

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence from the Foreign Secretary, HC 538

Wednesday 21 March 2018

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Members present: Tom Tugendhat (Chair); Ian Austin; Chris Bryant; Ann Clwyd; Mike Gapes; Stephen Gethins; Ian Murray; Priti Patel; Andrew Rosindell; Mr Bob Seely; Royston Smith.

Questions 147-330

Witnesses

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

Examination of witnesses

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

Chair: Welcome to this afternoon's session of the Foreign Affairs Committee. Foreign Secretary, Permanent Under-Secretary and Political Director, thank you very much for coming. We can start directly. I am going to ask Royston to kick off.

Q147 **Royston Smith:** Foreign Secretary, this is probably an obvious line of questioning, and entirely appropriate in my opinion— I am sure you will agree. Is it your assessment that President Putin was directly involved in, or gave the order for, the recent Salisbury attack?

Boris Johnson: Mr Smith, as you say, it is exactly right that we should begin with that subject. I am grateful to the Committee for having me along today. What the Prime Minister said a week ago was very clear. We gave the Russians two alternatives: either they could explain how stocks of Novichok had mysteriously escaped their possession and come to be used in Salisbury, or else we would be forced to draw the conclusion that the attempted murders that took place there, the reckless endangering of public life in this country and the first use of a nerve agent on European soil for 75 years was the direct responsibility of the Russian state. To go to your point, Mr Smith, as we saw in the case of the murder of Alexander Litvinenko, the trail of responsibility for such assassinations and assassination attempts does lead inexorably back to the Kremlin.

Q148 **Royston Smith:** On "Newsnight" recently, Mikhail Khodorkovsky—excuse my pronunciation—said that the attack could have been carried out by people empowered by President Putin but no longer under his control. Do you find that a plausible explanation?

Boris Johnson: I really think I would go back to what I just said. It is our view that when it comes to the use of a Novichok-type nerve agent in Salisbury to attempt to assassinate somebody who had been identified by the Russian state as a target for liquidation, not long after President Putin himself had said that such people would choke on their own 30 pieces of silver or deserve to be poisoned, no matter how exactly it came to be done, the pathway—the chain of responsibility—seems to me to go back to the Russian state and those at the top.

Q149 **Mike Gapes:** Foreign Secretary, why do you think that Putin, Russia, felt able to undertake such a brazen, despicable, illegal attack on British soil?

Boris Johnson: Well, I think that there are several reasons why the attack was made—the unlawful use of force, as the Prime Minister has correctly defined it. First, it was a sign that President Putin or the Russian state wanted to give to potential defectors in their own agencies, "This is what happens to you if you decide that you support a country with a different set of values," such as our own. "You can expect to be assassinated." The reason that they picked the United Kingdom is very



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simple. It is because this is a country that does have that particular set of values. It does believe in freedom, in democracy and in the rule of law, and time and again it has called out Russia over its abuses of those values. We have seen it in the western Balkans; we have seen it in the Baltics; we have seen what has been happening with the connivance of the Russians in Syria. And whether it is in the EU or the UN, or whatever, it is Britain that has been most forthright and most obstinate in sticking up for our values. I think that is probably the reason why it was decided to make the gesture here in this country.

Q150 Mike Gapes: Why do you think they used this particular nerve agent, rather than something more easily concealed and contained?

Boris Johnson: Obviously we can only speculate about that, Mr Gapes, but actually I thought it was the Father of the House, Ken Clarke, who put his finger on it the other day when he said that this was really to put a Russian signature on the deed, and by using a specific type of nerve agent that was known to have been developed in the Soviet Union, in Russia, it was a sign that nobody—no former Russian agent—was immune and no one could escape the long arm of Russian revenge. I think as the story has unfolded it has really become clearer and clearer how reckless the assassins were in their contempt for human life. It is not only that we still have a police officer in hospital and two people seriously injured; but many members of the public were put at serious risk of their health.

Q151 Mike Gapes: Why didn't they fear what our response, our reaction, would be? Is it related to 10 years ago, 12 years ago, when they murdered Alexander Litvinenko with polonium? Is it to do with how we are seen internationally? You have referred to how the Russian state sees the UK. Did they feel that we were at a particular point where we might be less supported internationally than we might have been in the past?

Boris Johnson: If that was their assumption I think they have been greatly disappointed, because I think there is a big difference in the global reaction to this event and the assassination of Alexander Livinenko. If you remember what happened 12 years ago, the world was in fact rather muted in the way that it responded, and what we have seen over the last couple of weeks has been, I think, a mounting disgust globally at what has been done; and I have certainly been surprised by the strength of the solidarity that there is with the UK and the determination, whether it is at NATO or the EU, or the Quad statement, or in the UN Security Council—the determination by other countries to show their support for us in this country.

Q152 Mike Gapes: Do you have any thoughts about why they chose this particular timing to do this?

Boris Johnson: I think the most common suggestion that I have read and heard is that there may have been some—for instance, I have seen it speculated that there may be some reaction in Moscow, in the Kremlin, to the very considerable loss of Russian life in the Wagner mercenaries. You will remember what happened in Syria. I have certainly read speculation about that; but I think the timing is probably more closely connected with



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the recent election in Russia. As many non-democratic figures do, when facing an election or some critical political moment, it is often attractive to conjure up in the public imagination the notion of an enemy. That is what I think it was an attempt to excite amongst the Russian electorate.

Chair: Before we go on, Foreign Secretary, may I reiterate the support that I have had from parliamentarians across Europe who have contacted me as Chair of this Committee on any number of occasions and at any number of levels to repeat exactly your words?

Q153 **Mr Seely:** Perhaps I can ask Mike's question with a different twist. You are giving your understanding of why the Russians may have behaved liked this, but there is another alternative: that they saw the response after Litvinenko and the possible other murders carried out on British soil since, and they see a nation that does not really spend very much on defence—as many European Union states do not—and that does not understand the nature of Russian full-spectrum war. You are saying that they are attacking us because they see us as being strong, but you could argue that they are actually attacking us because they see us as being weak and because we are desperate to look the other way, rather than see the nature of Russia's full-spectrum war—whether in Ukraine, Crimea, the Baltic republics, Cyprus, Bosnia, Syria, London or the US elections.

Boris Johnson: Regardless of what happened 12 years ago after the Litvinenko assassination, I think most people on both sides of the Commons and all the Back Benchers I listened to last Wednesday overwhelmingly approved of the response that the UK is issuing this time. It has been a mixture of a very firm diplomatic response—as you know, the biggest expulsion of undeclared Russian agents since the 1980s—coupled with a series of measures designed to push back on Russia in all sorts of ways. I don't believe that that would have been factored in or priced in when the decision was made to make this assassination attempt. You will know what they are: countering Russian disinformation with our colleagues, looking at what we can do to tackle cyber-war and build up our own cyber-capabilities, and above all making sure that we have a series of ways to crack down on those who may have illicitly or corruptly obtained money and who are connected to Vladimir Putin. We are working with our colleagues across the world to do just that; that work, as you can imagine, is now intensifying.

Q154 **Priti Patel:** Foreign Secretary, after your visit to Russia in December you said that we have to engage and we have to talk to each other. Is that still your approach when it comes to Russia? What are your plans, in terms of communication, in light of what has happened?

Boris Johnson: Yes, the policy is effectively unchanged, as the Prime Minister said on Wednesday. No one can say that we have not been trying. That was the reason for going to Moscow: to show that we were willing to engage. I am not going to say that Sergei Lavrov is coming here any time soon; he certainly isn't. There will be no high-level UK representation at the World Cup; we all know that.



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Things are going to be very difficult politically—of course they will be—for a while to come, but that does not mean that all contact must be stopped and all engagement must be stopped. I will tell you why: because I believe that the UK, in spite of everything, actually has many admirers among the Russian people and people who want to listen to what we have to say. Those people were very disappointed, by the way, by Russia's actions in closing down the British Council—of all the things that happened, that provoked the biggest hostile reaction that we know of amongst the Russian public. We want, if we possibly can, to continue communication and continue to hold out the hand of friendship to the Russian people, because our quarrel is emphatically not with them. Our quarrel is not with the Russians; it is with Putin's Kremlin.

Q155 Priti Patel: How would you define success going forward, in terms of communication, engagement and actually making some progress with key dialogue on some of these issues, which are really pressing issues that are affecting us in diplomatic terms, but also politically?

Boris Johnson: I think there are several areas in which we have to be absolutely honest, where the Russians do play a role across the geopolitical landscape—not least in Syria, where the crisis is getting worse and the slaughter is again intensifying. We have people dying at the rate of about 80 a day now in eastern Ghouta. It is up to the Russians to get their client state and get Bashar al-Assad to the negotiating table in Geneva, to abandon what is happening in Sochi, which is not really leading anywhere, and have a proper negotiation. There the Russians can be influential—they certainly are influential. We in the UK have to engage to make that point.

Q156 Priti Patel: I know we will want to talk about Syria in a bit, but specifically you have raised Russia's position on Syria and in Syria, in terms of its own actions and activities. In light of what we are facing in this country—following all the lines of culpability, getting accountability, getting them to take responsibility for what has happened—how far do you think we in Britain can push the Russians in being responsible and accountable for their own actions in Syria?

Boris Johnson: As you know, we have led the way in getting denunciation of what they have done and getting sanctions, certainly on members of the Assad regime, who were responsible the Khan Shaykhun massacre. We have continued to hold the Russians to account at the UN for what they are doing in Syria. Obviously, it is difficult since Russia is also a P5 country, but we continue to press the case and toughen up resolutions, so as to put the pressure on Assad and the Russians, and we continue to do so. If you look at the sanctions over Crimea. I think it is more or less exactly the fourth anniversary of that invasion. The UK has been in the lead across the world in imposing sanctions on Russia. I was asked about this a few days ago, those sanctions have been responsible for a 0.4% fall in Russia's GDP in 2015 alone. So they are not insignificant. The UK has been at the forefront of pushing for these and we will continue to do so.



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Q157 Chris Bryant: I want to press you a bit along the same lines as Mr Seely. When Alexander Litvinenko was murdered, obviously the first intention was to try to get a proper trial. It took a long time to have rows with the Russians about whether any extradition was possible, and whether it was even going to be possible to interview Mr Kovtun or Mr Lugovoy. Then there was a change of Government in 2010. Why did it take such a long time for the Government to agree to have a full inquiry into Alexander Litvinenko's death?

Boris Johnson: I know you have been following this type of issue for a long time with a great deal of assiduity and clarity, Mr Bryant. It goes to why we took the decision to respond not immediately, but in a measured and proportionate way, and not to let the grass grow under our feet this time round in the case of Sergei Skripal and his daughter. The reason is, when it came to Litvinenko, the British state basically behaved in the way you would expect us to behave. We scrupulously followed the legal processes. Indeed, we have done on this occasion. Then we thought that the Russians would do the same. My understanding is that every effort was made to persuade the Russians to handover Lugovoy and Kovtun for trial, and the Russians, as ever, responded with denial, distortion and delay. That is their tactic. I think we have learned a lesson from that. That is why we have moved in a different way this time.

Q158 Chris Bryant: The Litvinenko inquiry then happened and at the end of that, even when it had been decided by the judge in the closest we could have to a full and proper trial that the trail ran straight back to the Kremlin, we did nothing.

Boris Johnson: I can tell you, Mr Bryant, that the case of Alexander Litvinenko was the first thing I think I raised in my first ever meeting with Sergei Lavrov, so we have continued to raise it.

Q159 Chris Bryant: I know but we didn't do anything, did we?

Boris Johnson: It is very difficult, when you have absolute denial by the Russian state of what they have done, to ask them to produce—

Q160 Chris Bryant: Have you met Marina Litvinenko—his widow?

Boris Johnson: Not to my knowledge. It may be that I have.

Chris Bryant: I urge you, if you have not had an opportunity, to do so, because she is one of the most clear-sighted, calm and outstanding individuals that I have met and she has a lot of good ideas about things that we could do.

Sir Simon McDonald: Just on a point of fact, Mr Bryant, it is not true that the Government did not do anything. The Government of Gordon Brown, in July 2007, when it came in, put in place a series of measures—four expulsions.

