



Select Committee on International Relations

Corrected oral evidence: UK foreign policy in changed world conditions

Wednesday 24 October 2018

10.35 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Howell of Guildford (Chairman); Baroness Anelay of St Johns; Baroness Coussins; Lord Grocott; Lord Hannay of Chiswick; Baroness Helic; Baroness Hilton of Eggardon; Lord Jopling; Lord Reid of Cardowan; Baroness Smith of Newnham.

Evidence Session No. 19

Heard in Public

Questions 219 - 230

Witness

I: The Rt Hon Emily Thornberry MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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

Examination of witness

Emily Thornberry MP.

Q219 **The Chairman:** Shadow Secretary of State, good morning, and thank you for being with us. I have to make the usual routine points that this is a public session; it is all recorded. A full transcript is available afterwards, which you can adjust where you do not think it represents what you have said. I also have to remind my colleagues about declaring any interests relevant to any questions they may ask. That is the formalities over.

Shadow Secretary of State, you may or may not be aware that this Committee is engaged in a report and overview of changes in the foreign policy world. We have had copious evidence over many months that the conditions in which foreign policy is now being conducted—by any Government and certainly by ours—are changing very fast and very radically.

The change points are obvious: populism, a much wider audience involved in foreign policy discussion; non-state actors; weakening of Governments; big power shifts in the world; enormous gaps in such areas as gender equality, and vast disparities in equalities generally; general unrest; protectionism; and the allowances and assumptions of the last 70 years all now in question.

I begin with a general question from those comments. As you formulate Labour foreign policy and think about its conduct in the future, how do you see those changes affecting you? What is your assessment of the things I have just said?

Emily Thornberry MP: Thank you very much for inviting me. It is a real pleasure to be here. I do not know where to start; there are so many elements in this.

Where do we begin? We see a fragmenting of the world order; you are absolutely right about that. The things we have taken for granted seem to be falling apart in our hands as we watch them. There is a lack of respect for multilateralism; a lack of respect for organisations where the world comes together. People always ask why the UN is so weak, but the UN, in my view, is only ever an expression of the will of the world.

Then there are other forces, as you say, such as populism. To me, the most scary things are these deep veins of anti-democratic forces; we need to be very concerned about them. They are happening in the West and elsewhere. We are seeing the growth of big men—they are the forces behind what is happening in the world. We have new ways of talking to each other—or talking at each other. The world shrinks and people want immediate reactions to what is going on without the chance to think through what is happening in what can be extremely complex situations.

I got caught on this in the new year, for example, when there were demonstrations in Iran. I said we needed to treat with caution what was happening in Iran because it was not necessarily black and white. There were demonstrations and, in the second largest city, it seemed to me,

there were demonstrations being set out against Rouhani, and some that might be seen as supporting liberal forces; there were demonstrations about the price of eggs. Lots of different demonstrations were happening; there was a conflagration of all this unhappiness in Iran. I said, 'Let's just pause and see what is going on here' and then found myself being accused of being a supporter of the Iranian regime and not understanding. But it is very difficult to do a proper analysis on Twitter of what is really happening in Iran. I think that is quite a good example; people think, 'This regime is bad, these people are demonstrating against it, therefore they must be good'. Of course, things are never quite as simple as that.

There is a much greater interest in international affairs. In Britain, there has tended to be a unity between the Opposition and the Government about its approach to foreign affairs; that is not happening now. There is not the unity at the water's edge that there used to be, where Britain stands united against the world.

In politics these days, there are deep divisions about what our approach ought to be. I believe Labour's approach is very different to that of the current Government. I believe ours is a more popular approach and I am happy to go into details.

The Chairman: Do you think that the breaking up of the old consensus that you describe, is happening because the building blocks of that consensus have started to evaporate? I am thinking, for example, of the transatlantic alliance; the assumption that all the power is in the West; and the assumption that Governments deal with foreign policy, when in fact so many forces are outside Governments.

Emily Thornberry MP: No. One way in which we have taken away our anchor is by losing our standing in the world—our principles and what we stand for as a country. Even if the leadership in some other countries has changed temporarily, fundamentally the majority of people have the same views that we have: we should not act unless we act in a unified way; we should uphold human rights; we should do the right thing and we should be a force for good in the world. There are too many countries in which the leadership has temporarily lost its way. We used to be in many ways a force for good, but we have disappeared into a Brexit black hole and have lost our way in terms of what our influence could be. I think that the world misses us. When there is such a vacuum in leadership, there is a role for us in stepping forward, and it is a great shame that we are not doing that.

