.

Chair: Getting UN observers in.

Boris Johnson: We certainly want to have independent observers in Rakhine.

Q40 Ms Ghani: You mentioned leadership earlier. You also mentioned that Daesh has been defeated out of 90% of the territory they previously held. Something that is sometimes not talked about enough is the work that the Foreign Office has done in pushing through the UN resolution to investigate and prosecute Daesh, but we have to work with our international partners. A number of Daesh terrorists have come from Tunisia, but unfortunately the Tunisian President and the leader of the Islamist party do not fully believe that Daesh activists or extremists should be prosecuted. How are you going to urge your international partners to follow that UN resolution and make sure that Daesh is held accountable for its crimes?

Boris Johnson: Ms Ghani, I heard your excellent question a couple of hours ago in the House of Commons about the move at the UN to prosecute Daesh and bring it to justice. I totally share your sentiments. That is actually something that I should have listed at the beginning. It is something that we tabled in the Security Council about a year ago or more. It has taken a very long time particularly to get the Iraqi Government to agree to it, because they have worries about who might be affected by the gathering of that evidence and who might be arrested and brought to justice, but it has to be done and we will certainly be continuing the pressure with our partners, with the French, the Americans and all our allies in the region—all those who support us—to accumulate evidence against Daesh terrorists and to make sure they are brought to justice.

Q41 Ms Ghani: Do you think that will be made easier or more difficult, given



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that the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia has made quite a profound statement, saying that they are going to return to moderate Islam? Considering that the previous form of Islam practised in Saudi Arabia, one could argue, encouraged some people to become extremists at the root of Wahhabism, do you think Saudi Arabia will work closer with the UN in investigating Daesh?

Boris Johnson: I think that is a really fascinating question. The hopes of the region and how the whole thing will go depend on the answer to that question, because there is no doubt that what is happening in Saudi Arabia is potentially of great importance and benefit to the world. It is a great thing that from June 2018 women will be able to drive—great! How much further is that going to go? It sounds sort of bathetic to put it like that. We want, obviously, to encourage Saudi Arabia down the path of reform and modernisation, and if that can happen—

Q42 **Chair:** Which school of Islam do you think they should follow?

Boris Johnson: It is not for me to prescribe any form of Islam or to make windows into men's souls, as they say, and comment on their religious belief. As a democrat and a believer in human rights, gender equality, LGBT rights and all the things we have done in this country that make it so economically attractive, I would say to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who is a remarkable young man, "If you want to make an economic miracle in your country, look at those qualities that we have in this country. Look at the investment that comes. Look at the genius that comes. Look at the talent that wants to come to a country like that, and look at the economic success you will have." The argument I would make is not about what type of Islam they choose to follow but what kind of society they choose to build.

Q43 **Chris Bryant:** Can we move on to the United States of America? You said earlier—I am not sure whether this was one of the moments when you were being humble—that you thought one of your great achievements this year was making sure the incoming President shares our values.

Boris Johnson: With great respect to you, Mr Bryant—if I can go back to Uriah Heep mode here—I do not think I said that.

Chris Bryant: You did.

Boris Johnson: No power on earth would make it possible to get the President of the United States to conform identically to UK policy in every respect. That is not going to happen.

Q44 **Chris Bryant:** No, but you said "share our values".

Boris Johnson: I certainly think we have made progress in getting our friends in Washington—and they are our friends. It is very important to understand that whatever happens, the United States is our most important ally. It is absolutely critical for our future collectively that we remain very close to the United States. I do think we have had some progress.



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- Q45 **Chris Bryant:** I get that, but the implication of what you are saying is—I understand this—that you feel you have to negotiate your way around the new President and that he is not fully signed up to British values or British foreign policy objectives. I note that you then went into “our friends in America”. Does that mean you find a way round the President?

Boris Johnson: Clearly it is very important for us as a country to engage with the United States at all levels, and the Prime Minister has a very good relationship with President Trump. They talk regularly on the phone. I have a very good relationship with Rex Tillerson. We have superb diplomatic representation in Washington. It is a very, very thick relationship. It is a transatlantic pipeline of communication, and that is as it should be. On some key issues, we have been able to make our American friends aware of our perspective and, indeed, of our European perspective. There are issues such as the JCPOA or the importance of NATO—

- Q46 **Chris Bryant:** Climate change?

Boris Johnson: Climate change is not a lost cause—it is far from a lost cause. There may be a way of getting the Americans, not just at the state level or city level but also at the federal level, to get back into the Paris accords on different terms. I am not saying that that is going to be easy, but it is possible, and the UK will certainly play a big part in trying to achieve that.

- Q47 **Chris Bryant:** George W. Bush has said of the present political situation in the United States of America under Donald Trump, “We’ve seen nationalism distorted into nativism”. I wonder whether that is your perception. Though we obviously want to do some kind of free trade deal with the United States of America, the US Government have now proposed 300% tariffs on Bombardier C Series aircraft. They do not believe in free trade at all, do they?

Boris Johnson: Clearly the Bombardier decision is one that we regret. We have been clear with both Boeing and the Commerce Department—indeed, with all levels of Government—about our displeasure at that decision. We do not think it is right or fair, and we do not think it is reasonable for Bombardier. Of course, it is not unprecedented.

Chris Bryant: It is not a good start.

Boris Johnson: If you remember, the United States, under George W. Bush, slapped big tariffs on British steel. We protested then and we were able to negotiate and eventually to sort the problem out. That is what we want to do now.

You asked a question, Mr Bryant, about our ability to do a free trade deal with the United States. What is certainly true is that the Americans drive a very hard bargain. We should be under no illusions. Anybody with any experience of dealing with the US will tell you that they will try to be very tough. However, I have not met a single US Congressman or Senator who



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was not very enthusiastic about a free trade deal. There are big opportunities for this country, so we should go for it.

- Q48 **Chris Bryant:** May I just check the timing of such a possible deal? Some people have been talking about having something in place with the US—or, for that matter, with any other country in the world—for the end of March 2019. That is not legally possible, is it?

Boris Johnson: No, that's right.

- Q49 **Chris Bryant:** So there will have to be a transition period.

Boris Johnson: No; just to be clear, it is not legally possible to begin formal negotiations on a free trade deal while we have the duty of sincere co-operation with our European friends, as you know. What we can do is look at it in principle and look at the opportunities; we can scope it out and pencil it in, but we cannot ink it in.

- Q50 **Chris Bryant:** But the free trade deals that we already have with other countries through the EU will lapse at that date, presumably, and there will then be a lacuna?

Boris Johnson: That is right, but no, there will not be a lacuna. The objective is to make sure that they are grandfathered on.

- Q51 **Chris Bryant:** How will that happen?

Boris Johnson: That is a matter for negotiation and discussion by DExEU, but we are confident that that can be achieved. After all, it is in the commercial interests of both sides.