Q161 Chris Bryant: I understand that. I am talking about after the inquiry had been held. We did nothing then.

Sir Simon McDonald: There have been a series of actions, most of which are still in place.

Q162 **Chris Bryant:** I understand that. The point is that after the Litvinenko inquiry had been held, when the judge pointed the trail straight back to the Kremlin, we did nothing. That is where I think Mr Seely's point is quite a good one.

Obviously, we would much prefer to have a full trial, with suspects and all the rest. If that proves impossible, for all the same reasons, will we have a public inquiry led by a judge as soon as possible, so that as much as can be held in a proper judicial process can happen?

Boris Johnson: First of all—to get back to your point about the British state doing nothing about Kovtun and Lugovoy—we continue to demand their extradition. That is a point, as I said, that I raise with my Russian counterparts when I have met them.

On your question about a judicial inquiry, I think what most people would want to see now—the priority is to allow our police, our law enforcement agencies, to get on with their job and try to establish the facts of the case as best as they can. As you know, what we are doing now is handing over or making sure that the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has access to the samples of nerve agent, so that they can be properly evaluated in what I think most people would accept are going to be impartial conditions.

Q163 **Chris Bryant:** I am going to ask an allied question if that's okay. I have had it put to me that the reason we did nothing of substance after the Litvinenko inquiry was that Russian money in the UK is now so important that it would be an existential risk to the City of London to lose that money.

Boris Johnson: I don't believe that for a minute, Mr Bryant.

Q164 **Mr Seely:** Building on what Chris was saying, Foreign Secretary, I am slightly concerned that the west and the UK do not understand the nature of the Russian threat, so can I ask you what you believe it consists of—Russia's full-spectrum war, new generation war, hybrid war—and where you believe it is being played out, in the UK and elsewhere in the world?

Boris Johnson: I think the Russian threat consists mainly in a state of mind that is to be found in the Kremlin. It's a revanchist, bitter feeling about the way the Cold War ended and about what happened to the old Soviet Union, and a feeling that Russia is now simply the controller of a much diminished sphere of influence. The boundaries of Moscow's dominions have been rolled back, and I think Vladimir Putin feels that very keenly. He feels that Russia lost out and so he wants to cause trouble wherever he can. That is why you have seen the kind of provocations—the attempted assassination in Montenegro, the cyber-warfare, disinformation, meddling in European election campaigns, to say nothing of election campaigns elsewhere. It's a general feeling that Russia has got to be noticed. And then of course there is the action in Syria. It's a desire for the world to take Russia seriously again, at any price. Of course, his principal



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audience for this is not us; it's his domestic audience, who want, after what they see as all these humiliations, to feel that Russia is strong again and that Russia is ruled by someone who is strong and capable of expressing his strength and his desire for revenge, even in a place like Salisbury.

Q165 **Mr Seely:** I asked that question because—and thank you for the answer, which I thought was very full. You didn't list many tools and you primarily looked at forms of political covert warfare—what, in the Cold War, was called active measures, so disinformation, smears, assassinations, etc. Do you link that to other tools: conventional military tools, economic tools, soft power, hard power? I'm talking about what the Russians say in their doctrine is the mixing, the integration, of military and non-military.

Boris Johnson: Of course, and hybrid warfare is the correct term. Think about what happened with the attempted murder of an agent in Salisbury,¹ or things like attacks on a TV station—such as TV5 in France—the disabling of a network, or unexplained hacking. Those things are very carefully chosen because they probably come beneath the threshold of article 5 of the NATO treaty. They don't quite justify the nations of NATO coming together for a joint response, not least because—unlike the advance of a tank battalion, let alone a nuclear strike—they are much harder to identify and prove. It is that type of hybrid warfare that Russia is now engaged in.

Q166 **Mr Seely:** Coming back to what we are doing—we are doing something in finance, something in cyber, and something on the espionage front. Is our response to full-spectrum war, full spectrum?

Boris Johnson: I want to be very clear that we do not wish to engage in a new Cold War. I deprecate that term—I remember the old Cold War, and it was a pretty miserable time. I grew up genuinely worrying that our country was going to be evaporated in a thermonuclear strike. I don't think that we face that kind of existential threat, but it is a threat none the less. We have to be very tough and resolute. To return to your earlier question about defence spending, I think it is absolutely right that we as a country are one of the biggest spenders on defence in NATO, and that we meet the 2% threshold.

Q167 **Mr Seely:** Finally on this point, however you want to characterise our relationship with the Russians now, during the Cold War the United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence did fantastically good work methodically exposing Russian active measures and disinformation campaigns. Rather than just waving a stick or wagging a finger at the Russians, should we not be trying to do something similar and setting up some kind of permanent standing inquiry, under Government and under Parliament, that methodically exposes to our own people, the Russian people, and for the historical record, these subversive campaigns? If they are a threat, should we not be doing more to expose them to the light of truth?

¹ As corrected by witness; see Q309



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Boris Johnson: I certainly think that we need to do more to expose Russian disinformation. As you know, the UK makes a contribution to various organisations—not least in the EU—that are engaged in that effort, and we will continue to do so. One difficulty we have is that a lie goes half way round the world before the truth has got its boots on, and a lot of people are being taken in by stuff coming out from Russia Today and other outlets. The Russians are very, very adept at organising tweetbots and trolling factories and so on that pump out all sorts of stuff, and we certainly need to counteract that.

Q168 **Mr Seely:** As Foreign Secretary, what are you going to do about it?

Boris Johnson: We are investing in good journalism, and we are supporting the BBC World Service. As you know, that is an impartial, independent organisation that is much trusted and loved around the world.

Q169 **Chair:** On exactly that note, you have spoken about the intent of the Russian Government in order to talk at home, and most of us would recognise that many of the actions of the Russian Federation in recent weeks have been for a domestic audience. But surely, however, some of this is not for a domestic audience; it is designed to destroy the ties that bind us and the rules of the international system, and effectively to undermine the alliances and fabric of the world that we have built with such pain and difficulty over the best part of the last 70 years since the war. Do you see that as a very threatening situation of course for the United Kingdom, but also for our European partners, and particularly the smaller members who have clubbed together—either in NATO, the European Union, or any other form—to ensure that they are able to exercise their national mandate, free from the pressure of an overweening neighbour?

Boris Johnson: That is exactly right, Mr Tugendhat. I think that is maybe part of the Russian intention and, in so far as it is, so far they have been wholly confounded in their efforts, because what they have done is actually reinforce the solidarity—as you have discovered yourself in your conversation with other parliamentarians around Europe—of our continent and reinforce the solidarity of NATO. I have to say, I was very surprised by the strength of the language and the endorsement of the UK analysis that appeared in the Quad statement, and the power of what Nikki Haley had to say to the UN Security Council. These were things that we didn't necessarily go looking for, but which came spontaneously as it were, I think partly because so many countries over the last few years have felt the effects of Russia's disruptive and malign behaviour.

I just want to go back to a point Mr Seely made because Karen reminds me that in addition to supporting free and independent media—one of the things that I have done at the Foreign Office is to invest in support for journalists who fall foul of regimes with their legal difficulties—we are also putting £8 million into independent media operating in the Russian language. We are trying to reach those people as well.

Q170 **Chair:** Correcting the lies coming out of Russian state-sponsored media



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outlets in both London and Edinburgh, which we all know about, is clearly an important thing to do. I would also like to draw attention to the fact that these lies are being spread very effectively through modern means of communication. The work that our sister Committee under Damian Collins has done is extremely important. May I ask what support you as the Foreign Office would be willing to give to enable those forms of inquiry? Holding inquiries overseas, holding inquiries through embassy networks and all that is extremely important in making sure that Committees can reach out to partner nations like the United States that have lessons to give. It would be extremely useful to be able to use embassies in that way.

Boris Johnson: Yes, I recall that about Mr Collins's Committee. In fact, you are getting at a specific point here, which is that the DCMS Committee wanted to have an evidence session at the UK embassy in Washington. I thought that was a very interesting idea, but the difficulty with that is that it would have been construed as UK interference in domestic US politics, and we had to think very carefully about how to handle that. Of course we support the Committee going out fact-finding. That is what we are there to do: we are there to support all such inquiries and every effort to get to the truth and to counteract the peddling of lies.

Q171 **Chair:** I assure you that not only this Committee but other Committees feel very strongly that, as representatives of the British people, the embassies have a role to host not just the will of the British Government but the will of the British people, as assembled here in Parliament. Therefore, enabling the Committee system to work through the embassy network is seen as an important aspect of that.

Boris Johnson: Let me take that away, Mr Tugendhat. Let me take that away.

Q172 **Chair:** If we are not willing to explain to people the difference between Parliament and Government through our own embassy network, it does rather call into question our ability to communicate many of the finer points of our constitutional settlement—

Boris Johnson: I can see, Mr Tugendhat, that you would like to hold your inquiries around the world. I don't necessarily wish to stand in your way. I can see where this is leading. It is leading to us supporting you in having wonderful meetings of your Committee at embassies around the world. May I think about it?

Q173 **Chair:** It is not actually about this Committee, because this Committee already uses embassies extremely effectively and has no complaint to make; it is about other Committees. If it was solely about us, it would be much easier—

Boris Johnson: But I think the issue, if I understand it correctly, is that what was proposed was that there should be, as it were, an empanelled Committee holding a session and calling American politicians to a hearing on, as it were, UK soil—it was a novel idea.

Q174 **Chair:** Instead they just rented a room. The Committee was still quorate,



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the Committee event still happened, except instead of being held in the embassy it was held in a hotel—with extra cost to Parliament, admittedly. More importantly, it lost some of the impact, I would argue. We would be very happy for you to look at that and to come back.

Boris Johnson: Your point is heard and understood.

Q175 **Chair:** May I say specifically that that is not as relevant to this Committee as it is to many others in Parliament?

Boris Johnson: I understand. I certainly do not want to deter hon. Members representing the people here assembled in Parliament, as you have rightly described, from being able to hold their deliberations anywhere else in the world where the UK has representation—where that is reasonable. We will certainly look at it, but I don't want to make a blanket commitment to all sorts of sessions and all sorts of panels taking place around the world. I do foresee difficulties.

Q176 **Ian Austin:** I think that's a yes.

Boris Johnson: No, it's not; it's a no.

Chair: I think it's a no and that we will have to come back to this.

Q177 **Mike Gapes:** You referred in an earlier answer, Foreign Secretary, to the British Council. What discussions are you having with the British Council about how to help staff? Many of them are locally engaged staff, and there will be other people who have to leave Russia with their families because of this decision. Have you had any discussion with it about this?

Boris Johnson: Obviously, the Foreign Office has had extensive discussions with the British Council about how we are going to handle their needs. I think it is a desperate shame that so many British Council staff will have to come back. As the Committee may know, following what Maria Zakharova had to say after the Russian announcement, there is still some ambiguity about exactly what rights the British Council may still have in Moscow, so we are keen to bottom that out, but—

Mike Gapes: Will you write to us?

Boris Johnson: We will do everything we possibly can to look after them. By the way, may I take this opportunity to thank them for their outstanding work? They have done a fantastic job—Shakespeare all over the subway in Moscow, fantastic things with concerts and with young people, really showing the best of this country to Russians. That was why, I think, one of the strongest negative reactions to what Russia did was from people who value the British Council and British culture.

Q178 **Mike Gapes:** A few years ago, we unveiled a statue to Yuri Gagarin outside the British Council offices in London. There was a big ceremony and the Russians were very happy to have that. That is another example.

Finally, you spoke in answer to a previous question about the continuing UK contribution to organisations, not least in the European Union, and said that we will continue to do so. I welcome it very much that we will

continue to work with the European Union on those values-based issues. Thank you for saying that.

Boris Johnson: Yes, we will. Of course, as you know, because you will have studied the detail of the Prime Minister's Mansion House speech, we will sometimes do things in concert with our European friends and partners; we may sometimes do things differently—for instance, we may have tighter sanctions than our European friends and partners, where sanctions are appropriate—and we may take other initiatives.