Of course, there are other forces, and of course there are forces that are a challenge to the old way when a state expresses the will of its people simply by being the state. There are other ways and people have other ways of expressing themselves, but there still needs to be leadership. There is no leadership, which is what worries me.

Q220 **Lord Jopling:** One of your first comments to us was that there are many elements to all this. That is an understatement if ever I heard one.

Moving to the specifics, we have had a lot of evidence during this inquiry about the growing power of China, which of course is crucial. At the same time, the relatively new regime in the United States is having a profound effect on foreign policy. Another issue that we have not come to specifically is the influence of Russia and its operations in hybrid warfare of one sort or another. This is very much a current issue but I must ask you about the situation in Saudi Arabia. It is of great concern and the implications of what has been going on there for the whole power balance in the Middle East, which is so important. Could you comment on those four areas?

Emily Thornberry MP: Let me start on where I think the centre of this is. We have come to rely on the United States as being reliable, predictable and understandable. We now have a President whose very shtick is being unreliable—of throwing around the world order by sending out tweets. We do not know what he means. He will say things like 'North Korea will face shock and awe', or whatever. It will come out in the middle of the night and then we ask, 'What does he mean? What will happen next?'. Or he will start a trade war with China. He will then tear up the INF Treaty¹ and say that one reason is that the Chinese are not involved in the agreement. That has a profoundly destabilising effect. It is very difficult for the world to know how to respond because historically the Americans have been predictable. They have worked with their allies and friends; we have been able to talk to them and we have always felt, wrongly or rightly, that we have some influence. For example, ever since Nixon was given the pandas, America has always tried to be friends with China, and now we have what would seem to be deliberate attempts to break that link and influence or to break up the ongoing relationship. Where does that take us? That is very frightening when you are watching from the outside and feel that you have no control over the situation.

In those circumstances, what is one's response to China? There is a challenge for China too. When essentially the seat that has in many ways been filled by America is vacated and there is a vacuum, there is a role for China too. The Chinese are very good at bilaterals; we know about their influence in America, South America and Africa. There are other challenges, so will China step up and take some responsibility for cutting back on nuclear weapons? Will China take some responsibility when it comes to development? There is also the issue of refugees and many other things. Looking at China now, you might think, 'Well, that's fantasy. They're not going to take a role in that', but you need to think about it. I went to Copenhagen for the climate change talks. Looking at the way that China was then and the way it is now in relation to climate change, I would never have believed the change that has taken place. China has shown over the years that it can take a leadership role, so the challenge for China, as it is for all of us, is that perhaps we can no more complacently expect America to take the right lead and hold things together. The challenge for us all is to step up to that.

¹ The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty

In the meantime, we have Russia. People ask what Russia's strategy is. I do not think that Russia necessarily has a strategy. I think that it has deep unhappiness with the way things are at the moment and it wants them to change. It will take advantage of any weakness that we show and be opportunistic. The answer is to make sure that we do not show any weakness and are completely clear about what we stand for, who our friends are, and who we will and will not protect. Otherwise, if we show any cracks, they will come in.

I thought that the attack in Salisbury was shocking and appalling in its arrogance, recklessness and incompetence, but the other thing of note was where it took place—in Salisbury, which is at the very heart of the military establishment. Many senior people in the military live in Salisbury and it is right by Porton Down. It was extraordinarily bold and frightening to make an attack in the centre of the city. It was absolutely right for the Government—and all credit to them—to get our allies and those who share our values to stand with us and to say, 'We must together say that this is unacceptable'. All credit to the police and the security services for being able to show the evidence and demonstrate just how incompetent the attack had been, as well as showing that without a doubt the Russians were responsible. That is a glimmer of the sort of strength that we could have. I just wish us to have more.