- Q52 **Chris Bryant:** But at the moment it is legally impossible.

Boris Johnson: It is part of the negotiations.

- Q53 **Andrew Rosindell:** If we are outside the European Union, why would it be legally impossible to discuss and agree free trade agreements? Surely that is what we campaigned for?

Boris Johnson: Forgive me—

Andrew Rosindell: Surely we should be able to do that? What should restrict us from having free trade agreements post-March in two years' time?

Boris Johnson: Nothing at all. Sorry; perhaps I should have made myself clearer. As a matter of law—under the duty of sincere co-operation we have with our friends and partners—we cannot formally negotiate free trade deals now. We can, of course, get them ready, we can pre-cook them, we can think about them in great detail.

- Q54 **Andrew Rosindell:** But from 29 March 2019 we can?

Boris Johnson: We can be licking our lips, we can meditate on them and salivate over them, but we cannot do them. We have to wait until 2019 before the formal—

Andrew Rosindell: But then we can.

Boris Johnson: What we are saying is that if, as the Prime Minister has said, we want an implementation period, it is very important for the Committee to understand that, during that implementation period—post-March 2019—we will be able to do formal negotiations about free trade deals.

Q55 **Ann Clwyd:** Foreign Secretary, I want to ask you about Iran. Delegations from Iran have been here over the last few weeks, whom I assume you met; we certainly met them on an informal basis. Subsequently, at the Inter-Parliamentary Union conference in St Petersburg, we had bilaterals with the Iranians. I want to ask you whether you plan to reassure and guide UK companies about certain scenarios under which the US might reimpose sanctions on Iran. Are you going to do that?

Boris Johnson: I understand what you are driving at, Mrs Clwyd. The issue is what we will do in the UK if the US slaps sanctions back on in such a way that they look as though they might be a threat to British companies doing business in Iran. All I can say is that we want to avoid that situation. That is what we are trying to do at the moment.

The point that we make to our American friends is that the JCPOA itself—and I think President Trump understands this—remains intact. It was clear from what he said in his statement that the fundamental trade-off between good behaviour by Iran on nuclear weapons and economic activity with Iran, for the benefit of the Iranian people and the world, is still basically there.

Obviously, the President is concerned about disruptive Iranian behaviour in the region: the arming of the Houthis, Hezbollah and so on. He wants to take action to constrain Iran and, insofar as we can, we want to assist in that. What we do not want to do is have a situation in which those extra measures start, as it were, to shade in on the JCPOA so as to make it non-viable from the Iranian point of view. I hope I am making myself clear.

There is a balance to be struck. There might be more that we can do to constrain Iran in the region, but we do not want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. We want to keep the JCPOA alive.

Q56 **Ann Clwyd:** You will obviously want British companies to continue to trade with Iran.

Boris Johnson: I do. In the end, the 80 million Iranian people, many of them young and in a country with extraordinary potential, need and deserve to feel the benefits of the JCPOA and of engagement. Do not forget that the IAEA has found that Iran is in compliance with the JCPOA. Iran has not broken the terms of the JCPOA.

From my perspective, I want to see more UK commercial activity. We have sold some aircraft to Iran. That does not in any way blind us to the disruptive behaviour of Iran. That does not mean that we have any illusions about the kind of things that they are up to, but you have got to



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engage with these people. It is a country with an extraordinary future if we can get them on a better path.

- Q57 **Chair:** When you do engage, would you say you are engaging with the Government, the mullahs, the IRGC or a combination? Who is really in charge?

Boris Johnson: That is the key question, Mr Chairman. Iran resembles one of those Russian dolls, in the sense that the IRGC-QF is a state within a state. When we consider some of the disruptive activity that I have talked about, whether in Syria, Yemen or Lebanon, that is being conducted by Qassem Suleimani and the IRGC-QF. To a very large degree, he is the guy who is pulling the strings. We want to encourage the other side of the equation. We want to encourage the democratic and civilian component. We believe that engaging with them and encouraging them is a useful thing for us to do.

- Q58 **Ian Austin:** We were told at the time that the agreement and deal was first reached that lifting sanctions, welcoming Iran and thawing relations with Iran would encourage them to behave better in the region. That has clearly not happened, has it?

They threaten the existence of other countries. They are promoting terrorism elsewhere in the region. The lifting of sanctions has been followed by increased support for organisations such as Hezbollah and Hamas. How do you propose, as you said a moment ago, to constrain Iran's influence in the region, given that is what has happened following this deal?

Boris Johnson: Just looking at—you are right. The first point is—well, you are not quite right in the sense that the JCPOA was quite Cartesian in the way it excluded these considerations from the terms of the deal.

- Q59 **Ian Austin:** On the JCPOA, Iran is not allowing access to all military sites, and I know this is outside the JCPOA but it is pressing ahead with its ballistic missile programme. So the idea that we can regard it as some kind of benign force for peace—

Boris Johnson: I am with you, yes. Mr Austin, I understand where you are coming from. Just look, for instance, at Iran's army of Hezbollah in Lebanon and the shipping of hundreds of thousands of missiles to Hezbollah, which are then used to attack Israel—with reprisals, by the way, against the people of Lebanon rather than Iran. Mahan Air was used to ship the missiles to Damascus, I think, and then through to Lebanon, so we might consider sanctions on Mahan Air. That is one of the things we could do.

If you look at Yemen, you have got an extraordinary situation now in which Iranian missiles are being fired by the Houthis at Saudi territory. This is potentially an incredibly dangerous situation. We need to work with the Saudis, the Omanis and others to get the Houthis to see sense, to do a deal and find a political solution in Yemen. Otherwise, the tragedy of that country will continue. Iran was not in Yemen before this nightmare began;



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the Iranians were not there at all—or hardly, so that is the way of dealing with them there.

In Syria, which we have not discussed at all, I think the answer is to continue the work that Rex Tillerson has embarked on that is very positive. By the way, perhaps I should have said, in the context of my answer to Mr Bryant, that one of the crucial differences, which is unacknowledged by the west, between the Trump Administration and the Obama Administration is the willingness of the Trump Administration to engage directly and indeed kinetically in Syria, which President Obama never did. You can say, “Actually it was because Assad is winning,” but if you look on the ground, together with the Russians, the Americans are setting up deconfliction zones, and you can see a way in which Iran and Russia can be prised apart in Syria, and a way forward—I am not going to put a huge amount of money on this—in which you could restart a political process, have elections and have a move away from Assad, who is, after all, another of Tehran’s clients. To answer your question directly, across the region, you can see ways of pushing back, constraining and countering what Iran and Tehran—

Q60 **Chair:** On the subject of Tehran’s clients, does the UK have any direct links with Hamas?

Boris Johnson: We obviously talk to a wide range of people across the world. I am sure that, in the course of contacts with—

Q61 **Chair:** Is that a yes or no?

Boris Johnson: I would not want to rule out that the UK—

Q62 **Chair:** Is that a yes?