May I clarify one thing that I think it is important for the Committee to understand? The British Council representative has not been expelled, so there is still a question at the moment about how the British Council may or may not operate.

Chair: Are you going to be very quick, Chris?

Chris Bryant: I was going to ask about football.

Chair: We will come to that in a moment. Stephen.

Q179 **Stephen Gethins:** I have a couple of questions to ask, just to build on what Mr Gapes said. When this Committee went to Moscow—first, I commend your ambassador and embassy staff out in Moscow, who were very good to us, and I know that they have an extraordinarily tough gig at the moment, and did then as well—I was impressed by the work of the British Council, which was extraordinarily helpful to us. It is seeing its budget reduced quite significantly in 2019-20. Do you still think that that was the right decision to take?

Boris Johnson: Mr Gethins, there is a negotiation going on and a discussion under way about funding for the British Council.

Q180 **Stephen Gethins:** Okay, but in the light of what has happened recently, do you think that it is something worthwhile reviewing?

Boris Johnson: I am a massive fan of the British Council.

Stephen Gethins: I'm not sure whether to take that as a yes or a no, Foreign Secretary. It sounds like a no, though.

Boris Johnson: Mr Gethins, I can assure you that they will be getting more money.

Q181 **Stephen Gethins:** Good. I am really glad to hear that. Just to build on some of the additional work that is going on at the moment, can you set out some details about where you think we could be taking additional measures in terms of tackling the finances?

Boris Johnson: You are talking about, as it were, the corrupt associates of Vladimir Putin, and so on and so forth.

Chair: And Putin himself.



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Boris Johnson: Indeed. There are powers, under the Criminal Finances Act of April last year, to make unexplained wealth orders against people who law enforcement agencies determine have corruptly or illicitly obtained their wealth. We have the National Crime Agency currently working very hard on various lists of names, as you can imagine, of persons of interest to them. I should stress that they are persons of interest to them. We have to be clear about how this country works. This is not a country where we in the Government can say, "Oi! We think this so-and-so deserves to have his or her collar felt." That is not how it works here. They must decide on the basis of the evidence whether a crime has been committed, and they must decide whether or not to prosecute.

We have a national economic crime unit—they are also involved. That work is certainly intensifying. It is one of the areas in which the work is intensifying across borders. This is something that we are doing together with our American colleagues and our French colleagues. We are working together on this issue. I could not now name individuals who are in the crosshairs of the law enforcement agencies, simply because that would be legally very unwise. If we are to have any chance whatever of successful prosecutions of these individuals, it would be totally wrong to prejudice the case against them by identifying some sort of political directive or mandate.

Q182 **Stephen Gethins:** I know that you will be aware of, and you'll understand, the concerns about the political will to tackle the finances. Notwithstanding games of tennis that cost more than 99% of what people earn in a year, can you reassure the Committee that there is absolutely the political will in Government to tackle the financial element of this?

Boris Johnson: Absolutely. We believe that that is the next big shoe to drop, as it were. We think that is where the UK activity will go. It is not just financial, of course. I should have mentioned to Mr Seely in the list of things that we are doing what the Prime Minister said about making sure that there was a proper Magnitsky—or Magnitsky-style—amendment to the new sanctions Bill. I know that there is, more or less, cross-party agreement now on how that should work.

Q183 **Stephen Gethins:** As well as looking at that, just as one final question on the finances, you will be aware of Scottish limited partnerships. They were originally set up in 1907, but more have been created in the past decade than in their first 100 years of existence. Is that something you will look at as well?

Boris Johnson: Forgive me, Mr Gethins, did you say Scottish limited partnerships?

Stephen Gethins: Scottish limited partnerships.

Boris Johnson: I am sure we will certainly take that away.

Q184 **Stephen Gethins:** It was something that came up at the weekend on the Peston programme, for example. I'd be grateful to you if you could look at that.



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Boris Johnson: I'd be very happy to have a look at that.

Q185 **Mr Seely:** I just want to make sure, because by far the most important element of the modest amount of stuff that we promised to do across the full spectrum of effects to counter Russia is in this field, that there is no reluctance on the part of Government to hit significant oligarchic criminal supporters.

Boris Johnson: Absolutely.

Mr Seely: And you're going to go after them at this juncture?

Boris Johnson: All I can say—and this is not by political fiat; this must be done according to the law, because that is how we work—is that I can assure you that if there is evidence that the wealth of people in London, the wealth of people with great big schlosses in wherever it is, in fashionable districts of this city, has been illicitly or corruptly obtained, and we have evidence for that, we now have the statute to have an unexplained wealth order against them, or to find other means to deprive them of their assets and to go after them.

Q186 **Mr Seely:** Thank you. One of the things that concerned me, prior to Colonel Skripal's attempted murder, was the reluctance—the slight dragging of feet—about the Magnitsky law. I hope that has now changed. There are five elements that not only I but Transparency International and other people have recommended that the Government do: unexplained wealth orders; the public register, which seems to be permanently delayed—we should be speeding it up, but we seem to be delaying it; prohibiting agents who are not linked to the anti-money laundering supervising programmes but are setting up companies in this country; providing Companies House with resources; and bringing the overseas territories and Crown dependencies up to UK standards. Are those five elements going to be part of our attempt to ensure our system is clean so that we can dissuade corrupt money from coming to London and legally target Kremlin cash?

Boris Johnson: First of all, on Magnitsky and why there was some delay and some discussion about how to proceed, to be fair to the Government—which is, after all, my job—

Chris Bryant: Sometimes.

Boris Johnson: Always, Mr Bryant, always.

If you look at the text, it actually says that we should be able to hold to account anybody who is responsible for human rights abuses in Russia—or, indeed, in any other country.

Q187 **Chair:** Sorry, just to be clear, who will determine what the human rights abuses are?

Boris Johnson: That will obviously be a matter for our law enforcement agencies to determine. My point to Mr Seely is that, a fortiori, "any human rights abuse" is a stronger formulation than "gross human rights abuse",



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which is what the Magnitsky terminology demanded. I think we have reached a good place on that, and as I understand it there is cross-party agreement on the language, and we are happy to support it.

On the issue of beneficial ownership and making sure there is total clarity about that, the UK is far in advance of every other G20 country in that it has the first public central register of beneficial ownership information. That is something that few other countries do. The issue relates to the overseas territories, where there is a controversy about some of the ways in which they make information available.

Mr Seely: They've been very slow.

Boris Johnson: At the moment, it is certainly true that they operate a slightly different regime from us. But, as you yourself say, Mr Seely, they do make that information available to law enforcement agencies, people cracking down on financial crime, and all the rest of it. That's what they do. There is no secrecy per se. What they don't necessarily do is put it all out in the public domain for journalists and everybody else. Now, that's where we want them to get to. That's the ideal world. We all want to achieve that. The question is, how do we get that? The discussion going on with parliamentary colleagues is about the pace we insist upon for them to achieve that.

Several issues are raised by that. The first is a constitutional point: is it really right for us in the UK simply to order them to do something like that, when after all we believe in devolved Government here in the UK and we wouldn't want to order the Welsh or the Scottish to do absolutely everything in the way we do it?

Q188 **Chair:** What about financial probity?

Boris Johnson: We make no comment on their probity.

The second question relates to the very great suffering that some of these jurisdictions have experienced in the last year after Hurricane Irma—the worst natural disaster we have seen for generations. Their case to us is that they need to proceed a bit more slowly because of the risk that funds—the British Virgin Islands' tourist economy is very limited by comparison with its financial services industry. The risk is that you would simply see a diversion of investment away from British overseas territories to the Netherlands Antilles or wherever it happens to be, which have a jurisdiction that is much less demanding than the UK's. We want to get there and that's the movement that we are engaged in.

Q189 **Ian Austin:** I think people will be quite sceptical about what you have said about the response to Magnitsky, for example. He was murdered almost nine years ago. Since then, on at least five separate occasions, Bill Browder has presented the Government with dossiers of evidence, showing that money from that crime was laundered here in London. Twelve other countries have initiated investigations into laundering of that money. As far as I am aware, that has not happened in the UK. Why is that?



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Boris Johnson: As I said earlier to the Committee, first of all, we do have powers under existing statute to go after people who we think are involved in the abuse of human rights.

Q190 **Ian Austin:** But they have not been used.

Boris Johnson: What we are doing now is strengthening those powers under an amendment to the sanctions Bill, to give further encouragement to law enforcement agencies to go after such individuals.

Q191 **Ian Austin:** With the greatest of respect, Foreign Secretary, it should not have taken another attempted murder on the streets of Britain for the Government finally to have woken up to the severity of this issue. It should not have taken that. I agree with you that we should be tough and robust, but nothing you have said this afternoon will have boots quaking in the Kremlin.

For all you have said about engagement, it is about time our Government woke up to the fact that we are not dealing here with a legitimate leader of a democratic country. Putin is an unreconstructed KGB thug who has enriched himself to the tune of hundreds of billions, has looted the country, has murdered his opponents at home and abroad, and has sanctioned the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

The best way to deal with that is to go after him and the corrupt people around him. I will give you one example: Igor Shuvalov, the First Deputy Prime Minister, supposedly earns £112,000 a year but, within a few hundred yards of this building, has bought two flats on Whitehall near the Ministry of Defence, worth £11 million. What are you going to do about that?

Boris Johnson: First of all, Mr Austin, I completely disagree with your first point. The reaction that I saw on both sides of the House of Commons on Wednesday was that they thought this was a commensurate and robust package of measures. It has overwhelming parliamentary support and I do think it will make a great difference. We intend to ensure that it does.

On your point about the individual, as I said, nothing could be more prejudicial to our chances of actually cracking down on somebody whose wealth has been corruptly or illicitly obtained than for me to identify politically any such target.

Q192 **Chair:** Can I just jump straight on that? Forgive me. One of the ways that people are getting their money out of this country is by allowing Russian sovereign debt to be sold in the UK, and that debt to be used to reimburse Russians, in a way, to bring back their money onshore, in Moscow terms. As that gold is moving towards Moscow, we are, quite extraordinarily, enabling those bond auctions, those debt auctions. In fact, I believe I am right in saying that only last week \$4 billion of Eurobonds were sold in London, and half that was bought.

Boris Johnson: Mr Tugendhat, where a crime has been committed and you have evidence, you should take that to—



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Q193 **Chair:** I am not specifically referring to a crime. I am saying that the sanctions on individuals only work if the state is not allowed to find a loop around the sanction. This is one of those areas where it appears that sanctions on businesses are being compensated for by the Russian state.

As Mr Austin rightly said, we are not dealing with a normal regime here. If you go to the Russian state and say, "A particular aspect has been sanctioned. Will the Russian state, therefore, recognise the international importance of the sanctions regime?", they will look for a way round the sanction and a way to help the individual because, of course, the individual, the state and the gangster regime of KGB-affiliated agents are all one.

Boris Johnson: As you know, Mr Tugendhat, we have already sanctioned about 149 individuals, who have restrictions on their travel and on their ability to transact business in this country, certainly. If you have evidence of other individuals who are breaking the law at the moment—

Q194 **Chair:** I am referring to the whole state. I am not referring to individuals.

Boris Johnson: If you are saying that our country is breaking the law, then you as a parliamentarian are entitled to—

Q195 **Chair:** No, I am saying that the state is using its organs to undermine sanctions on banks like VTB Bank. That is what I am saying.

Boris Johnson: If there is a deficiency in the law of a kind that you describe, we will look at it to see what we can do.

Q196 **Chair:** So would you consider, as part of that, imposing sanctions on Russian bond sales in London or through London clearing houses?

Boris Johnson: I didn't say that.

Q197 **Chair:** No, I know. I am asking you whether you would.

Boris Johnson: I think what we need to do is—You are talking about getting round sanctions, if I understand you correctly. If there is something we can do to stop people who are sanctioned individuals getting round the penalties against them, then we should certainly look at that.

Q198 **Chair:** Russian debt markets use London clearing houses.

Boris Johnson: If there is something that we can do to stop individuals from getting round the sanctions—

Q199 **Chair:** Yes, there is, and that is called sanctioning Russian debt markets and preventing sovereign bonds from being traded in London.