I have made notes of the things that you are asking about. You asked about America, China and Russia. The other area is Saudi Arabia, which has been a long-term ally of ours, but that does not mean that we have to accept everything it does. We have to be very careful, particularly with the new leadership in Saudi Arabia, not to indulge it and not to think that anything it does is fine because we rely on it. Actually, the Saudis rely on us too. Yes, we sell them planes and bombs and all sorts of other defence equipment, but they rely on our weaponry and our armaments and we should have a little more confidence in ourselves. We should have been much clearer about how wrong it was for the Crown Prince to persuade the Prime Minister of Lebanon to go on a so-called hunting trip, to beat him up and to put him on television, telling him that he has to resign. We really should have been much clearer about how unacceptable that was. We should have stood with Canada when it was talking about the arrests, particularly of women who have advocated and campaigned for women's rights. It is not good enough for us to say, 'He's given women the right to drive. Isn't that great?' That does not cover everything. The bombing campaign in Yemen has been simply wrong. I do not think that we should have been involved in it and we should have been clearer about how unacceptable it was.

Our voice should have been louder. This goes back to the question of who we are. Post-Brexit, are we interested only in trade deals or are we who we have always been, and who we think we are? What are we proud of? We think that most international law was written by British lawyers. We think that many of the multilateral institutions would not be as they are without us. We think we have power, influence and an understanding of the world. We think that we stand for certain principles. Why do we not

stand by them? Why are we not proud? Why are we allowing ourselves to be shrunk in a way that I believe we are?

If we had made it clearer at an earlier stage that we believe the behaviour of the Saudi Arabian leadership at the moment is unacceptable, we would have had an influence. I appreciate Saudi Arabia has been emboldened by the behaviour of an erratic US President. That is part of it too, but only makes it more important that we are not a Trump Mini Me—that we are who we are, we work with our friends, and we make clear what is acceptable and what is not acceptable.

Baroness Smith of Newnham: I will follow on from two of your answers—the one just now on Saudi Arabia and the answer on China. On Saudi, does there come a point when we should stop selling them planes? Should we take a stronger line and say, “With what you are doing in Yemen and other things, we are going to respond with more than rhetoric”? Regarding China, you said that at times it is willing to take a leadership role, which it has done recently on climate change. To what extent is China a potential ally on some, or even more than some, issues?

Emily Thornberry MP: China is potentially an ally, but I just wish it was sometimes a little more proactive. I was at a Security Council debate on the chemical attacks in Syria and China’s input was not memorable. That is a shame because it could have done more.

With regard to selling planes to Saudi Arabia, it has been our policy since the previous shadow Foreign Secretary to me that we do not believe we should sell armaments that can be used in the war on Yemen. Until and unless there has been an independent, international investigation into war crimes on both sides, we are very concerned that our planes and bombs may be being used for what seem to be breaches of international humanitarian law. We see it time and time again. When a funeral, a wedding, a bus carrying children, a milk factory or agricultural land have been bombed, the Saudis first deny it. Then, when there is overwhelming evidence, they say, ‘It is rogue elements’.

Either they are behaving in a controlled way, which is appalling, or they are behaving in a way that is not controlled, which is even more appalling. Which is it? The difficulty is that as they continue to use our weaponry, we are complicit, so we have to stop. This is not right and it has not been right for years. It was made much worse when the Crown Prince came to Britain this year and we rolled out the red carpet for him. We were claiming that he is some great reformer just because he has given women the right to drive. Presumably they cannot drive without an adult male with them, and presumably they still have to be completely covered, but they are allowed to drive. All the women who campaigned to be allowed to drive are now in prison and are being threatened with beheading. Is this a reformer? If you look at the increase in the number of people who have been executed in Saudi Arabia during the first eight months of the Crown Prince taking control, it is very worrying indeed.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: On the question about China, I deduce from what you say that you do not share the view of Vice President Mike Pence that China is a systematic adversary of ours. Of course, he was only talking about the United States, but I think we still have a quandary which perhaps you could address. How does Britain, which is a middle-ranking power with a bit of vulnerability in the shape of Hong Kong, approach issues on which China is not performing as a responsible stakeholder? I agree with your analysis about climate change and possibly some of the analysis about trade rules where China clings to the WTO when it is helpful, but its attitude to the Law of the Sea has been totally adversarial, as has some of its behaviour on trade policy issues. How does Britain set about coping with this, given that, as I imagine you would agree, we cannot do very much by acting on our own?

Emily Thornberry MP: That is right, and of course there is the issue—the elephant in the room—of China’s human rights record; I understand that. I wish I had all the answers, but that is why one needs to work multilaterally and we need to work with friends. That is the only way in which we can increase our influence and it is how we have always done things in the past. We need to put more work into doing that.

The Chairman: Which friends?