Boris Johnson: I would not want to rule out or to mislead the Committee on this matter. I would not want to exclude the possibility of our talking to Hamas. But let me just say, on Hamas, that—

Q63 **Chair:** That is not a yes or a no, is it?

Boris Johnson: No, it’s not—you’re right. I don’t want to exclude the possibility that we are—in the end, good diplomacy involves talking to all sorts of people who are not necessarily—

Chris Bryant: That sounds like a yes.

Boris Johnson: I don’t wish to disappoint you, but I’m not going to offer you an answer.

Q64 **Ian Austin:** Are you aware of any contact between the British Government and—

Boris Johnson: If I were, I couldn’t tell you. What I will say—

Q65 **Chris Bryant:** So you’re not aware of whether you’re aware.

Boris Johnson: What I will say is that—I don’t want to mislead the Committee.

Q66 **Chair:** Well, you're doing a very good job of it.

Boris Johnson: On the contrary, I don't think the Committee can possibly have been misled by anything I've said, since I haven't said anything on this matter. But what I can tell you on Hamas which, as you rightly say, is a client of Tehran, is that our view, which we make clear in public without the need for any private communication, is that if Hamas want to be part of the Government of the Palestinian Authority—if they want to enter the democratic process—then it is very clear what they have to do. They have to renounce terror, they have to recognise the state of Israel and they have to stop spewing out anti-Semitic propaganda. But of course we recognise that Hamas is a political force and needs to be engaged.

Q67 **Ian Austin:** I completely agree with you about Hamas and its behaviour, but while we are on the subject of Israel and Palestine, you said on Monday that you support the aspirations set out by the International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace. Can I ask whether you are prepared to commit additional British resources for this, whether you are prepared to speak to the EU, the US and Arab states about boosting international support for it, and whether you agree with me that the best way of marking, or celebrating, the Balfour declaration would be an increase in British support—I know you mentioned three million quid and all that, but that is not a massive amount—for co-existence projects that bring Israelis and Palestinians together? I think that would be the best—

Boris Johnson: Mr Austin, I answered your question in the House on Monday.

Q68 **Ian Austin:** I am asking you to go beyond that, because I don't think three million quid is—

Boris Johnson: I spoke about the £3 million commitment we have made to co-existence funds. If you would like a further and more generous commitment, I would be happy to investigate the possibilities. I do not want to write a cheque now, but I am happy to look at it.¹

Q69 **Ann Clwyd:** To come back to the subject of Iran, do you agree with the Trump Administration that Iran is a state sponsor of terrorism?

¹ Note from Witness: The UK is supportive of such work, which helps build the necessary environment for a just and peaceful two-state solution. We share the aspiration of the international fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace to help build a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

As part of the Department for International Development's new people-to-people programme, which will bring together individuals from both sides of the conflict to build support for a just and peaceful political solution, the UK will provide up to £3 million over three years through Search for Common Ground. This supports young people, religious communities and the health sector to help Israelis and Palestinians work together to make improvements in their lives, build understanding and help to build support for a peaceful, negotiated resolution. We are in consultation with international partners including the US and the EU about how to encourage the parties to reverse negative trends and encourage meaningful bilateral negotiations.



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Boris Johnson: Iran is certainly responsible for a great deal of disruptive behaviour of a kind that needs to be constrained. How useful it is right now to call them global sponsors of terror, I'm not sure, but I certainly think that if you take shipping rockets to Hezbollah that are then fired at Israel, or shipping rockets to the Houthis that are then fired at the Saudis, or backing Hamas, they are obviously up to no good.

Q70 **Ann Clwyd:** We raised both here and in St Petersburg the two dual nationals—at least two—being held by the Iranians, of whom I think you are well aware. In both cases, I believe it has been difficult for you to visit them. Is there any access for consular officials to either of the two?

Boris Johnson: I believe there has been some access in some of the consular cases we have in Iran, but these are very difficult cases. My colleague Minister Burt saw Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's husband yesterday to reassure him of our efforts to try to free Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe. We continue to make representations both on her behalf and on behalf of Mr Foroughi, and indeed others. As the Committee will appreciate, it is very difficult, because the Iranians do not recognise dual citizenship. They think of them just as Iranians, and it is very hard.

If I may say so—to get back to the point that the Chairman rightly made about the Iranian state—one of the disadvantages of escalating these difficult consular cases and having a very loud public campaign in this country is that that simply strengthens the hand of those who are using these cases for their own internal ends in Iran. That is why sometimes the advice I have had over the months has been that no matter how frustrating and miserable it is, and clearly these cases are very sad, the best approach is a diplomatic one.

Q71 **Ann Clwyd:** Would you consider calling for their release on humanitarian grounds?

Boris Johnson: Certainly, in both cases, there are obvious humanitarian grounds for their release. I would not dispute that for a minute.

Q72 **Ann Clwyd:** When I pressed the Iranian delegation in St Petersburg, one of the members of the delegation said to me, "If you come to Tehran, you can visit Mrs Ratcliffe in jail."

Boris Johnson: Who—me or you?

Q73 **Ann Clwyd:** Me. Would you like to?

Boris Johnson: Of course. Obviously, we will have to be very careful about this, because we want them to be released. I have raised this case many times now with Javad Zarif, my Iranian counterpart. When we look at what Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe was doing, she was simply teaching people journalism, as I understand it, at the very limit. I hope that a way forward can be found. I must say, I find it deeply depressing; I think it is totally contrary to the interests of the Iranian people for this to continue.

Q74 **Ann Clwyd:** But can I just ask whether you think we are playing it in the right way? The Americans always seem to get their people out.



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Boris Johnson: They do sometimes, Mrs Clwyd, but then what happens is that the Iranians lift some more and hold them for the same purposes.

Q75 **Chris Bryant:** So what you are saying is that the Iranians are hostage-taking?

Boris Johnson: I am not going to go as far as to say that, but what is certainly the case is that American efforts to do deals have then been followed by further very difficult consular cases in which duals have been detained.

Q76 **Ms Ghani:** I want to follow on from Mrs Clwyd's questioning. One of the frustrations we have, and no doubt Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's family do too, is that there is no full understanding of how long her sentence is. There was some talk that there was an extra 16 years added on top. When the Committee met the delegation from Iran recently, they disputed that and then challenged us not to ask them these questions again. Do you have any idea how long she has been sentenced for, at the very least?

Boris Johnson: It is worse than that. It is not only that we have no idea about how long her sentence really is—the point about the extra 16 years has not been confirmed, so we are not certain of that—but neither Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe nor her family has been informed of what crime she is supposed to have committed. That I find extraordinary and incredible.

Chair: Can we move on? Forgive me.

Q77 **Nadhim Zahawi:** Very briefly, Foreign Secretary: can there really be a joint comprehensive plan of action without the US?