Boris Johnson: You make an interesting suggestion.

Q200 **Mr Seely:** This is a matter of policy, not a matter of criminality. For example, quite recently, a month or two ago, EN+ floated in London and raised lots of money. Greg Barker, sadly, is the chairman of it—an ex-Tory MP who now sits with much majesty and finesse in the House of Lords. He is chairman of this outfit. It floated. A lot of money went to EN+. They go and pay VTB Bank, which is sanctioned. London is being



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used to raise funds to give hard currency to banks that are sanctioned. We are almost enabling the Russians to play the sanctions. Is that because Lord Barker is just so powerful or because our sanctions are weak?

Boris Johnson: I hesitate to comment on any individual case, but it is very important in this whole conversation to make a hard and fast distinction between those who the law enforcement agencies believe are responsible for crimes, and Russian people, Russian business people and Russian businesses trading freely and living their lives in this country.

Q201 **Chris Bryant:** Can I ask one simple question? Was Vladimir Putin validly elected in a free and fair election this week?

Boris Johnson: I think, according to the OSCE monitors, there was an absence of genuine competition. I think that slightly understates it but, you know.

Q202 **Chris Bryant:** Say what you really mean. Do you think he was validly elected or not?

Boris Johnson: I prefer to go with the judgment of the OSCE monitors, which was that there was, as far as I can remember what they said, very little free and fair media, people were discouraged from taking part, and there was an absence of genuine competition. That does not strike me as a free and fair election.

Q203 **Chris Bryant:** Okay. I don't understand why you can't just say it straight for yourself.

Boris Johnson: The answer to that is no.

Q204 **Chris Bryant:** Thank you. For the Sochi Olympics, notwithstanding the fact that we had suspended intelligence co-operation with the Russians, we did co-operate for those Olympics to make sure that they could happen safely. Are we doing the same for the World Cup or are we doing something different?

Boris Johnson: As you would expect, we are doing everything we can to ensure the safety of UK fans—of England fans—going to watch the football. There has been an awful lot of work in the last few months with the Russian police to try to co-ordinate. It is up to the Russians. It is up to the Russians to guarantee the safety of England fans going to Russia. It is their duty under their FIFA contract to look after our fans. We will be doing everything we can in the Foreign Office to make sure that they have access to the best possible advice. There are updates on our "Be on the Ball" website and we will of course make sure that they have that. We are watching it very, very closely.

At the moment, we are not inclined actively to dissuade people from going, because we want to hear from the Russians what steps they are going to take to look after our fans. I want to hear from Russia how they propose to look after UK nationals coming to the World Cup.



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I will give you one interesting statistic, which is that, so far, the applications from England fans to go to Russia for the World Cup are about a quarter of what they were at this stage for the Rio World Cup—so about 24,000 against about 94,000 for a comparable stage in the competition. So the numbers are well down, but that does not mean that we are not deeply concerned about how they may be treated.

Q205 **Chris Bryant:** Despite being Welsh, I do have an interest in English football fans, but that was not the question I was asking really. The question I am asking is, have we suspended intelligence co-operation with Russian intelligence or not?

Boris Johnson: I don't make any comment on intelligence matters.

Q206 **Chris Bryant:** In previous operations, we have. When Litvinenko was murdered, we said that we were suspending all intelligence operations with the Russians—

Boris Johnson: I don't comment on intelligence matters, but what I have told you, Mr Bryant—

Chris Bryant: But every previous Foreign Secretary has made that commitment.

Boris Johnson: What I have told you, Mr Bryant, is that we are—have been—co-operating at a police level with the Russians. There are questions now about how that co-operation will go on, and my challenge to the Russian authorities is to show that the 24,000 UK applicants for tickets to the football World Cup are going to be well treated and safe in Russia.

Q207 **Chair:** The way you are expressing yourself, Foreign Secretary, suggests that you are doubtful that they will be.

Boris Johnson: I think it is up to the Russians to give us undertakings that they will be. It is there in their FIFA contract, and they should.

Q208 **Ian Murray:** Foreign Secretary, may I take you back to the previous questions? How much dirty money, whether Russian or otherwise, does the Foreign Office estimate is currently in the UK?

Boris Johnson: We don't have a figure for that.

Q209 **Ian Murray:** Although you don't have a figure, do you think it is greater or less than it would have been five years ago?

Boris Johnson: I can't—I have no data I can give you on that, Mr Murray.

Q210 **Ian Murray:** How do you know the scale of the problem?

Boris Johnson: What I can tell you is what I have said repeatedly to the Committee, which is that we have the powers under the Criminal Finances Act to go after money that has been illicitly or corruptly obtained. That is what our law enforcement agencies are doing.

Q211 **Ian Murray:** Could the public conclude from that concession that Russian



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money in London in particular is too important for the Government to have a really strong policy against it.

Boris Johnson: No.

Q212 **Ian Murray:** In what way?

Boris Johnson: Because we are determined to go after money that has been illicitly or corruptly obtained, and we will use unexplained wealth orders and other devices against such individuals.

Q213 **Ian Murray:** So when you come back to the Committee, say in 12 months' time, you will have a list of people who have been properly sanctioned, assets that have been properly seized and money that has been properly returned to its rightful owner.

Boris Johnson: I will certainly guarantee that the National Crime Agency and the entire apparatus of our law enforcement bodies are on that case.

Q214 **Ian Murray:** It is not just about crime agencies and law enforcement but, as Mr Seely said, it is about Government policy.

Boris Johnson: No, it's not. If I may say so, Mr Murray, it is very important for the Committee to understand that it cannot be Government policy to single out individuals and to say that they are right for persecution, or prosecution.

Q215 **Ian Murray:** Government have put in place the legal framework that crime agencies work towards—

Boris Johnson: That's right.

Ian Murray: And it seems to me that the legal framework is deficient.

Boris Johnson: Well, I respectfully disagree with that. We have ample statute to go after people. And it is vital that we do that work in co-operation with Governments and law enforcement agencies around the world.

Q216 **Ian Murray:** In example after example, evidence has been produced, and it appears on the face of it, to the public, that people are not being brought to justice.

Boris Johnson: I revert to what I said a while ago. Where we can find good evidence, of course we must have convictions, but the worst possible thing would be to start, politically, a great hue and cry against certain individuals who might actually have their wealth by perfectly proper means.

Q217 **Ian Austin:** I hope that the message you got from the Committee this afternoon is that we think there should be much more urgent, much more serious efforts. I accept that you cannot say to officials, "Go after this individual, go after that individual", but the Government can certainly tell the National Crime Agency and the other law enforcement bodies to take a much more urgent and more serious approach to tackling money brought to this country by people responsible for corruption in Russia or



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the gross abuse of human rights. That is the message that I hope you have got from this discussion, and I hope as a result there will be a much more co-ordinated approach across Government.

Boris Johnson: Mr Austin, I totally get what you're saying. Nobody would be happier than me if we could finger the collar of several corrupt oligarchs and distraint them of their possessions in London. That would be a fantastic thing. But nothing could be more prejudicial to that operation than for me to identify those people—

Q218 **Ian Austin:** I am not asking you to do that.

Boris Johnson: Could I just finish the point? Nothing would be worse than having a case that misfired, where someone got off.

Q219 **Ian Austin:** Let's agree on this then. The next time you come here you will be able to tell us that action has been taken against a series of people. Let's just agree on that.

On the World Cup, I am a football fan and season ticket holder. I love watching England but there is absolutely no way that I would be going to Russia to watch the national team. If a member of my family wanted to go, he would be subject to a visa ban by me, frankly. They got the right to stage the World Cup, clearly through corruption. Putin is going to use it the way Hitler used the 1936 Olympics. The idea of Putin handing over the World Cup to the captain of the winning team fills me with horror.

Boris Johnson: I'm afraid you're completely right—that's completely wrong.

Q220 **Ian Austin:** The idea of Putin using this as a PR exercise to gloss over the brutal, corrupt regime for which he is responsible, fills me with horror. I think we should look carefully at the participation of the England team.

Boris Johnson: When you say look carefully, Mr Austin, what do you mean by that?

Q221 **Ian Austin:** I frankly do not think that England should participate in the World Cup. I do not think we should support Putin using this as a PR exercise to gloss over the gross human rights abuses for which he is responsible.

I also think it is not safe for England fans to travel to Russia, particularly when so many of our diplomats have just been booted out. How on earth can we think that proper consular services are going to be provided to England fans who could be attacked, as they were attacked by Russian thugs during the European championships a couple of years ago? That violence was supported and encouraged by members of the Russian Parliament. I think we have got to wake up to this and take this much more seriously.

Boris Johnson: Let me say of your characterisation of what is going to happen in Moscow and all the venues for the World Cup, yes, the comparison with 1936 is certainly right. It is an emetic prospect to think of Putin glorying in this sporting event. I have thought about it a lot. I

mentioned it when I first came to Parliament. At your suggestion, Mr Chairman, I suggested that we might consider UK representation at the World Cup. By that I meant what has now happened: the decision not to send the princes or high-level political representation.

Thinking very hard about the tournament itself, English football and fans of England, who could come from any part of the United Kingdom, or elsewhere indeed—global fans of England—on balance, it would be wrong to punish them or the team, who have worked on this for a long time incredibly hard, giving up their lives to it. I think it would be a pity for them.

Your point about the safety of fans is well made and well taken. That is of crucial importance to us. We do indeed need to have an urgent conversation with the Russians about how they propose to fulfil their obligations under their FIFA contract to look after all fans arriving.

Q222 Mr Seely: Are you having those conversations?

Boris Johnson: We certainly shall be.

Q223 Mr Seely: Have you had any conversation yet?

Boris Johnson: Not yet, no. We must have a proper discussion at the UK national level on how exactly we proceed. Because one of the consequences of the expulsions that we had from Moscow was that we lost the officer who was going to be responsible for the fans. You can't imagine anything more counterproductive for the UK's ability to help fans when in Russia. I will not hide from the Committee that there is an issue and there is a discussion. We need to consider that issue. At the moment, the numbers of applicants for tickets are well down on where we were at Rio, but there is still a considerable number of fans who want to go. We have to think of their welfare.

Q224 Chair: There are fans who, if they go, will go to places such as Kaliningrad that are exposed hotbeds of Russian nationalism; and Volgograd, which is a long way from Moscow. Those train and car journeys are—

Boris Johnson: Mr Austin has an extremely good point. That is the truth. You are right, Mr Tugendhat, about Kaliningrad. We are thinking actively about all that.

Chair: We have no diplomatic representation there; we are closing the consulate in St Petersburg.

Boris Johnson: We can see the risks, of course we can. To appreciate the risks and to understand our latest thinking, I tell all fans to look at the "Be on the Ball" section of our website.

Q225 Chair: And you'll keep that up to date?

Boris Johnson: We will keep that updated, and across Government we are considering what further steps we need to take to get the Russians to guarantee the safety of our fans, if we can.



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Q226 Chair: Of course we are talking about fans, coming up to the World Cup, but there are many UK businesses operating perfectly legally in the United Kingdom. Surely, this is one of those moments when they should think very hard—

Boris Johnson: In Russia?

Chair: Sorry, in Russia. This is one of those moments when they should think very hard about the safety of their own staff.

Boris Johnson: Yes, and that is why it is so important that, notwithstanding the strong feelings that this whole episode has evoked in the UK, and indeed in Russia, we make it clear to the people of Russia that our quarrel is not with them. We don't want Russophobia or anything like that. That is why I use my language carefully about our quarrel being with the Russian state and with Putin.

Q227 Priti Patel: Do you envisage a situation at all where the British Government could advise football fans not to travel to Russia?

Boris Johnson: As I say, we need to understand what steps are going to be taken to give England fans the safety that they require.

Q228 Priti Patel: When do you think you will make that judgment call?

Boris Johnson: At the moment, our judgment is that there is no cause for a boycott, but we urge fans to get on to our website and to take our advice.