Emily Thornberry MP: People who share our values. A lot of them are in Europe, Canada, Australia and, in relation to the South China Sea, in Japan too. We need to work with people in the region because of course we cannot do it by ourselves. When we are able to, we need to work with the United States as well. The United States is not just the President. I have met Senators and Congresspeople in America with whom there is no doubt that we share values. We would begin to talk and it was clear that we were completely eye to eye. There is an alliance to be made with people in America who have the same values as us. Many of them share our history, culture and politics. We can work with people like that.

We have to learn, hopefully just in the short term, how to work round the American President, particularly since the Administration is so unpredictable. We do not even know who it is we work with because people come and go so fast. You think that you have identified someone you can work with and then they are off. That makes life very difficult, but we are not alone in having this problem. Other countries around the world are trying different ways to deal with it. Our way is certainly not working and frankly it is humiliating.

Q221 **Baroness Helic:** Shadow Foreign Secretary, as a Conservative may I say that I am a huge admirer of the former Foreign Secretary Robin Cook. When you wrote about the foreign policy of a potential Labour Government, I was pleased to see that you quoted him and referred often to ethical foreign policy. I got to know Secretary Cook when he was involved in the Balkans and he showed exceptional leadership there. How do you feel today, when all the gains that were made through his work and understanding of the region, seem to be unravelling? I refer in particular to the potential exchange of territories, correcting of borders

and exchange of populations between Kosovo and Serbia. Do you support this or do you still support Foreign Secretary Cook's policy, which was that border changes in the Balkans were finished in 1999?

Emily Thornberry MP: We share a mutual admiration of Robin Cook. I stood in a very marginal seat and Robin came to underline the fact that I was standing as a proud member of the Labour Party but also as one of the proud members of the Labour Party who did not agree with the Iraq war. When I came into Parliament, I would ask his advice and I always found him to be very wise. It is a great shame that he did not remain in the Foreign Office for longer than he did and that he did not get the support that he should have had in the longer term from the leadership. That is my honest view. The difficulty with the Balkans is that obviously things change, and they change quickly. I do not think Robin's views on the Balkans can be fossilised. We always have to look at the facts on the ground as they are. I am really proud that our Government did what they did in relation to Kosovo and that we intervened. It was the right thing to do.

It highlights another issue, which I appreciate you have not spoken about but we need to talk about it too. When do we get involved in military intervention, and does it always have to be with the unanimous support of the Security Council when one country on the Security Council is against it and vetoes it, yet it is clearly the will of the world—the United Nations has discussed it and it is clear that other countries in the world want there to be some intervention? In those circumstances, we have to be a little lighter on our feet. That is an ongoing debate that we need to have, and clearly it is a question of degree, but we cannot stand aside when a country is slaughtering its citizens, or potentially doing so. But it really is a question of looking at and learning from Chilcot,² looking at and learning from our own experiences and being involved when we know that there is a credible plan for what happens afterwards.

The Chairman: We have talked about the fact that we do not like what is going on in Saudi Arabia, that the Russians are aggressive and awkward, and that China is not following the rules in every area, and in fact in some areas is blatantly attacking the rules-based order. Regarding America, although you have talked about good Congressmen and there are always pro-British people in Congress, the American alliance is undoubtedly wobbly. I am not totally clear where your party and your policy would begin to look for, to use the Prime Minister's language, new partners and new allies. It seems that we will not have any allies at all.

Emily Thornberry MP: I do not think that the alliance with America is wobbly; I simply do not think that President Trump reflects the values of the majority of the American people. I think that the alliance is still there; we just have a problem at the moment with the current President, who is very difficult to work with, and we have to find a way of working around him. I do not think that America has fundamentally changed. It is the

² The Report of the Iraq Inquiry, published on 6 July 2016.

country that we have been close to for decades, if not longer. Let us be straight about this.

The Chairman: I am treading on a question that Lord Hannay is going to ask.

Q222 **Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** I want to move on to the catchphrase 'the rules-based international order'. Perhaps you could also say whether you share the view that whoever is in government needs to explain a bit more clearly to the British electorate what the rules-based international order is and why it affects every person, whether it is through trade, human rights or a range of things. There is a tendency to use this phrase as though it is the sort of knock-down argument and then you can carry on. I do not think that most people out there know what it means, so I would be grateful if you could say whether you think that a bit more effort needs to be put into explaining it.

Having said that, we have had a huge amount of evidence—it is becoming a tsunami now—about the way that the rules-based international order is under stress and under threat. Each week brings another example—the withdrawal of the United States from the INF Treaty being the most recent.