Boris Johnson: It certainly would make it much more difficult. We would continue, but we want our American friends to stay with the project. I have been really heartened; I thought the statement that the President made, when you listen to it, was a very careful and clever piece of work.

Rather like Mr Austin, he bashed Iran and pointed out all the things that are going wrong, but he also kept the core of the JCPOA intact, and that is our objective as well.

Q78 **Nadhim Zahawi:** On that point, paragraph 36 of the JCPOA obliges the US to go through a dispute resolution mechanism. Why did the President raise dispute in his speech but not go through the mechanism, and have they violated the JCPOA?

Boris Johnson: Not having paragraph 36 of the JCPOA to hand, I will just give you this instinctive answer. America has not yet abrogated the JCPOA. We are not yet at the stage at which paragraph 36 needs to be invoked. I am going to Capitol Hill in the next few days to talk to friends around there to see where they are. It is quite interesting that they share the scepticism of this Committee about the way Iran is behaving, but they also see that the JCPOA, for all its flaws, is the best deal we've got and is worth preserving, so I am cautiously optimistic about this. I think there is a real chance of keeping this thing going.



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Q79 **Nadhim Zahawi:** It may be worth, on your visit, reminding the United States that the EU has made it clear that it would not reimpose nuclear sanctions without going through the dispute resolution mechanism within the JCPOA, and the same should apply to the United States.

Boris Johnson: That is an extremely good point. I know that our American friends are sticklers for the—it is an agreement, not a treaty, but they will want to uphold it.

Q80 **Ian Murray:** Apologies, Foreign Secretary, for not being able to be here at the start. You may have answered this question already. I am slightly confused by your answer with regard to trading with Iran. You were saying that British companies should be encouraged to continue to trade, but could UK companies ignore any US sanctions, given the UN resolution?

Boris Johnson: As I said—Mrs Clwyd asked the same question, effectively—it is a very difficult position, because as you know, the US has quite a strong doctrine of extraterritoriality when it comes to this kind of thing. British companies will be typically quite nervous of running the risk of being prosecuted under US law. One of the difficulties we have is that we might, for instance, want to indemnify those companies against that risk by offering export guarantees or something of that nature, but the danger then becomes a danger to the taxpayer, which could be very considerable. By far the best answer is not to go down that route; it is to avoid those new American sanctions. What the Americans have told me—what Rex Tillerson has told me—is that certainly from the point of view of the US Government, they want that economic activity to continue. What we have to contrive now is a way of putting pressure on the disruptive elements of the Iranian system, and the IRGC in particular, but without doing so in such a way as to vitiate the whole JCPOA. That is the balance we want to strike.

Q81 **Ian Murray:** So as the Foreign Secretary, what would your advice be to UK companies, if the UN permits trade and the US says no?

Boris Johnson: I am afraid my advice would be to help us to avoid that scenario developing. You are right to identify a potential problem, which is caused by the strong extraterritorial doctrines of US justice. I do not want UK companies or the UK taxpayer exposed to that risk.

Q82 **Ian Murray:** So you would encourage them not to trade, on that basis.

Boris Johnson: I didn't say that, but I do not want them to be exposed to that risk.

Q83 **Ian Austin:** On the JCPOA, do you think the duration of the sunset clauses is too short? Do you agree with all of them?

Boris Johnson: The shortest of the sunset clauses—I think the centrifuges—is 10 years so far as I can remember, and there are then various deadlines for the enrichment. I think it is 10 years, and two years of that have already elapsed, so we are only eight years away from the expiry of the main—. Once you start being able to do what you want with



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the centrifuges, you are much closer, as I understand it, to making a nuclear weapon.

Q84 Ian Austin: What do you think will happen at the point they expire? What is to prevent Iran from starting enrichment again?

Boris Johnson: You are making an extremely good point. The JCPOA is time-limited. We are going to have to grasp that nettle and find a way of protracting and extending it.

Q85 Ian Austin: But that is the big fear, isn't it? Look, they expire, they can start enrichment again, and in the meantime they have developed a ballistic missile programme. It is a bit of a worry, isn't it?

Boris Johnson: Yes, it is, but if I may say so, it is even more of a worry if we kick it all out and get rid of it now, because then they will simply start enriching now at Natanz and Fordow and wherever else, and they will be only a year from breakout, or whatever the time is. It is much better to—

Q86 Ian Austin: To kick the can down the road.

Boris Johnson: Yes, because we cannot foresee the composition of Iranian politics that far down the road. We want to encourage a different approach in Tehran and a different atmosphere and mood towards the west.

Q87 Chair: Is there any group or any body—political, military or whatever—that opposes the development of nuclear weapons in Iran?

Boris Johnson: I think the last polls I saw showed almost overwhelming public support in Tehran for nuclear weapons.

Q88 Chair: So regime change may not make a big difference?

Boris Johnson: If I may say so, the Chair once again makes an extremely important point, which is that, in a way, it is an extraordinary thing that we have the JCPOA at all. It really is a most amazing triumph of diplomacy that the Iranians had the imagination to postpone or freeze their nuclear programme in exchange for greater economic progress. It is a considerable achievement and we must preserve it. Your question about sunset clauses is one that we are going to have deal with, and we will have to deal with it sooner rather than later.

Chair: Forgive me; we are going to run short. Mr Smith?

Q89 Royston Smith: Foreign Secretary, can I move on a bit, even if not that far geographically? The recent events in Kurdistan, particularly over the weekend, were alarming. The referendum held in September was popular with Kurds, but we might perhaps concede it was premature and could even have been considered provocative. I know that you were in contact with Iraqis and Kurds over the weekend to try to urge restraint and de-escalation. In the House on 17 October, you referred to Kurdistan. Do you agree that Kurds should have a state of their own?

Boris Johnson: Your question is absolutely right, in the sense that we were disappointed with the fact that the referendum went ahead in the KRG. We tried to stop it and we lobbied against it.

Q90 **Chair:** When did you first hear about the referendum?

Boris Johnson: I am afraid I cannot give you the exact date.

Q91 **Chair:** When did you first engage with the Kurdish authorities to try to stop it?

Boris Johnson: I am so sorry, Mr Tugendhat, but I cannot tell you exactly when we first started. I remember Mr Fallon going there and I remember making repeated phone calls to Mr Masoud Barzani. I know that Mr Zahawi himself interceded at several points.

Q92 **Chair:** Before or after the summer recess?

Boris Johnson: I am afraid I couldn't tell you.

Karen Pierce: It was definitely over the summer.