Q229 Priti Patel: Could I ask another specific question post the Salisbury attack? You have spoken very clearly about the support that we have received from friends and allies around the world. You have also said that financial sanctions and the measures that we have make us able to go after various individuals, culprits and people who are known to be responsible for corruption—washing money through London and so on. What are you doing to ask our allies to undertake specific action with regards to further sanctions and targeted interventions on Russia?

Secondly, tomorrow we have a meeting of the European Council. Do you expect anything specific to come out the European Council tomorrow that could lead to firm actions?

Boris Johnson: Let me just say that actions are a matter for our friends and colleagues; I am not sighted on what they may or may choose to do.

Q230 Priti Patel: Are there any recommendations?

Boris Johnson: What we are pleased by is that, so far, the intensity of the fellow feeling that I have detected from colleagues around the world has been far beyond what we expected. We have had statements basically backing up our analysis from the Quad, and from the Americans in the UN of what has happened, pointing the finger very firmly at Russia; the EU calling for Russia to explain what it has done; and a very strong statement from NATO. These are things that we did not get 12 years ago when Alexander Litvinenko was assassinated. I am pleased to see that.



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Q231 **Chair:** You must have been particularly pleased with the comments with the Frans Timmermans and Guy Verhofstadt, who you have clashed with in the past. They were very critical of Jean-Claude Juncker, who congratulated Mr Putin.

Boris Johnson: Let's be clear: we have had some very powerful statements of support.

Q232 **Chair:** But you welcome Guy Verhofstadt and Frans Timmermans's statements?

Boris Johnson: I welcome the very powerful statements in support of the United Kingdom.

Chair: There is one thing that we would like to clarify on Georgia. You were going to bring it up, Bob? Then we will move on, if that's all right.

Q233 **Mr Seely:** The question was about Georgia and Ukraine, which are clearly bearing the brunt of the more violent end of Russia's full-spectrum warfare, eastern Ukraine now, Abkhazia from the early 1990s onwards and then the Georgian war. In your view, is Russia occupying Abkhazia and South Ossetia? If it is an occupation—a lot of people would suggest that it is—why does the UK Government not call it an occupation, since Russian proxies and Russian forces are in both those territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia? Clearly, Georgian territorial integrity has been violated.

Boris Johnson: We don't for legal reasons use the term "occupation"—perhaps I will ask Karen to comment on that. I believe we refer to them as breakaway republics. Karen, do you want to elaborate on that?

Q234 **Mr Seely:** Isn't that a bit mealy-mouthed?

Karen Pierce: Occupation means something very precise in international law, and it also confers rights as well as responsibilities, so there are a range of legal reasons why we don't use it in this case. We could write to you—

Q235 **Mr Seely:** So it is a bit like the west bank. If it is "occupied", Israel has various rights and responsibilities. What you are saying is, if it is occupied, you expect the Russians to do certain things, because they are the occupying power.

Karen Pierce: That is essentially correct, but if you wanted a more detailed legal briefing we would write to you.

Q236 **Mr Seely:** But, briefly, because I will not talk about this for long, this is part of the problem—because they are an occupying power but have proxy Governments and are manipulating the situation, acting through others, you cannot call them an occupying power. But clearly Russia and its proxies have broken up parts of another state. It seems to me that in our whole diplomatic framework and the language we use, we are missing a chunk of language to describe a manipulated occupation, a managed conflict or a frozen conflict—call it what you like. What would be your thoughts on that?

Boris Johnson: Again, that goes back to the point that I was making to the Committee earlier about the malignant subtlety of the way the Russians sometimes behave. For instance, in Crimea or the Donbass there are perpetual denials of any activity at all. MH17 is nothing to do with them at all. It is very difficult sometimes to find the right way of countering this, short of a military engagement, which of course is very difficult for us to mount.

Q237 **Mr Seely:** They are not breakaway; they have been broken away.

Boris Johnson: I understand.

Mr Seely: So there is a—

Boris Johnson: I understand. I saw the Prime Minister of Georgia² only recently and we were discussing this. I intend to go there very soon. To get back to the point Mr Gapes made right at the beginning, it is because, particularly on Ukraine, the UK has been the most fierce and forthright in our denunciations of what has happened, so they have us in their sights.

Karen Pierce: May I add something, Foreign Secretary? Russia was voted off the UN Human Rights Council largely because of its approach to Ukraine and Georgia.

Chair: May we move on, because we don't want to run out of time?

Q238 **Mike Gapes:** Talking about being voted off things at the UN, we failed to get our judge at the International Court of Justice. The Committee produced a report on that. In the memorandum we received from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on Global Britain, you said that you would be "building on lessons learned from the loss of our seat on the International Court of Justice". Will you tell us what could have been done differently?

Boris Johnson: Obviously it was disappointing that Sir Christopher Greenwood was not elected. He was a superb candidate. He very nearly got it on the first ballot. I think that all sorts of considerations have been advanced to me about it. One of the difficulties was that we were running a lot of campaigns that year, such as trying to get David Nabarro into the WHO—as Priti will remember. We were trying to do an awful lot of stuff. We will make sure that we contest the next election and that we succeed. That should be the ambition of any country. Although I must stress, I congratulate the Indians on their success.

Q239 **Mike Gapes:** We were told that you were going to carry out an exercise to assess the reasons. How has that gone?

Boris Johnson: We certainly have looked at what went on, and that is among the reasons we think that we did not succeed that time. We have had plenty of successes. We got Mark Lowcock into OCHA. Martin Griffiths is the new representative for Yemen.

² Subsequent correction by the witness: should read as 'I saw the Vice-Prime Minister of Georgia...'



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Q240 **Mike Gapes:** Foreign Secretary, the question is about the failure. We were told that you, as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, were going to look in detail to find out the reasons and learn the lessons. I am asking you specifically—

Boris Johnson: Unless I missed my guess, I think you had a whole session with Lord Ahmad on this matter on 7 February.

Q241 **Mike Gapes:** We had a session, and we were told that there was going to be an assessment within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and you were going to look at the lessons. We produced a report, and your memorandum on Global Britain that you sent to us refers to building on the lessons learned. I am asking you what specific lessons there are.

Boris Johnson: I think I have given one, which is that even with the resources at our disposal, sometimes you should not run too many campaigns at once.

Q242 **Mike Gapes:** But you may not be able to choose the timing of these changes, surely?

Boris Johnson: Yes. We know the timings fairly well in advance, but we decided to go—we were perhaps greedy—for the WHO and we had to contest the ICJ.

Q243 **Chair:** Are you saying that the United Kingdom should not have a position on both the ICJ and the WHO, given our generosity in aid and our importance to the international rule of law?

Boris Johnson: No, sorry, the job was the director general of the WHO. That was the job.

Chair: Indeed.

Boris Johnson: There is no question of not having a position on the WHO, Mr Tugendhat.

Q244 **Mike Gapes:** Can I ask you this then? In her speech at the General Assembly in September last year, the Prime Minister had a sentence where she threatened to potentially set aside 30% of contributions to the UN. She said there would only be payment if there was an improvement in the results. How does it reflect the idea of Global Britain if we are starting to move towards what could be perceived as an old-style American approach to the UN?

Boris Johnson: No, no, no. It is right to want to reform the UN—the UK is the third-biggest contributor to the UN. We greatly value the UN and what it achieves around the world, but it is also important to drive the process of reform that António Guterres is leading. We support him in that.

Q245 **Mike Gapes:** Is it necessary to threaten to cut contributions in order to achieve that reform?

Boris Johnson: I think that you have to encourage value for money, and the way to encourage value for money is obviously to insist that future



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contributions may be withheld if value for money is not demonstrated, but we want to see a reformed, superb UN.

Q246 **Mike Gapes:** Will progress on addressing the issue of sexual violence be one of the criteria you will use to assess whether that contribution should continue?

Boris Johnson: We certainly have been making every effort to stress the seriousness with which we approach the issue. We have been making that clear to all UN agencies.

Q247 **Mike Gapes:** You have not answered my question.

Boris Johnson: If your question is, "Are we going to withdraw funding on the basis of whether there is adequate action on SEA?"—

Mike Gapes: Yes, that is my question.

Boris Johnson: Of course that will be among the considerations that we will make.

Karen Pierce: It might be worth adding that the UN itself wants to work with us and other donors to stamp out SEA. It is a slightly different issue from performance, where the UN is responsible. The UN as a body is very determined to take proper action against SEA.

Q248 **Mike Gapes:** Are your performance assessments related to particular agencies or organisations within the UN? It has been reported in the press that it was specifically to do with the United Nations Development Programme, as opposed to the general culture.

Boris Johnson: I do not want to get into any invidious comparisons between UN agencies, but obviously some of them have better reputations than others.

Q249 **Mike Gapes:** So you are not denying my point?

Boris Johnson: No.

Q250 **Ian Murray:** Foreign Secretary, have you read the report that we published on the ICJ?

Boris Johnson: I have certainly looked at your report on the ICJ, yes.

Q251 **Ian Murray:** And your only conclusion is that the UK should not run too many concurrent elections.

Boris Johnson: I didn't say that. I said that was among the conclusions that we have drawn.

Q252 **Ian Murray:** It was not one of the conclusions of Lord Ahmad, who gave us a session on the ICJ.

Boris Johnson: I can't comment on Lord Ahmad's views, but those are my views.

Q253 **Ian Murray:** So your views are contrary to those of one of your



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Ministers?

Boris Johnson: No, I didn't say that.

Q254 **Ian Murray:** Will you publish your views when you reply to the Committee?

Boris Johnson: I think I have just given you my views.

Q255 **Ian Murray:** But you will be replying to the Committee's report.

Boris Johnson: Oh yes, of course. Yes, certainly.

Q256 **Ian Murray:** And you will put your own view in that report when you reply?

Boris Johnson: Yes.

Q257 **Ian Murray:** Which will contain the point about concurrent elections?

Boris Johnson: I think you will find, when they arrive, that my views are uncannily close to those of Lord Ahmad.

Q258 **Ian Murray:** This is the first time since the start of the ICJ that we have not had a judge from the UK sitting on it. Have we ever run concurrent elections before in that process?

Karen Pierce: We have run concurrent elections, but not to the best of my knowledge concurrent with the ICJ. I was involved in the previous ICJ election, but the world changes and more countries want to compete for these jobs, so we keep our process under review, as the Foreign Secretary said.

Q259 **Ian Murray:** Do you think there may be a capacity issue if we are unable to run concurrent elections?

Boris Johnson: There are all sorts of issues raised, and I will be responding to the Committee and to your report in due course. Actually, since you mention capacity, Mr Murray, it is an opportune moment to inform the Committee that we have been able, thanks to new funding for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to fund 250 more diplomatic posts as a result of the Chancellor's spring statement. Not only are we going to be able to have 250 extra diplomats overseas, but we will have 10 new sovereign posts, including a new diplomatic office in N'Djamena in Chad. We are running up the Union Jack in Chad for the first time ever, I think. As a result of that, not only will we be spending more altogether on our overseas engagement than any other country in Europe—about £53 billion overall—but we will have more sovereign posts for the Foreign Office than any other European diplomatic service.

Q260 **Ian Murray:** So we will win a seat back on the ICJ?

Boris Johnson: Indeed. Thank you, Mr Murray. You teed me up well for that.

Q261 **Ian Murray:** Is that a guarantee?



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Boris Johnson: Among other things, when a seat next falls vacant, of course we will be contesting it very keenly.

Q262 **Chair:** Can we come to funding in a moment? We very much welcome the statement about funding—

Boris Johnson: I am sorry if I shoehorned that in, but I realised that time was marching on and I had to drop my bombshell.

Chair: Not at all.

Q263 **Chris Bryant:** Are you sure that is more than France? Are you absolutely certain?

Boris Johnson: I am told it is one more sovereign post than France.

Q264 **Chris Bryant:** You made a big hullabaloo for one post, didn't you?

Boris Johnson: On a sauté—on a dépassé.

Q265 **Chair:** If you had been to N'Djamena, Foreign Secretary, you may not feel so joyous about that extra post.

Boris Johnson: I think it is a place of great potential.

Q266 **Chair:** I have been there, and it has got a long way to go for the potential to be achieved.

Boris Johnson: Be very careful what you say, Mr Tugendhat.