How do you think a United Kingdom whose Government you were in would set about sustaining and strengthening the rules-based international order, faced with, as you say, a rather erratic and difficult-to-handle United States President heading a country that, after all, set up that order and is an essential part of it, or at least was until—

Emily Thornberry MP: Set it up with our help.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Yes. Could you say a bit about that and about how to handle the question of sustaining and strengthening the rules-based international order?

Emily Thornberry MP: You are right: we in the bubble know what we mean by it, but it is important that we talk about it more than we do. I have to say that I do that; I go around and talk to people about foreign policy and why it ought to be what it is. With the change of leadership in the Labour Party and Jeremy becoming leader, it is interesting that foreign policy has become much more important within the Labour Party. I think that our different approach is very popular with the public. You get all kinds of people talking about foreign affairs, whereas they had not been interested in talking about it before. There is now the idea that there are certain ideals behind what we do.

Let me give you a really controversial example. It is one that we got into a lot of trouble about but we were right. There was an allegation that chemical weapons had been used in Syria, although I cannot remember which occasion it was. We got a tweet from President Trump in the middle of the night saying that he was going to do something about it and, before I could turn around, the French and the British were

supporting President Trump in a bombing campaign, albeit limited. It seemed to me to be completely not thought through.

Of course, the chemical weapons treaty³ is an absolute and no one should breach it, and where there are breaches, we have to do something about them. But the question is: what do you do? An increasingly small number of countries think that it is for them to do something about it without consulting others and without necessarily acting on their behalf. The idea that you should enforce international law by effectively breaching international law makes no sense to me at all. Surely, first we should have done some work to ascertain that there had been a chemical attack, what the nature of the attack was and who was responsible, and then we should have held those involved to account. There was no need to do it immediately—the next morning—because President Trump had put out a tweet in the middle of the night. The right thing would have been for us to keep cool heads and to do something about it multilaterally so that the world could say, 'That is unacceptable. We will do something about it'.

We have to work together. You know better than I do how incredibly difficult and frustrating it can be, all the knots that you will get into and the game-playing that will go on, but you have to be clear about it. Just because it is hard does not mean that it is not the right thing to do. In fact, it is easier for certain politicians to say, 'Well, that's terrible. We've seen some terrible pictures. We must do something about it and be seen to do something about it', and not think through what they are doing, why they are doing it or what the effect will be. That seems to be a very good example. We can explain why we are doing what we are doing and why it is important that we work together.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Perhaps I may interrupt you in the example you are giving before you move on to the wider question, which I think is of great interest to the Committee. In the example you have given, the Russians had prevented the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons from carrying out any work involving attribution of responsibility. That road was simply blocked; it had been closed by the Russian veto and the Russians' behaviour on the Security Council. I honestly do not think that it is a good example on which to argue that it was a bit impetuous to respond, considering that the regime had been dropping chlorine, which is not a banned substance but whose use as a weapon the Chemical Weapons Convention does ban, day after day—I think the record is now 170 times. I am not sure that it is a very good example, but perhaps you could go on—

Emily Thornberry MP: May I just answer that? The OPCW had had a role in confirming that chemical weapons had been used. Then there was another organisation—it may have been called the JIT;⁴ I cannot remember—that was supposed to look at culpability. There was a debate about some of the conclusions that that organisation had reached, because on previous occasions it had not necessarily been there on the

³ Chemical Weapons Convention

⁴ The OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism on Chemical Weapons Use in Syria

ground but had taken evidence from sources that were somewhat questionable. So I quite understand that it is frustrating, and I was kind of alluding to that. Since then, however, there has been further agreement on how you can attribute culpability and a re-establishment of a means by which that can be done.

We also know that it is not just Assad who has been responsible for chemical attacks. That is why it is important that it is proved not only that there has been a chemical attack but who has been responsible for it. As I say, it cannot be established overnight, but we need to be strong and clear about it, and make sure that it is attributed and proved and that people are then held to account.

I just give it as an example of what we mean. We cannot just trot out the phrase 'the rules-based international order' and then not adhere to it ourselves. It should not just be something that we use when it is convenient for us and then ignore it when it is not convenient or when it is annoying or will take too long. We need to be conscious that when we tread over the line, we undermine it. We do not have completely clean hands in relation to this at all times.