Boris Johnson: I can't tell you exactly when we first started to weigh in on the Kurdish referendum, but we were certainly very active in trying to prevent it from going ahead. If I could just finish my answer to Mr Smith, it has gone ahead. If you ask whether I envisage an independent Kurdistan, I think the answer is no. I am a great admirer of the Kurdish people and their ambitions and what they are achieving. When you go to Irbil, it is fantastic. It is unlike, or could be, very different from many ~~other places in that~~ vicinity. It could be democratic, liberal and pluralist. It

² Note from Witness: The Committee was also interested in the Kurdish Referendum: in particular, what Ministerial representations had been made and when my Ministerial colleagues and I made representations to Kurdish leaders on numerous occasions after the Kurdistan Regional Government first announced in April its intention to hold a referendum on independence in 2017. The then Minister for the Middle East Tobias Ellwood underlined the UK's respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Iraq with Kurdish leaders when he visited Iraq on 11-12 April. During the period of the British pre-election purdah, officials continued to advocate a unified Iraq with Kurdish leaders, with a strong Kurdistan Region as an integral part. On 7 June, the Kurdistan Regional Government announced that the referendum would take place on 25 September. After purdah ended, FCO officials informed me of the Kurds' intentions and on 12 June I released a public statement outlining the UK position. In the run up to the referendum, I made representations to Iraqi Foreign Minister al-Jaafari, which were followed by the Minister for the Middle East, Alistair Burt, during his visit. During his visit to Iraq on 16-17 July, Alistair Burt, made representations to Kurdish President Barzani and Iraqi Prime Minister Abadi. On a second visit on 3-4 September, he made representations to Kurdish Foreign Minister al-Jafaari and Iraqi Prime Minister Abadi. I also made further representations to Kurdish President Barzani in September.



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is an astonishing thing. I pay tribute to Ann Clwyd for everything she has done for the Kurds over the years. It is a nation already but it is an astonishing polity in the making.

What exactly is the relationship between that Kurdish polity and the federal Iraqi structure? That is the question. It is our view that, for all sorts of reasons, it is much better to keep Iraq together. That is what we are telling our Kurdish friends and Baghdad. The important thing is for Mr Abadi and Mr Nechirvan Barzani now to negotiate.²

- Q93 **Mike Gapes:** Isn't it true that President Barzani made it absolutely clear in June that they were going to have a referendum in September? I would be very interested to know what representations we made in June or July about this issue. Because I understood—I may be wrong—that we did not really take it seriously until September, when the referendum was being held around 23 or 24 September.

Boris Johnson: I am sure, Mr Gapes, you are familiar with Frank Baker.

- Q94 **Mike Gapes:** I am not talking about the ambassador in Iraq. I am talking about at ministerial level, when were we really taking this issue seriously?

Boris Johnson: I can tell you that we took it very seriously and in real time, in the sense that we took it seriously when it was well possible for the Kurds, for Masoud Barzani, to disengage.

- Q95 **Chair:** But before the summer recess?

Boris Johnson: I am virtually certain but I'm afraid at this stage I can't tell you the exact date.

Chair: If you would like to write to us, that would be fine.

- Q96 **Royston Smith:** I want to press on this point. The Peshmerga were very helpful in pushing out Daesh when the Iraqis were forced out of Kirkuk and elsewhere. We were helping to arm the Peshmerga. We are allies with the Iraqis, the Peshmerga and the Kurds. Do you see a difficulty in trying to negotiate a course between those two factions? They are more than factions because there are factions within the Kurds anyway. Those two—the Iraqis and the Kurds—especially on those borders and those arguments that have been well rehearsed, do you see a complication there? How do expect to navigate that?

Boris Johnson: I understand exactly what you mean. We have an old friendship with the Kurds. I pay tribute to what they did in fighting Daesh; I saw it myself. We owe a great debt to the Peshmerga for their bravery and sacrifice. What they are doing is on behalf of all of us. That is why instinctively we are so supportive of the Kurds and their aspirations—the KRG, I should say.

What we worry about is what happens if an independent Kurdistan leads to the break-up of Iraq. We fear we would then have effectively a Sunni chunk running from Iraq into Syria over an indistinguishable border; you



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would have a great deal of Iranian influence; and it would be very bad news. It would be something that was not in the interests of long-term stability in the region.

It would be much, much better to—the interesting thing about Nechirvan Barzani, whom I know well, is that he is a gradualist in his approach. He has a vision for his country but he does not want to do it overnight. He can see a way of doing this over time, of not busting loose from the Iraqi structure. I think that is what we should encourage because the downsides are very considerable. He has in Baghdad at the moment, in Mr Abadi, the best possible partner that he could. I have a great deal of admiration for Mr Abadi. I think that they can work together to sort this out and that is what the UK will be encouraging.

- Q97 **Ian Austin:** I understand how much Britain has invested in a strong and unified Iraq, and I understand why you want to support Abadi, for fear of something worse, but if the choice is—as it appears to be—between a strong and unified Iraq acting as an Iranian puppet, which is what appears to be happening, and a more independent, more autonomous, pro-Western Kurdistan acting as a counterweight to the Iranians' influence in the region, wouldn't the morally and strategically sensible policy be to support the latter?

Boris Johnson: There are some who take your view, Mr Austin. Clearly the advisers to Masoud Barzani took that view. They thought they could do it that way. I must be absolutely clear: I am very much attracted to what is going on in Kurdistan and to the possibilities of that country. Given some of the difficult nature of the wider region, Kurdistan could be a beacon, an oasis and an extraordinary place. At the moment, we think that the risk of it establishing its own independence now, forthwith, would be very considerable in terms of Iranian impingement and the general destabilisation of Iraq.

- Q98 **Chair:** So you echo the thoughts of the Colonial Secretary of 1920.

Boris Johnson: I think it was the Colonial Secretary of 1920 who put together the three vilayets of Mosul, Baghdad and Basra—we all know the historical result. Alas, I think that any undoing of that now could have serious destabilising consequences. If I may say so, when our Kurdish friends say that they are under threat or that the Iraqi army is attacking them, we are with them in trying to restrain Baghdad, to appeal for common sense and calm. Actually, I am cautiously optimistic about the way things are going. Irbil is rattled by some of the way in which Baghdad is behaving, but things could be a lot worse.

- Q99 **Nadhim Zahawi:** Vilayet-i Musul—with Baghdad and Basra—was the original Ottoman. Is not the important thing, which you have sort of touched on, that Prime Minister Barzani—because President Masoud Barzani stood down today—should be encouraged to maintain the unity of Kurdistan and then to start serious negotiations with Prime Minister Abadi, including on security at the borders, of course, and all the other things, to settle the big questions or challenges that led the Kurdish



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nation to the frustrations that precipitated the 25 September referendum, that is, power sharing, revenue sharing, and article 140 on Kirkuk and disputed territories? The State Department is encouraging, saying that the disputed territories remain disputed. Could we play a bigger role with Washington and the UN to facilitate that political settlement, which will deliver a stable and prosperous Iraq? Some of the regional forces may want to see it destabilised again and divide the will of Kurd against Kurd, or Kurd against Turkman or Sunnis, Arabs and Shi'ite.