Q267 **Chris Bryant:** That's been your motto in life, hasn't it?

Boris Johnson: I don't wish Mr Tugendhat to make any gaffes.

Q268 **Ann Clwyd:** Can we turn to Syria, Foreign Secretary? I know you felt very strongly about Aleppo and reacted in the same way as I did at the time in the Chamber. I then took a cross-party group to the Russian embassy. We tried to discuss with the Russian ambassador at the time the situation in Aleppo. We asked him why he was bombing hospitals in Aleppo. His answer was that they were not hospitals; they were run by jihadists. Presumably, he expressed that view to the team of reporters he had in the Russian embassy at the time. When people make allegations of that kind and they refute them what do we do? Do we try and find out what the truth of the matter is and put that on the record?

Boris Johnson: Mrs Clwyd, first of all can I thank you for the passion with which you have taken up the cause—the suffering of the people of Syria—as well as everything you have done for the Kurdish people. You are right that it has been one of the most miserable episodes that I can remember: an absolutely shameful episode for us. We certainly do ask the UN to investigate all these episodes, all these crimes, and to identify what really happened if we possibly can. The excuse that is always used by Assad and by the Russians is that they are going after terrorists. That is the loophole that they use, under resolution 2401. If you remember, that is how they have been able to keep the bombing going in eastern Ghouta—because



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they say that they are just going after terrorists. In reality, they are killing hundreds of totally innocent people.

Our argument to Russia and to the Iranians, and to everybody who is responsible for this campaign, and to Bashar al-Assad, is that, even despite the massacres that are taking place, they are not going to win. It is going to be such a Carthaginian peace that they will never be able to control the country. Assad currently controls 75% of the population, 50% of the territory. There is, if he is going to continue in this way, a huge amount of slaughter still to come. As I said, it will sow the dragon's teeth of revenge. The best thing they can do is get round the table in Geneva and try and begin the process of a new constitutional settlement for Syria. That is what needs to happen.

Q269 **Ann Clwyd:** Do we in the UK have any way of influencing his departure or his indictment?

Boris Johnson: I think it is the second point that is the most interesting one now, and I think it is the fear of indictment that is probably more powerful than anything else. The old mantra of "Assad must go" is certainly not one that is working at the moment. The idea of a commission of inquiry is certainly one that we support.

Q270 **Priti Patel:** Britain, as you know, has led the way in terms of Syria, the humanitarian crisis, support in the region, the various countries—Lebanon, Jordan. We have seen, obviously, humanitarianism has been completely devastated, full stop. You have mentioned the indictment as an option. Through our leadership—Britain has led the way in terms of convening countries, funding, forums—how assertively are you going to pursue that angle in terms of indictments, through the international process with our colleagues and our allies, with donor countries? Particularly—because of course there was a Brussels conference last year—are there any plans coming forward to convene something that can actually take this to the next stage further?

Boris Johnson: There are several things here under resolution 2371, I think it is. You and I did some work on it together to try to hold to account Daesh in Iraq and Syria. Yes, of course I would like to hold Assad to account for his war crimes. The difficulty is finding a court in which to try him or process him, in which we could make it work, but as I say, I certainly believe that we should have a commission of inquiry into what has happened. Ultimately, the way forward is for the people of Syria. They have got to have a political process; they have got to have a new constitution. That is when the fate of Assad will be decided.

Q271 **Priti Patel:** Do you think donor countries will effectively start to say at some stage "Enough is enough. We can't carry on like this"? We saw last year as well that there is fatigue. Everyone is completely drained and broken by these atrocious scenes—the atrocities that we see day in, day out.

There are reports in the newspapers today—you will have seen them, Foreign Secretary—about the surgeon David Nott, who is a hero. He has



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achieved amazing, life-saving tele-technology in terms of operations, yet we saw more abuses when the hospital undertaking the operations last year was blown up. Surely something will have to give. The international community and hopefully Britain can lead the way by saying, "We cannot continue like this." We need to fast-track a process—create a process, even—and use our leadership and leverage in the right way.

Boris Johnson: Yes, but the leverage that we have, Ms Patel—you were very tough on this when you were at DFID—is in not giving money to the Assad regime to rebuild as long as all of this is going on. It is vital that Britain holds to that line now, because I am afraid there are other partners who are saying, "Well, because of the catastrophe that has happened all over Syria, we have got to start giving money to the Assad-controlled areas as well." That would be to give up one of the most important levers we have.

Q272 **Ann Clwyd:** You have said that we will not stand idly back where there is another chemical weapons attack. Well, there have been several. Is that just an idle threat, or can you see some way of ensuring that international law, which prohibits the use of chemical weapons, can be enacted?

Boris Johnson: I want to stress that there is no proposal at the moment that we should take action. There is no proposal either from the Americans or the French about such joint action. But I remind you about what happened at Khan Shaykhun on 4 April last year, when there was an attack with chemical weapons, which poisoned more than 100 people, including kids. America did take action, and I pay tribute to the American Administration for what they did. All I can say, probably, is that if there were to be a plan for such action again, it would be very important for the UK at least to keep its options open.

Q273 **Ann Clwyd:** Obama had a red line. Do we have a red line?

Boris Johnson: Well, we did—we also had a red line, as you will recall. The sad thing is that we allowed it to be crossed.

Q274 **Mr Seely:** Just to follow up on the David Nott story, my understanding is that in electronic warfare they hack into a Skype call and target a hospital on the back of that. I am aware of cases of the Syrian opposition also being hacked during calls—that information is a military target. The Russians have also put up fake apps for the Ukrainians to download compasses, which then send Ukrainian positions. Some of these are ruses of war, and some of them are clearly war crimes. There have been at least two dozen chemical attacks since Syria—I think 27—which is a phenomenal number, to which one was responded to in a somewhat perfunctory way by the Americans. Better than nothing.

This is a plethora of war crimes across the board. I want more than just angry words. Are people recording these? Can we at least name those individuals responsible? Clearly, the Russians will block any move to try them, because it will implicate people within the Russian military command as well, which Putin will never allow. Are you at least gathering



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information? Where and how?

Boris Johnson: Yes, absolutely. We are certainly gathering information—we are tabulating. But the trouble is that at the moment we do not have a criminal court that will try him, because Russia will simply veto any reference to the International Criminal Court as things stand.

Q275 **Mr Seely:** So really this is a waste of time, effectively?

Boris Johnson: Well, no. You may say that. The mills of justice grind slowly, but they grind small. Let's see where we get to.

Q276 **Mike Gapes:** Just one question. Turkish Government forces have gone into Afrin, and it is reported that 200,000 people are fleeing. There are many, many deaths, and now the Turkish Government is saying it is going to widen its area of operations to Manbij, attack the Syrian Kurds and drive them from that area. What is our position? What representations are we making to our NATO ally, Turkey? In your assessment, what is the United States' view of this, given that the PYD have been at the forefront of the fighting against Daesh and our allies in that process?

Boris Johnson: Mr Gapes, this is an appalling problem. The situation is certainly deteriorating in the Afrin-Manbij-Jarabulus area. Of course, Turkey has a legitimate right to defend itself, to protect its borders and to protect itself against attack. Everybody understands Turkey's anxieties about the PKK and Kurdish terrorists, but I can't be the only MP to have received representations from Kurdish constituents with harrowing images of what is happening. As Foreign Secretary, I am all too aware of the suffering going on in Afrin and elsewhere. We worry a great deal about what is happening. Certainly, I have made representations to my Turkish colleague, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, about what is happening. Among other points is our worry that this conflict is dragging away from the fight against Daesh in the east of the country Kurdish fighters who have been so valuable in that struggle. It is a very, very difficult situation. As you rightly say, Turkey is our NATO ally.

Q277 **Ann Clwyd:** It is quite disgraceful for the Turks and the other allies to have used the Kurds to fight Daesh, only to abandon them in this way. I don't think the Prime Minister understood the question she was asked during Prime Minister's questions today. Will you enlighten her?

Boris Johnson: With great respect, Ms Clwyd, I think she totally understands the appalling dilemmas of what is happening now in Afrin. We are urging our Turkish allies to use every possible restraint in what they are doing. This is one of the most worrying developments in the whole of the Syrian war.

Q278 **Ann Clwyd:** Are you talking to Erdoğan directly?

Boris Johnson: I talk to Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, but obviously the Prime Minister talks to Erdoğan.

Q279 **Andrew Rosindell:** I want to move on to what I hope will be happier



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topics for you, Foreign Secretary: the Commonwealth—CHOGM is coming up soon—and our passionate campaign to promote the idea of Global Britain. We are very keen to hear more about it.

Boris Johnson: Yes. Well, I hear a lot about it from this excellent Committee.

Q280 **Andrew Rosindell:** Thank you. If I may say so, Foreign Secretary, with CHOGM coming up and with Global Britain being so pivotal to Government policy, it is time for more bulldog spirit to promote our country and to show that we are not going to go away and that we will stand up for our interests. What is your plan? First, let us talk about the Commonwealth. We are chairing the Commonwealth for the next two years. We have a huge opportunity next month to promote Britain and work with our allies. What is your plan for this?

Boris Johnson: I think it is going to be a fantastic summit. I know that many members of the Committee are already involved in it in one way or another, and I certainly welcome that. This is a chance to celebrate an institution that has stood the test of time and commands incredible affection and loyalty from members. In my view, it has been undervalued by this country—not by other Commonwealth members—over the past 50 years.

Gambia is coming back in—we are welcoming a new member. We are going to have a session—that's all we can do—with Zimbabwe. They can't have observer status yet, but we are going to have some sort of event with Zimbabwe to celebrate the fact that they are back on the path of Commonwealth membership.

The four big themes of the summit include prosperity and increasing trade between us—they comprise 2.4 billion people and 53 of the fastest-growing economies in the world. We are seeing massive growth in some of those economies. We will be talking about cyber-security, which we spoke of earlier. We will be talking about the war against plastic waste. We expect a lot of work at the summit about how to combat plastic waste. Many of the countries there have a big problem with it. Above all, we will be talking about female education—12 years of quality education for every girl in the Commonwealth. That is of crucial importance to the world. If you look at Pakistan, they have a big gap between the educational attainment of boys and girls. They are getting a lot of help from the UK to combat that, and you will be hearing a lot about that at the Commonwealth meeting.

Q281 **Andrew Rosindell:** This is all excellent stuff, Foreign Secretary, but our own Minister for the Commonwealth admitted to the Committee that the UK had neglected the Commonwealth over some considerable time. What are we going to do in the next year or two, while we chair the Commonwealth, to actually show that we are serious again, and that the Commonwealth is not just something that we do as a matter of course, but that we are making it a much greater priority than we have until now?



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Boris Johnson: The first and most powerful thing we can do is to take action on the four areas—above all, trade and prosperity—and get some of those free trade agreements going that the Prime Minister spoke of in the House today. We can do those with our Commonwealth friends and partners, and about time, too.

Q282 **Andrew Rosindell:** So why were the Commonwealth flags taken down from Parliament Square? The moment the service was over, they were down. We have CHOGM next month, which is a great advert for the Commonwealth and shows that we really love our Commonwealth relationships. The very next day, the flags were removed, leaving empty flagpoles. Doesn't that show a pretty poor attempt to cherish our Commonwealth friends?

Boris Johnson: Mr Rosindell, last time I was before the Committee, or maybe the time before that, you totally bowled me middle stump with a question about the Commonwealth flag, on which I am now fully educated. I see it every day. On your precise point about the flags, they will be waving all over London on April 16.

Q283 **Andrew Rosindell:** Let's get that right in the future, please, Foreign Secretary. In terms of Global Britain, we had the Minister for Africa here last week or two weeks ago. We spoke quite extensively about this excellent memo that you sent us—the memorandum on Global Britain. Unfortunately, the Minister was not aware of the memo. Are your Ministers aware of it? Have they read it? Do the Government, as a whole, understand what we mean by Global Britain? If our Ministers don't know what it means, how can they go out and beat the drum for our country?