No one is perfect and I am not being po-faced about this, but a very important part of a Labour foreign policy would be reaffirming the importance of working through the United Nations in particular—something that Jeremy is very keen on—supporting the role of the United Nations and doing everything we can to strengthen such bodies.

Q223 Baroness Coussins: Following on from the question about the rules-based international order, we have heard from a number of witnesses to our inquiry that they think that international organisations such as the UN should strengthen their links with the private sector when it comes to delivering programmes and policies, and that the UK should engage more and better with the private sector in developing our own foreign policy. This view has been expressed mainly in the context of technology but also in the context of development and humanitarian aid programmes and policies. What is your view on the merits or otherwise of engaging with the private sector and whether the private sector has a legitimate role in the context of developing foreign policy for the UK?

Emily Thornberry MP: I am a pragmatist more than anything else, so I would not say no, but nor would I automatically say yes. Sometimes people go on either side of this. I think it should be acknowledged that Britain has an extraordinary depth and wealth of experience when it comes to NGOs, whose experiences are second to none. Sometimes we take the voluntary sector for granted. We could do more work with it and we should be strengthening it as much as anything else. But in the end—I am sorry to give you a general answer—we need to go with what works in centres of particular need.

Baroness Coussins: I was thinking about international business rather than NGOs.

Emily Thornberry MP: International business doing what specifically?

Baroness Coussins: Participating in the delivery of development and humanitarian aid programmes or participating in the formulation of what some kind of regulatory regime to do with technology might look like.

Emily Thornberry MP: So long as we do not fall into thinking that the best way to do development is to increase trade and that, by increasing trade, we help with development. That is foggy thinking. Development is development and trade and trade, and they should be kept separate. We should use our development budget because it is the right thing to do, and we should separate it from our need for trade. That is the only thing that I would say, and I am sorry not to be able to be more helpful.

The Chairman: Trade follows investment and investment follows trade. Investment and the movement of capital are very much influenced by connections and communications and the whole IT/internet revolution that we are living through. I do not see how you can keep these things separate. In my view, there is a new framework in the developing countries, in the connectivity between developed and developing countries, and in the vast use by Governments of algorithms and the great energy and communications firms. Does this not present for you a new picture in which some new thoughts are needed?

Emily Thornberry MP: You are taking me into development policy, which is not really my brief.

The Chairman: Fair enough.

Emily Thornberry MP: It is a little more difficult for me. When I went to Rwanda, I was really struck by the fact that the internet connection was better there than it was in France. It has clearly thought through the steps that it needs to take in developing itself as a country. It was very interesting to see a system of roads being built when people did not really have cars. Nevertheless, it was very interesting to see forward thinking about where Rwanda was going and why it was going there. However, I am afraid that I cannot help much more than that.

Q224 **Lord Reid of Cardowan:** In the context of the crumbling world order, I go back to the point raised by Baroness Helic and about which you have written recently—that is, an ethical foreign policy. One of the great challenges in applying an ethical foreign policy, whether we are talking about Robin Cook or anyone else, is that very often it involves working with and having discussions with allies and looking for a non-violent way out of a problem. But in some situations—indeed, under Robin Cook in Sierra Leone, Bosnia and Kosovo—it involves, without the authorisation of the United Nations, the use of the military. Could you outline the criteria by which military intervention might be acceptable and appropriate under an ethical foreign policy? I fully accept that not all problems have a military solution—indeed, some might not have a solution at all, however intolerable they might be. Would you take the chance to lay to rest the lie that somehow an ethical foreign policy is a pacifist foreign policy?

Emily Thornberry MP: I am not a pacifist; Jeremy Corbyn is not a pacifist; we are not pacifists. The question is: when do you use military intervention and when do you not? It is not whether you should; of course there is not an absolute ban on it. A doctrine that Robin tried to develop was the doctrine of responsibility to protect, but unfortunately it came to an end and was never really embedded in international law. That is a great shame. We need to do further work on that.

There are two reasons why R2P came to an end. First, there was great suspicion of it. It was thought that it would be a cloak used to cover a minority of quite powerful states deciding that they would be the world's policeman, whatever the world had to say. Who are they to decide, and in what circumstances should there be intervention? That was one problem. The other problem with R2P was the fact that it was the doctrine used in Libya. The world community agreed that something had to be done and there had to be military intervention. It would be led by America, Britain, France and regional allies. All the boxes were ticked in international law, and then look what happened. There was not really a plan for what would happen thereafter. That is the issue.