Boris Johnson: I totally agree that we could. When we talk to our friends in the region they say, "Please convene a summit, get everybody around the table, knock heads together." Let's see how we go. What we are saying at the moment is that we want them to do the talking. In the end, they have to sort it out. It is for Irbil and Baghdad to do a deal. They have not done a deal for ages. Now is the time.

Q100 **Mike Gapes:** The situation in Syria is far worse than the situation in Iraq. Since you last came before the Committee, which was before the election, the Assad regime has regained control of Aleppo, regained control of Palmyra, recaptured the last rebel-held district in Homs, broken the siege of Deir ez-Zor and seems to be pretty much emboldened and strengthened. You said earlier that you could see a way in which Iran and Russia could be prised apart. Iran, Russia and Turkey are regularly meeting in Astana. They seem to have a clear joint approach to what is going on in Syria. Is the reality not, sadly, that the position that the British Government and American Government have been pressing is not credible and has no influence? Is Assad winning? Is Russia winning? Is it in our interests, and more importantly in the interests of the people of the region and of Syria, that this brutal dictator remains in power?

Boris Johnson: The answer to your first question, in broad terms, is yes. The answer to your second question is no. Just to unpack that a bit, what is unquestionably the case—last time I appeared before this Committee, I think Aleppo still had not fallen, but most of operational Syria is now in the hands of Assad and the regime. That is absolutely correct, but he is yet to win. It is very important to understand this—he is yet to win. There are chunks of Syria that are not under Assad's control. I spoke of the deconfliction zone that the Russians and Americans have set up in Daraa in the south. The Americans are being much tougher than previously. There are chips on the board for a political negotiation. There are bits of Syria that Assad has not won and now will not win, and that means there is the incentive for a political conversation.

Your second question was: is it in our interests that a brutal tyrant should remain on the throne in Syria? I do not think it is. As the Committee knows, he is responsible for the overwhelming majority of the deaths—90% of the 400,000 who have been killed were probably killed by the Assad regime. It is very hard to see how he can survive in the long term. He cannot win militarily, ultimately. It will be just too difficult. I think a political process is now imaginable. Under that process, I can see elections in which the 11 million or 12 million Syrians who have been dispersed

from Syria are able to vote under UN auspices, and I cannot believe they would vote for Assad.

Q101 **Mike Gapes:** But this political process will not be driven by the Geneva process; it will be coming out of Putin and the Astana process.

Boris Johnson: We don't think that's necessarily true. The Russians and the Iranians may have won in Syria in the short term, in the sense that they certainly militarily have the upper hand, though at great cost to their reputations, but they now own the problem, and they cannot achieve any meaningful plan to rebuild Syria as long as they refuse to engage in a political process. The Iranians may have the troops on the ground, and the Russians may have got the air war sorted out, but they do not have the chequebook to rebuild that country. That chequebook belongs to the EU and to the US. They understand that full well, so I think the pressure will be on them, ultimately, if they want to rebuild the country, to engage in a political process.

Q102 **Mike Gapes:** Can I take you to another part of Syria? We have seen the liberation of Raqqa. The key military force on the ground there within the Syrian democratic forces has been the YPG of the Syrian-Kurdish PYD. That is an organisation that has been armed quite extensively by the United States. Can you clarify what support, advice or armaments we, as the UK, have contributed to the PYD, YPG and the liberation of Raqqa?

Boris Johnson: As you rightly say, the funding and support of the YPG is mainly a United States venture.

Q103 **Mike Gapes:** Mainly, but have we made any contribution?

Boris Johnson: I would have to take advice, insofar, as you know, that we scaled back our commitments in this area recently. I would not want to mislead you.

Q104 **Mike Gapes:** Will you write to us?

Boris Johnson: Whatever funding or support we give the YPG is very small. I would be happy to clarify.³

Q105 **Mike Gapes:** You know that the Turkish Government have a position that we do not hold.

³ Note from Witness: I can confirm that the UK does not provide any direct assistance to the YPG (People's Protection Units) or PYD (Democratic Union Party). As part of the Global Coalition, the UK has provided military support to the SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces) in the campaign to liberate Raqqa, as well as humanitarian aid to the local population. Our aim has been to ensure that liberation happens in a way that protects civilians; minimises the humanitarian impact and limits longer-term conflict in Eastern Syria. We have been at the forefront of efforts to alleviate the humanitarian situation since military operations began, supporting the displaced with food, healthcare, shelter, water and sanitation and hygiene assistance where possible. And we provided an additional £10m to help restore crippled health facilities, deliver much needed medical support and relief, and to clear lethal landmines and explosives.

Boris Johnson: I do know that.

Q106 **Mike Gapes:** Which is that the YPG is linked to the PKK and is, therefore, a terrorist organisation. What is our position with regard to that relationship? Do we continue to press the Turkish Government to stop their military attacks on Syrian Kurds?

Boris Johnson: Well, we don't share the perspective of the Turkish Government on this matter, though we are certainly aware of Turkish sensitivities.

Q107 **Chris Bryant:** On Russia and China, I have some fairly quick questions, I'm afraid, because we are running out of time. On Russia, is it your belief that the Russians have played any role in British elections and referendums?

Boris Johnson: I have not seen any evidence of that.

Q108 **Chris Bryant:** You seem uncertain whether you have seen it or not. Is this another of your "confirm or can't confirm" kind of replies?

Boris Johnson: No. I can confirm to you, Mr Bryant, that I don't think—

Q109 **Chris Bryant:** Mr McDonald has written no.

Boris Johnson: The Permanent Under Secretary says, "No."

Q110 **Chris Bryant:** So, you don't think the Russians—

Boris Johnson: No, I haven't seen it. I haven't seen—not a sausage. Nyet.

Q111 **Chris Bryant:** So, you don't think the Russians played any role or sought to play any role in the elections.

Boris Johnson: I don't know about "sought to play" but as far as I know they have played no role.

Q112 **Chris Bryant:** Are Foreign Office officials helping Robert Mueller's investigation and, if they receive any requests, will they do so?

Boris Johnson: We have not had any requests but will obviously be as obliging as we ought to be.

Q113 **Chris Bryant:** Quite a few of the people involved are British.

Karen Pierce: That does not necessarily mean the British Government is involved.

Boris Johnson: I do not think we have had any requests thus far.

Q114 **Chris Bryant:** You wanted to press the reset button with Russia. That was what you were arguing two years ago, in 2015. You are going to Russia very soon. What are you hoping to get out of it?

Boris Johnson: Our Russian policy, as you know, is evolving from "engage but beware" to "beware but engage". We have things we want to do and interests we have in common with Russia but there are many

obstacles to our relationship. Those include their behaviour in Crimea, their behaviour in cyber—excepting my reservations about their involvement in UK elections—the murder of Alexander Litvinenko and other things, such as their behaviour in the western Balkans and so on.

Q115 **Chris Bryant:** On China, all foreign journalists were excluded from the recent congress. Did you not feel it important to say something about that?