Boris Johnson: They do know what it means. By the way, I am thrilled that the Committee has decided to write a report on that subject. Global Britain can be summed up very simply: the more global Britain is, the better it is for the globe and the better it is for Britain. There is no question about that.

People in this country do not realise quite how massive our cultural, economic, diplomatic and military footprint is. I have already told the Committee something about our diplomatic expansion and the cash we spend on overseas engagement, but that does not do justice to the soft power impact of the UK. I totally agree with whichever think-tank it was that concluded the other day that we are the second most influential country in the world after the United States. Since I basically believe that the United States is an intellectual epiphenomenon of Britain, I am content with that hierarchy.

Global Britain is out there. The job of the Global Britain campaign is to show to our friends and partners that our decision on the European Union can be and is being accompanied by an intensified engagement with the world, not just in the EU, where we are adding 50 diplomats, but around the world where, as I just told the Committee, we are adding another 250 diplomats. It is also an attempt to show people in the UK that this adds to their incomes—that, by being global, by being free trading and by being



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out there, we will be more prosperous. That is the essence of the campaign.

Q284 **Chair:** Given that you have so kindly highlighted this new money that you have—by the way, you will find no opposition to that from the Committee; we are incredibly supportive of your battles with the Treasury, in which you succeeded—

Boris Johnson: I'm very grateful to the Committee.

Chair: You have told us in the past that you are removing posts from China in order to reinforce posts in France and the EU27. Presumably that will no longer be necessary? Presumably you will now look to reinforce in important countries like China, India, Indonesia and so on, where the need for increased diplomatic outreach will be. Can you tell us where those 250 posts will be going?

Boris Johnson: My understanding is that these are 250 additional UK-based posts, but I will pass the ball down the line, in a fluid three-quarter movement, to Sir Simon.

Sir Simon McDonald: We got the letter from the Treasury last week; the Foreign Secretary got it from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Our choice is 250 extra bodies overseas, 10 new posts.

Boris Johnson: Ten new locations.

Sir Simon McDonald: Ten new sovereign posts. There will now be a debate within the Office. Ministers will decide exactly where to place these people. At last, we know how much we have to work with.

Q285 **Chair:** Clearly, this is very welcome. Where are you thinking? Where is your priority?

Boris Johnson: Mr Tugendhat, you will be among the very first to know.

Q286 **Chair:** You must have a priority, Foreign Secretary. You have been in post for a while. You must—

Boris Johnson: As you know from the memo that we sent you—

Chris Bryant: Chad.

Boris Johnson: Chad is happening today—that is just today.

Chair: We welcome Chad, and it is very good that we are supporting the French air base in N'Djamena.

Boris Johnson: The record should reflect that the Committee Chairman welcomed our opening in N'Djamena, notwithstanding. We will be opening 10 new sovereign posts. I will make sure that we give you—

Q287 **Chair:** Can you not tell us perhaps that your priority is the Commonwealth, or China, or the EU27 or Latin America?



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Boris Johnson: If you look to what we said in the Global Britain document, you will find enough to give you—

Q288 **Chair:** You reiterated the policy of the Foreign Office for the last 60 years in the Global Britain report.

Boris Johnson: We think that there are three key areas. That does not necessarily mean that we will not be opening posts in other areas, but we think that there are three key areas where the UK needs to be particularly active: the Americas and North America, the European region and Asia-Pacific. But that does not exclude other areas. That covers quite a lot, as you will appreciate.

Q289 **Chair:** That doesn't narrow it down an awful lot. Can I ask Mr Murray to join us in this discussion?

Boris Johnson: With great respect to you and your Committee, we had not come prepared to make the specific announcements today, but you will get information soon.

Chair: As soon as possible. If you would write to the Committee, we would be very grateful.

Q290 **Ian Murray:** Can I echo Mr Rosindell's thanks for the memo you wrote to us on Global Britain? While we are on memos, can I take you to another one? You wrote a memo to the Prime Minister with regard to a potential hard border in Northern Ireland. On the same day, you promised to publish that memo. Can you tell us when you are likely to publish it?

Boris Johnson: I'm afraid that the contents of that memo were grossly traduced by whichever media organisation—alas, it is not the policy of the Government to publish information simply in response to leaks. I can tell you that the assertions that were made about that memo were directly contrary to what it actually said.

Q291 **Ian Murray:** Could you publish the memo so that we can make that judgment ourselves, as you promised?

Boris Johnson: It is not the policy of the Government, or indeed any Government, simply upon a leak, to publish a memo.

Q292 **Stephen Gethins:** Foreign Secretary, you said that you would publish it.

Boris Johnson: It is not the policy of the Government to publish memos simply because they have been partially and misleadingly leaked.

Q293 **Ian Murray:** Are you still jogging?

Boris Johnson: Yes.

Q294 **Ian Murray:** Because it was during one of your infamous jogs that you promised to publish—

Boris Johnson: I don't see what is infamous about my jogs.

Q295 **Ian Murray:** Do you regret promising to publish it?



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Boris Johnson: As I say, it is not the policy of the Government to publish—

Ian Murray: So you do regret it?

Chair: I think we have heard the answer often enough. Mike, do you want to come in?

Q296 **Mike Gapes:** Last November, Foreign Secretary, you promised, in answer to my question, to take up the fact that the response to “Article 50 negotiations: Implications of ‘no deal’”, which was published by the previous Foreign Affairs Committee in March last year, had not yet been published. You said that you were going to take it up, but nothing happened. I raised a point of order on this last week, on the anniversary of the publication of that document, and miraculously we have now received a letter from the Department for Exiting the European Union. I don’t know if you are aware of this letter, because it has only just come in.

Boris Johnson: I believe I am, but perhaps I’m wrong.

Q297 **Mike Gapes:** Whether it was due to your representations in November last year, or to my point of order last week, somehow we have miraculously got a letter, but we have not got a response. We are still awaiting the response. We have an apology for no response, but no explanation in detail and no report. Do you have any idea when the Department for Exiting the European Union will give us a response?

Boris Johnson: I think the credit for that non-apology non-response letter must go entirely to you, Mr Gapes, rather than to me, but I cannot really elucidate the matter any further, except to say that it is DExEU’s responsibility. The most important point is that David Davis and I are absolutely certain that we will get a great deal for this country and for our friends and partners, too. That is what we are working for.

Q298 **Mike Gapes:** But would you not accept that the implications of a no deal would be very serious, and that it is appropriate and, in fact, customary for Parliament to receive a response normally within two months, although obviously with the election there is a delay, and that it is unacceptable that we have been waiting more than a year?

Boris Johnson: Mr Gapes, I understand your concerns completely.

Q299 **Mike Gapes:** And you agree that it is unacceptable?

Boris Johnson: And I say it is not a matter for us in the FCO, but the point I would make is that no deal is better than a bad deal.

Mike Gapes: Really?

Boris Johnson: It is.

Chair: We have had that answer before. Ann, would you like to move on?

Q300 **Ann Clwyd:** Foreign Secretary, I was in Baghdad recently with a



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parliamentary delegation. I am very concerned about the judicial system in Iraq, which we did so much to support initially, because it is overburdened, given the tens of thousands of people awaiting trial. We need to ensure that there are fair trials of IS suspects in Iraq, in order not to fuel further grievances among the Sunni community. Do we have plans to support that system?

Boris Johnson: You are quite right, Mrs Clwyd, in what you say. We are concerned about the workload in the system. I would like to write to you about what steps we may be taking to support the legal system in Iraq. I have an idea in my head that we have done a lot in the past, at least, but I do not want to mislead the Committee now about what we are doing.

Q301 **Ian Murray:** I have a quick comment, and then a question. On the Foreign Office website, the advice to football supporters travelling to Russia has not been updated since 18 February. I wonder perhaps if it should be updated on the basis of what has happened recently.

Boris Johnson: We will certainly update it as and when we think it necessary to do so.

Q302 **Ian Murray:** Also on the website, one of the key policies of the Foreign Office is the European single market. It says, "The single market is key to Europe's place in the global economy. It can drive growth and jobs". It also says that it drives jobs and growth in the UK. Does the Foreign Secretary agree with that assessment on the Foreign Office website?

Boris Johnson: I think you must be looking at an old version of the website.

Ian Murray: No, I have it here.

Boris Johnson: If it is indeed—

Q303 **Ian Murray:** I will clear the cache just in case it is wrong. No, it is back there again. Do you agree with that?

Boris Johnson: No I don't, as it happens. I think that we will prosper mightily coming out of the single market.

Q304 **Ian Murray:** So the Foreign Secretary doesn't agree with the Foreign Office's website.

Boris Johnson: I will study with interest the page of our website that you have truffled up.

Q305 **Ian Murray:** May I ask you about something else that I have truffled up? The spring statement last week showed that the UK Government will pay contributions to the European Union until at least 2064. I do not know whether you have seen that graph. You said on the "Andrew Marr Show" last weekend that it was complete "claptrap" that the UK would pay any money to the EU post Brexit. Do you still agree with that?

Boris Johnson: I see no reason why we should be making large contributions to the EU.

Q306 Ian Murray: You called it “claptrap”, but it is not claptrap, because the spring statement showed that we would be paying contributions until 2064. Is that true?

Boris Johnson: I see no reason why we should be paying for access to the single market or membership in the way that we are now.

Q307 Ian Murray: So you don’t agree with the FCO’s website, and now you don’t agree with the Chancellor?

Boris Johnson: The Government are resolved that we will not be making large contributions to the EU after we leave. What we may do, as the Prime Minister has said, is continue to participate in common ventures, such as Erasmus, Horizon, EUREKA or whatever, which are projects—EU projects, scientific projects, educational exchange projects—where there is a bill attached. Yes, we certainly may be paying for those, but there is no reason why we should be making contributions in the way that we do now.

Q308 Stephen Gethins: Was the Chancellor speaking claptrap then?

Boris Johnson: I’m afraid that I was not there for the spring statement—alas, I had to be somewhere else—but the Chancellor’s spring statement was excellent in every respect. It is the view of the Government that we will not be making contributions to the EU budget in the way that we do now. We may contribute, as both the Chancellor and the Prime Minister have said, to various EU-associated bodies with which we wish to have a close relationship, but we are not going to be coughing up the EU budget.

Q309 Stephen Gethins: Much as I would like to drill into what you and the Chancellor agree on, I would actually like to ask a quick question on the common foreign and security policy and the transition deal. Why did we go for an opt-out from the common foreign and security policy?

Boris Johnson: Because I think it would be very odd for this country, post-March 2019, to be in a situation—suppose, for instance, that the EU decided collectively that they wished to relax sanctions on Russia over Ukraine after we had left, which I don’t think for a moment would happen. If we were to stay in the CFSP as it is currently configured, we might be obliged to do the same. That would be crazy. Indeed, there might be other ways in which we might be constricted. There might be an embargo placed on such and such a country that we didn’t agree with, or whatever. Under no circumstances could the UK accept that we would be fettered in that way, so what we have gone for is the ability to opt out under article 31 and to be able to vary CFSP as we choose.

Mr Chairman, can I just correct one thing that I said earlier? Accidentally, I referred to the attempted murder of “agents” in Salisbury, rather than “agent”. It is absolutely vital, for reasons I am sure the Committee will understand, that I meant to say “agent”, not “agents”. I hope that the record will reflect that.³

Q310 Chris Bryant: You said “assassins” as well. Did you mean that in the

³ See Q165



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plural?

Boris Johnson: What do you mean—by Russian assassins?

Chris Bryant: You said “assassins” in relation to Salisbury.

Boris Johnson: I don’t know. I can’t confirm, obviously, what—

Chris Bryant: Whether you meant “assassin” or “assassins”.

Boris Johnson: I think we can take it that the operation was not confined to one individual.

Stephen Gethins: Can I just finish up? Thank you for that clarification—

Boris Johnson: For the avoidance of doubt, Mr Bryant, that should not be taken as any particular news or development in the—

Chris Bryant: That’s what I wanted to clear up.

Q311 **Mr Seely:** When you were talking about “agent”, were you referring to the former GRU agent, Colonel Sergei Skripal, or another agent?