Who makes the decision and how do you justify that decision? If you cannot justify it as a world decision, who is to say that anyone has the authority to be involved in military intervention? Also, how can you justify it if you do not have a long-term plan? You have to ask not only whether the military intervention will give immediate relief but whether it will make the situation worse. There is the idea that you can cut the head off a snake and somehow that will make the situation better, but it just gives you a dead snake. There has to be deeper thought about why we are getting involved.

This comes back to Chilcot. I am afraid I am going to make a party political point but when the Chilcot report came out and I talked in the Chamber about the importance of its lessons, I was very disappointed that the current Government said, 'We've already learned the lessons of Chilcot'.

If we had learned the lessons of Chilcot, we would not be in the difficulties that we are in in relation to, say, Syria, or Libya in particular. I voted for military action and I regret that. We should have thought through what it involved and should not just have gone on the assurances that the Government gave us. We should have been much more confident that there was a long-term plan.

Lord Reid of Cardowan: May I just repeat the question? I do not disagree with you on Libya, I kind of agree with you on Syria, and I am not sure that we have learned the lessons of Iraq, but the point that I made was that military intervention in Kosovo, Bosnia, Sierra Leone and elsewhere saved thousands—maybe tens or hundreds of thousands—of lives. Therefore, I wanted to give you the opportunity to describe the criteria for military intervention. You have now made it plain that you are not a pacifist and a Labour government would not be pacifist, but what would the criteria for intervention be? Can you say whether there is

anywhere in the world at the moment—Yemen or anywhere else—where you might support intervention by military means along with others? Is that possible?

Emily Thornberry MP: I cannot think of anywhere at the moment. In a previous answer I said that Kosovo was a really good example of the difficulty that you can have if you do not have a doctrine like responsibility to protect or an alternative to that. Obviously, in international law at the moment you can use force if you yourself are being attacked or your ally is being attacked and you are there to defend an ally. Otherwise you can intervene in another country only if the Security Council agrees. That is a caricature of the current law. But what do we do about cases that are on the edges of that? That is the issue. Without developing a slightly more pragmatic legal doctrine, we are in difficulties. We need to recognise and be honest about that. We also need to be very mindful of the lessons of Chilcot.

Part of the problem in Bosnia was that the mandate given to the peacekeepers was that they were not allowed to use any sort of force. My dad was in Bosnia as one of the peacekeepers. He was kept hostage in Mostar by the desperate people there, who were really worried about what was going to happen to them. We saw some of the terrible things that happened in Bosnia. It was a great challenge to all of us. It was one reason why, in the end, people felt that we could not hold back when it came to Kosovo. I hope that that helps.

Q225 **Lord Grocott:** In your answers you have spelled out very clearly the fundamental dilemma involved in foreign policy. On the one hand, there is the idealism, if you like, of the ethical foreign policy that Robin Cook enunciated; on the other hand, you have described yourself as a pragmatist. It seems that that dilemma is practically the heart of the matter for anyone exercising foreign policy. On the one hand, we are in favour of human rights; on the other hand, we see what you have described, and I agree with you: we see China as a country that might be very helpful to us in certain aspects of defending the international order while at the same time having a human rights record that we would prefer to look the other way on.

Is not the truth that, however much we try to generalise about the structure in which we all conduct our foreign policy, in practical terms it is almost impossible to give answers without reference to specific problems and difficulties as and when they arise? That makes it very frustrating, I have to say, but there is always a risk in running up a flag that says 'Ethical foreign policy' and then coming to the difficult question of how to deal with a great power, as opposed to a small power that you can perhaps sort out—Sierra Leone being a good example. It seems to me that that dilemma is at the heart of foreign policy, and that is why it is very difficult to answer questions on the basis of a generalisation as opposed to specifics.

Emily Thornberry MP: Yes, I understand what you are saying and of course it is a question of degree. However, I think that there is a big

difference between the approach to this taken by the Opposition and the approach taken by the Government. That is because we begin by thinking that Britain could be a force for good in the world, particularly when there is a vacuum of world leadership. I am not saying that we would do it by ourselves but, if there were plenty of other countries with which we had a great deal in common, we could work with them and nudge the world in the right direction. I do not think that we are doing that at the moment but we should.

Q226 The Chairman: Still on the subject of generalisations, we talk about hard power but have you thought at all about soft power or smart power? The Foreign Office has told us that it has set up a new organisation concerned with soft-power management across Whitehall. Have you thought about that sort of thing?