Boris Johnson: The Chinese treatment of their media includes particular restrictions on the internet and various other things. That is a long-standing Chinese practice.

Q116 **Chris Bryant:** But *The Telegraph* were allowed to it. It is nothing to do with *The Telegraph* being allowed to stay in?

Boris Johnson: I am unaware of that fact but I am grateful to you for raising it.

Q117 **Chris Bryant:** Is this the Osborne doctrine, then? That we will not say anything to offend China because all we are really after is better trade deals.

Boris Johnson: No. We were very clear with our Chinese friends. The golden era is still very much alive, but we are very clear about things on which we disagree, such as the treatment of Ben Rogers. We have an annual human rights dialogue every year—in June, I think—and we raise the treatment of Liu Xiaobo, his wife, and so on. We do not shy away from those difficult discussions—of course we don't.

Q118 **Chris Bryant:** How worried are you about Hong Kong?

Boris Johnson: I think it is very important that the Chinese Government uphold the principle of “one country, two systems” and the joint declaration continues to have force and be in effect.

Q119 **Chris Bryant:** Do you think they are?

Boris Johnson: I think it is very important that they should.

Q120 **Chris Bryant:** So you don't think they are?

Boris Johnson: In so far as I am not certain that refusing Ben Rogers access to Hong Kong was in conformity with the principle of “one country, two systems”. We have raised that with the Chinese at virtually every level. I think Mark Field summoned the Chinese ambassador to make that point.

Q121 **Chair:** At what point would you say that the UK's desire to engage more closely with China conflicts with our policy towards the United States, our proximity with the United States and our engagement with the network in the region?

Boris Johnson: We see no conflict at the moment. Indeed, one of the most encouraging things about the state of the world today is that the relations between Washington and Beijing seem to be very good.



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Conversations between President Trump and President Xi take place regularly. Look at something like the North Korean crisis; we should pay tribute to Beijing for what they are doing. They have done much more than I thought they would to put pressure on Pyongyang. That is as a result of very vigorous American diplomacy, and I pay tribute to Rex Tillerson for what he is doing. When you say, "Does our relationship with China lead to a conflict with the US?", I would say "Look at the closeness with—"

Q122 **Chair:** What about the region? The Prime Minister was in Japan recently, and she made some statements about common defence which were welcomed by many. She was then greeted by Chinese hostility.

Boris Johnson: We have an all-of-Asia policy. We recognise that we have great friends across the region who we have very important relationships with. We treat them in different ways, but we do not—it is rather like the judgment of Paris, if I may say so, between Hera, Aphrodite and Artemis.

Q123 **Chair:** And you are Paris?

Boris Johnson: The United Kingdom.

Chair: But are you Paris in this analogy?

Boris Johnson: No.

Q124 **Chair:** Do you have a golden apple? I am sorry, I am not quite following you.

Boris Johnson: The apple of discord. We want to be friendly with all three; that is the point I am trying to make.

Chair: That wasn't how it ended up, if you remember.

Q125 **Mike Gapes:** Just getting back to Hong Kong, the Government publishes an assessment every six months of—

Boris Johnson: It didn't end up that way because he made a judgment.

Chair: The Trojan war lasted a while.

Boris Johnson: That was a mistake.

Q126 **Mike Gapes:** We have very little time. Getting back to Hong Kong, the Government publishes a report every six months on the relationships. There is a slight toughening of the wording between the one published in December 2016 and the one in June, where you say that "we recognise that there are some areas which are coming under increasing pressure." Is it correct to say that you are now seriously concerned about the way in which the Chinese side are interpreting the agreement? Specifically, what conversations have you had with them about their statement that the 1997 joint declaration is "now history and of no practical significance"? Does that mean that "one country, two systems" is, in practice, according to the Chinese view, no longer in existence?



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Boris Johnson: We certainly reject the idea that the joint declaration of 1984 is in any way no longer operative.

Q127 **Chair:** But if it stops working, do we have a duty to intervene in any way?

Boris Johnson: As you would expect, we use all the instruments of diplomacy to make our point. We believe that it is profoundly in the interests of the people of Hong Kong and China for that to be maintained. China is a fantastic growing, dynamic economy, and of course their perspectives are going to change as they grow in strength and confidence. Of course there will be a temptation to start to think of Hong Kong in rather different terms, but the sensible way forward is to maintain the one country, two systems approach and recognise the continuing validity of the joint declaration. That is the point that we make repeatedly.

Q128 **Chair:** May we move on briefly? You mentioned the Commonwealth, and clearly one of the most important Commonwealth countries is India. Could you speak a little about what the Indians have asked for in recent diplomatic engagements, and what you have done to improve that relationship?

Boris Johnson: The No.1 thing that the Indians really want is on mode 4, so that would be visas.

Q129 **Chair:** Currently, there are more Indian students in New Zealand than in the UK.

Boris Johnson: You make a very serious criticism, and it is something on which I campaigned a great deal. Actually, the numbers are now going up again, and I think the vast majority of visa applications from India to the UK are now successful and administered rapidly. You asked what the No.1 thing is that they want, and that is it.

Q130 **Ian Austin:** On India, what assessment have you made of the calls for a full public inquiry into UK involvement in the events of 1984? Have you seen the recent report?

Boris Johnson: Is this Blue Star?

Ian Austin: Yes. A report published this week by the Sikh Federation was critical of the review conducted by Sir Jeremy Heywood and commissioned by David Cameron. Have you looked at that and made any assessment of calls for a public inquiry?

Boris Johnson: We have indeed. I am aware that a document was found in the National Archives relating to Operation Blue Star. The overall conclusion that the Cabinet Secretary made in 2014 was that the UK involvement was purely advisory, and ended several months before Operation Blue Star and had a very limited impact on events. Nothing we have found so far has contradicted that essential finding.

I have just been lobbied about it outside, and some members of the Sikh community gave me a pamphlet about it. I understand the strength of



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feeling about Operation Blue Star, but—hand on heart—we have not found evidence to—

Q131 **Ian Austin:** Would you be prepared to meet the Sikh Federation to discuss this? They published a report this week, and I think it would be worth you looking at that.

Boris Johnson: I am grateful to you, and as I said, I have just been served with a copy of that—I will look at it in detail.

Q132 **Ms Ghani:** Just a quick question. We are talking about the Commonwealth. Foreign Secretary, I wonder if you could tell me where you stand on the issue of Kashmir.

Boris Johnson: We believe that it is an area of extraordinary economic potential if Pakistan and India could settle their differences.

Q133 **Ms Ghani:** Have you met the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Mehbooba Mufti, at all?

Boris Johnson: I have not, I believe, had the honour of meeting her.

Q134 **Ms Ghani:** Have you discussed the recent atrocities that took place in Kashmir, where there was a curfew and where pellet guns were used, even though the UN stated that they should not be used on the people of Kashmir? Have you had any conversations either with the Indian authorities or the Pakistan authorities?