Boris Johnson: No, I was referring to Sergei Skripal. Let’s be absolutely clear about that. Mr Tugendhat, I have been here for quite a while, and I just wonder how you are getting on with your—

Chair: We are nearly there, Foreign Secretary. You are being extremely generous and extremely helpful, and I am sure you wouldn’t want us to leave disappointed. Therefore, I know that—

Boris Johnson: I remember vividly—I want to give you every possible assistance, but I am just drawing your attention to the hour.

Chair: We are enormously grateful.

Q312 **Stephen Gethins:** Foreign Secretary, then, let me wind up with just two questions. First, just to finish up that point on security, we have talked about our security relationship with the rest of the European Union being very important. Given that we have gone for the opt-out on CFSP and not gone for opt-outs on other issues—we are still in the common fisheries policy, for example—what kind of message do you think that sends out? Also, why did the Government decide not to lead the EU battlegroup? That is my first question. I will let you answer that one first, then I have one quick question. The second one’s easy.

Boris Johnson: This is all for negotiation, Mr Gethins. The exact configuration of our arrangements under the implementation period are there to be decided. You have got the essence of what the UK is asking for.

Q313 **Stephen Gethins:** Okay. Can I ask you, finally, on a different issue, does the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have any contracts with the SCL Group—Strategic Communication Laboratories?

Boris Johnson: No.



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Karen Pierce: We don't think so, but we will check and let you know.

Boris Johnson: We will check.

Q314 **Stephen Gethins:** You don't think so? Obviously, this came up at Prime Minister's questions today, so you will be aware of it.

Sir Simon McDonald: At first scrub, no.

Stephen Gethins: So it's a no? Okay.

Q315 **Chris Bryant:** In relation to CHOGM, one of the elements that the Government has already said it wants to raise is the issue of LGBT rights.

Boris Johnson: Yes.

Q316 **Chris Bryant:** Why, then, did no Government Minister say to the Bermudian Government, "Please don't abolish same-sex marriage"?

Boris Johnson: Well, Mr Bryant, I must correct you on that. I did have a long conversation with the Premier of Bermuda about that matter, and I made the point to him—what I passionately believe—that one of the reasons why this city, of which I used to be Mayor, is a fantastic place to live is that people feel they can live their lives in any way they want, provided they do no harm to others, and that it is of great economic benefit to show that spirit. That was the argument I made to him—

Q317 **Chris Bryant:** So you said to him, in terms, "Keep same-sex marriage."?

Boris Johnson: I did.

Q318 **Chris Bryant:** Why, then, did the letter that was sent to me from Harriett Baldwin on behalf of the Government make no mention of this, when the express question was whether any Ministers had spoken—

Boris Johnson: I'm just telling you what I did.

Q319 **Chris Bryant:** No, but you need to clarify with other Departments if they are giving incorrect evidence on this.

Boris Johnson: I would be very happy to send you a letter about it.

Q320 **Chris Bryant:** Fine. Just one other thing. On 21 January 2016, you said that the Litvinenko murder "needs the fiercest possible diplomatic response". On 11 August 2016, you said that Britain must "normalise" its relationship with Russia. Isn't the fear that many of us are sensing here that we will say all these things now and in September you will ring up Mr Lavrov and say, "Yes, now we've got to normalise relationships," all over again? Isn't the most important thing that we have a steady state—that we are not flip-flopping or zig-zagging, but just being absolutely resolute?

Boris Johnson: We haven't.

Q321 **Chris Bryant:** Well, from January 2016 to August 2016, you completely changed your mind.



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Boris Johnson: No, that's complete nonsense, Mr Bryant. We have remained absolutely committed to a policy of "engage but beware". It is in its toughness in standing up against Russian bad behaviour around the world, in all the places I described earlier, that Britain has distinguished itself and led the pack, and we continue to do that. The package that we have announced—I heard you yourself stand up to applaud it on Wednesday and to agree with the Prime Minister—

Chris Bryant: I do now. I didn't in 2016.

Boris Johnson: I think it is the right approach. If I may say so, no matter how tough it is—and it is very tough—it should not exclude the duty of this country on matters like the World Cup or on Syria or whatever it happens to be not just to beware the Russians, but, where necessary, to engage with the Russians. That is also vital, so I see no inconsistency in what I said.

Q322 **Royston Smith:** Can I change the subject, Foreign Secretary? You have been very generous with your time, and I know that you will want to get away and not be hindered any longer than absolutely necessary, but I want to talk about Libya if I may.

Chair: Sorry, forgive me. We have just had a tweet, unusually, in which No. 10 has revealed two more Government contracts with SCL, the parent company of Cambridge Analytica. One is with the Foreign Office for training.

Boris Johnson: News to me.

Sir Simon McDonald: News to us.

Chair: We would be very grateful if you wrote to us about that to be clear.

Q323 **Royston Smith:** Libya, Foreign Secretary. You talked about red lines in Syria and whether we should have intervened in 2013. Some of us think we should have, and we didn't. Some of us perhaps think we shouldn't have in Iraq, but we did. I think most people would agree that intervention in Libya was probably the right thing, but planning is not something we have done particularly well. Thousands and thousands of migrants are coming across the Med, thousands of people are being trafficked and there is a dysfunctional Government. At what point do we say that what is there is not good enough and either suggest there should be an alternative or walk away completely?

Boris Johnson: I don't think we can walk away, Mr Smith, at all, because, actually, I think that the Libyan crisis, although it is very, very tough, is capable of solution. What it needs is for a handful of men to put aside their differences and their political fiefdoms, and come together in the interests of the whole country of Libya. We all know who they are—I am sure you know who they are. They can do it; they can compromise.

What needs to happen now is a revision of the constitution of Libya—of the Libyan political accord, the so-called Skhirat agreement. The new UN



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special representative, Ghassan Salamé, is doing, I think, a fantastic job, and he is getting our support in that. It needs a small group of people to lay aside their differences, agree to a constitutional change, and then, when that is bedded in, to have elections and to take the country forward. That is what needs to happen, but the most important thing for Libya now is that the international community does not back different horses and different sides, and that everybody gets behind the UN plan.

Q324 **Chair:** And is Russia joining in on that?

Boris Johnson: Another reason, by the way, to engage with Russia and to encourage them on that path.

Q325 **Mr Seely:** Very briefly, a question on Yemen, Foreign Secretary; I am sorry we have not had a chance to talk about it more because I know it is very important to you. My question: are we looking too much at the west of the country to find a solution? The reason I say that is because in the east you have the Saudis moving eastwards towards the Omani border. You have Omani concerns about the encroaching influence of Saudi, which is not being met with wholehearted approval. You also have smuggling routes—I have sent some pictures of the Mahra tribes identified smuggling routes being used by AQ and ISIS to smuggle weapons and drugs into Yemen, Oman and Saudi, which is obviously destabilising. Is there a role for the UK in Yemen, and is there a role for us to be working with the tribes in the east, rather than joining the cluster of countries trying to solve the problems of Yemen in the west?

Boris Johnson: You're perfectly right that there are two separate things, basically, going on. I think that the UK can be useful in both. In the north-west, as it were, of the country, there is a war going on, which we think has gone on for too long. That is the primary conflict. It has been going on for too long. There is a humanitarian catastrophe unfolding there, as Ms Patel knows very well. The UK can play a very important role, I believe, in encouraging moves towards a political solution.

I think what is necessary is for the Houthis to desist in their bombardment of Saudi Arabia, and to stop using Iranian-made missiles to attack Saudi cities, but it also requires some understanding that there will have to be a political solution in which the Houthis will have to have a role in the government of Yemen and also in which the Iranians are specifically excluded from exercising military or political power in that country, and in which the security of Saudi Arabia is protected. It is in that area that a solution is to be found, and the UK, I can tell you, is heavily engaged in that work.

It is a priority for us. I know that the Committee has asked about some of our priorities. Mr Smith and you, Mr Seely, have mentioned two of them. Libya and Yemen are areas where we consider that the UK has an exceptional role, and we really want to try to promote a solution.

Q326 **Chair:** I know you have had an excellent ambassador in Yemen who has just returned. I am sure you have sent out somebody excellent in replacement. Your relationship, of course, with Mohammad bin Salman



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will be incredibly important in making sure that the Saudis listen to the views of the United Kingdom. The visit last week—did it go well?

Boris Johnson: I thought it was a very important and successful visit, and an opportunity for us to make some of those points to the Saudi leadership. You saw a commitment to invest £65 billion or so in this country from Saudi Arabia, and also to work with the Saudis on Mohammad bin Salman's Vision 2030 for his country. Yes, of course, people have their anxieties and their hesitations, but this is a man who is reforming his country. If he can fundamentally start changing the custodian of the two holiest shrines of Islam, that will make a difference for the world, and we need to encourage it.

Q327 **Chair:** I know that you will welcome the fact that, as you say, as Sharif al-Haramayn he is custodian of two holy places. He has spoken in Arabic—most importantly—about going back to an earlier form of Islam that his grandfathers practised, which was significantly more open than the practice that is now being seen in Saudi Arabia. That is all very, very important, and we hugely welcome it.

Did you also bring up Yemen, though? The reason I ask so specifically is because, of course, we have had a very long-standing relationship—military relationship—with Saudi Arabia, and I know it is very much one of those areas where we can assure them that they are not on the path to success.

Boris Johnson: No. And I think, to be honest, Mr Tugendhat, they understand that. The current approach is severely limited, to say the least. That is a point that the Crown Prince well understands, and I can tell you that Yemen is a subject of continuous dialogue between us.

Q328 **Ian Austin:** The suggestion from Washington—it looks as though they are going to tear up the Iran deal or force through the end of the sunset clause, or require ballistic missiles to be included. Do you recognise the high likelihood of change to the Iran deal? If the alternative was the US walking away from the deal and reimposing secondary sanctions, would you accept modifications to the sunset clause date and the inclusion of the banning of ballistic missiles in the deal to keep it alive?

Boris Johnson: The deal itself is very, very important and valuable, and we want to keep it going. There are things we can do without vitiating or opening up the deal to stress the accessibility of sites to the IAEA and the range of the missiles—no more than 2,000 km. We can do that.

There is the issue, of course, of the sunset clauses. That is probably the most difficult thing, because in order to bury the sunset clauses, arguably you do have to open up the text of the JCPOA, and that would be very difficult for Iran.

Q329 **Ian Austin:** Do you think that some sort of compromise is possible on this?

Boris Johnson: I think it is—I really think it is—and I think it has got to be done. There is a huge amount of work going on to try to do that. There



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is strong agreement about that between us and our allies. The effort now is to persuade our American friends of the value of maintaining this arrangement. I would not want to be absolutely certain which way the President is going to go on this, but I hope he will see the logic of our case that you are better off with a JCPOA and an Iran not armed with nuclear weapons than scrapping it and the Iranians immediately going for a nuclear weapon. By the way, just to be clear, I also think—although it would be much less valuable and probably very difficult to work—it is possible to envisage a JCPOA without the United States. But obviously that will be very difficult to achieve.

Q330 Ian Austin: Thank you. Finally, could I just ask what you think it says about the unity of the Cabinet and No. 10's confidence in you that, whenever you come to our Committee, No. 10 send along the Prime Minister's PPS to keep an eye on you?

Boris Johnson: Where is he? Seema!

Ian Austin: Every time. I am really struck by this.

Boris Johnson: I think it is an honour, and a measure of the cheek-by-jowl, hand-in-glove, almost glutinous harmony that exists across all Departments of Government that we feel free to come and sit—

Chair: Okay, I think we've got it.

Can I thank you? Given that we finished on a question on Iran, I am sure you will join me in wishing nowruz mobarak to all of our Iranian Persian-speaking, Kurdish and Afghan friends. It is a wonderful happy new year for them.

Boris Johnson: Happy new year!

Chair: Before we close, may I also thank Karen Pierce, who has been the most extraordinary political director for the Foreign Office and wish her every good will on her trip to New York to represent us at the UN?

Karen Pierce: Thank you very much.

Chair: I am sure you will achieve the restoration of the place of a British judge on the ICJ. We are looking forward to that very, very much. Foreign Secretary, Permanent Under-Secretary, Political Director, thank you.