Boris Johnson: I have had conversations with both of them, indeed on that matter, but it is our view that this is something that those countries must resolve. Alas, proud as I am of British history, we must accept the fact that sometimes our historical role does not make us the ideal mediator.

Q135 **Chair:** Continuing with the Commonwealth, may I ask about the recent murder of a journalist in Malta, which has raised concerns among many? Has the British Government been involved in any way in assisting the Government authorities in Malta in solving that appalling crime?

Boris Johnson: I don't believe we have yet been asked to help, but clearly it was an appalling attack on press freedom. Mr Zahawi asked right at the beginning about our priorities, and perhaps one of the things I should have said was to reverse the restrictions on press freedom that we are seeing around the world.

Q136 **Chair:** Except in China.

Boris Johnson: We have raised it.

Q137 **Chair:** You did raise it in China?

Boris Johnson: We do raise the freedom of Mr Liu Xiaobo and others. I think about 830 journalists were murdered last year. There is more and more Government impunity—more and more countries, I'm afraid, feel like they can get away with this. That is something that we in this country care very deeply about and want to uphold.



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Q138 **Chair:** On that point, why have you not decided to designate Turkey as a human rights priority country?

Boris Johnson: It is a very good question. The answer is that, of course, we deprecate some of the behaviour of the Turkish Government—I should say the Turkish authorities—towards journalists, members of the judiciary and human rights activists. You all know the case of the Amnesty 12 and Taner Kılıç in particular. I was pleased that 10 were released and I congratulate the Turks on doing that. I am very disappointed that Taner Kılıç remains in jail.

What can we do further? Should we make Turkey a human rights priority country? The risk is that we simply push Turkey further away and encourage it further down what we would say would be the wrong path. There are many millions of Turks who look to the UK for partnership and friendship, who share our ideals and who have a Euro-Atlantic vocation for their country. To push Turkey away or to demonise Turkey is the wrong way to go. It is a geostrategically crucial country for all of us. That is my hesitation. I believe we have more of a chance of being influential with our Turkish friends if we engage with them rather than pushing them in the other direction.

Q139 **Ian Murray:** On the question of Turkey and your own strategy in relation to it, we had Turkish MPs here and you have read a report that the previous Committee put together about relations with Turkey. From a Foreign Office perspective, what takes priority with Turkey—human rights violations or trade?

Boris Johnson: Thank you for putting it in that way. We raise human rights violations repeatedly, but we are also very keen to have an ever bigger trading relationship for the sake of both our populations. By having greater economic interpenetration and growth in Turkey, Turkey will have a better chance of dealing with some of the problems that it faces. The better the Turkish economy is performing, the more chance the Turks will have of beating radicalisation among young people in Turkey and many of the other problems it faces. I see no inconsistency between those approaches.

Q140 **Chair:** Do you think the Turkish Government are part of the Muslim Brotherhood?

Boris Johnson: There are many aspects of the Muslim Brotherhood. I have heard Turkish friends and colleagues addressing each other, and Government Ministers addressing other Ministers from around the world, as brother.

Chair: Not quite the point.

Boris Johnson: I do not hold that against them.

Q141 **Mike Gapes:** Can I take you back to the responsibility of your Department to publish responses to Select Committee reports within two months? On 12 March the previous Foreign Affairs Committee published a report on the implications of no deal on Brexit and we have yet to receive



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a response to that report. Other reports published around that time in March on Russia and Turkey did receive responses, which we received in September. Why is there a hold up?

Boris Johnson: I think you are asking the wrong Department. I think it is DExEU that is drafting the response to your excellent report.

Q142 **Mike Gapes:** Have you seen any proposal draft from them yet?

Karen Pierce: I haven't.

Boris Johnson: Not that I am aware of.

Ian Murray: Is no response better than a bad response?

Q143 **Mike Gapes:** Have you asked them why, given that the Select Committee's job is to monitor your Department, they are delaying so long?

Boris Johnson: Now that you have raised it with me, Mr Gapes, I will make sure we take it up with DExEU.

Mike Gapes: It is eight months.

Boris Johnson: Thank you, I will make sure that we take it up.

Chair: Ms Ghani has promised that this will be a very short final question.

Q144 **Ms Ghani:** We started off with a lot of fizz and I thought we could end on it. I need to state that I have a dozen vineyards in my constituency. I tried to pass a Bill in the last Parliament to get all of our overseas embassies to serve English sparkling wine, especially those that come from my constituency of Wealden. It was supported by Mr Bryant. I want to know what we are doing to support our wine and sparkling wine industry through our embassies overseas and, Foreign Secretary, if you are supporting this wholeheartedly?

Boris Johnson: I am a keen drinker—

Chair: Would this affect the prosecco trade?

Ms Ghani: Ignore the Chairman. Stay focused on English sparkling wines.

Boris Johnson: Now, Mr Chairman we must be careful with cross-cultural jokes—*[Interruption.]* I think telling jokes is a very effective way of getting your diplomatic message across. I just say that in parentheses. Sometimes people greatly appreciate that you are talking to them in that informal way, while subtly getting your point across. It can be a little bit condescending to think that they do not get the point.

Chris Bryant: Getting back to wine.

Q145 **Ms Ghani:** Are all of our embassies carrying English sparkling wine?

Boris Johnson: On wine and sparkling wine, I think the answer is that we serve—

Ms Ghani: English.

Boris Johnson: Yes, we serve English sparkling wine. I do not know the vineyard to which you refer, but I am sure it is fantastic.

Q146 **Ms Ghani:** Could you possibly write to the Committee to let us know?

Sir Simon McDonald: Can I add one point? Every year we have a leadership conference, before which is a reception, and the Wine and Spirits Trade Association does a bang-up job getting English producers into this reception and many orders are placed with English producers as a consequence of this outreach, so we do a lot. The only thing I would draw attention to is the price. English sparkling wines are not necessarily the most competitively priced.⁴

Boris Johnson: Very true.

Chair: Foreign Secretary, Permanent Under Secretary, Political Director, thank you very much for coming.

⁴ Members of the Committee asked how the FCO supported the English wine industry.

Government Hospitality (GH), part of the FCO's Protocol Directorate, is responsible for the management of the Government Wine Cellar. They have bought English and Welsh sparkling wines for a number of years and they are used regularly at FCO and other Government Department events. In 2016/17 GH used 333 bottles of English sparkling wine. GH will continue to purchase more sparkling wines from the UK.

The Committee will be pleased to know that our overseas posts do use some English sparkling wines and Heads of Mission have discretion to purchase them from within their devolved budgets, but it is unfortunately the case that the costs involved in transporting the wines can prove prohibitive.

I hope that these answers provide some clarification. I know that officials are already working on dates for my next appearance in spring 2018 and I look forward to that opportunity to update the Committee on the FCO's work