Emily Thornberry MP: Absolutely. I often say that as a country, in my view, we should be a bit less arrogant and a bit more confident about who we are and the influence that we can have. Without doubt, we have a great deal going for us. We have the brains trust that is the Foreign Office; we have our history internationally; we have links and friendships, and common history, although not always good, with many countries around the world; we have English; we have so much. We underestimate the influence of the BBC. I know of stories where, if something happens, such as war breaking out, news rooms switch to the BBC from whichever news outlet they have been using because they know that they can rely on it. There are many things that we can do. We should recognise that, be proud of it and use it—of course.

Q227 Baroness Helic: I declare an interest, as I am going to ask about the preventing sexual violence initiative that I have worked on and continue to work on. I was pleased to hear the shadow Foreign Secretary talk about confidence without arrogance. That is a very good starting point when acting in the world. Talking about soft power, one of the initiatives that Foreign Secretary Hague started in 2013 related to preventing sexual violence—that is, trying to reverse, stop and manage sexual violence and help victims of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations. So far I have not heard from the Labour benches in our House or the other House on this matter. How do you feel about it? Is it an initiative that you would support? Is it an area where you see Britain doing things that it does not have to do but can do because it is a country with an understanding and a moral authority to lead on it?

Emily Thornberry MP: There is one thing that comes to mind that we have been harrying the Government about. I may be wrong about the number but I think that there are 107 or 110 advisers on this issue, and we have asked how many of them are now in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh helping the traumatised women and Rohingya people. There only ever seem to be four or five, so we have asked what has happened to the other 105 of them and what they are doing. What worries me sometimes is the practical application of these policies. It is always the way, is it not? You can have the best policies in the world but you have to ask how they are applied.

There is one thing that I think we need to do more work on, and I have spoken to the Swedes about this. I also spoke to some Bosnians about it, but the paper has been written only in Serbo-Croat. I am talking about having an initiative whereby it is expected that a certain proportion—it has to be a realistic proportion; obviously I would like it to be half, but it cannot be half—of peacekeepers are women, and about the different dynamic that you would have in countries if there were.

Obviously that would help with the terrible allegations in relation to abuse. Equally, I suspect that there would be a different approach, which would be interesting. Bosnia is one of the few countries where quite a high proportion of peacekeepers are women. I believe that there are studies on this and I have asked UN Women to look at it. We can say what we think would happen but is there any evidence to show that there is an improvement and that it makes things better? That would be quite a good initiative.

The Chairman: There is one more aspect to the new situation. Lord Reid has a question.

Q228 **Lord Reid of Cardowan:** It is on technology. We completely accept that you want the high-level access to information on this that a government Minister would have. It is obvious to everyone that we are living through the biggest technological revolution in a huge number of areas. In industrial production, it is probably the biggest since the steam engine; in information, it is probably the biggest since the printing press; and in communications, it is bigger even than the telegraph. All of those things affect international relations. My question is simply this: how do you think the country and the Government are doing in meeting that challenge? Where are the major omissions and what would you like to see being done about it?

Emily Thornberry MP: It is interesting that we are one of the very few countries that has said publicly that we will and we do use cybertechnology to attack. It is ridiculous that some countries claim that they use it only defensively when we all know full well that they use it to attack. That is a good place to be—it is honest. From what I am told, and I have had some briefings on this, recently there has been quite a lot of investment in cybertechnology. That is good but we can always do more, and it is something on which we can work with our allies. I have been briefed on some of the ways we work with them, particularly in relation to Daesh. This is obviously public knowledge. The cells might have gone and the caliph might not be there any more in the territory they held, but online Daesh continues to be a real threat. How do we disrupt and undermine that? The work on that with allies is impressive but there is always more that can be done. That is the sort of thing we need to do.

With regard to other states potentially attacking us, we have only to look at what happened in Ukraine and 10 years ago in Tallinn. These attacks are just as intimidating as tanks rolling over the hills when your internet servers all go down, the banks do not work any more, there is robocalling

of your state institutions and Russian speakers are told to drive slowly around the centre of the city. That attack happened 10 years ago.

When I was first given the job of shadow Defence Secretary three years ago, I talked about the 21st century threats that Britain would face. I talked about cyberattacks, propaganda and interference in other people's systems. I was told that I was hysterical and a fantasist, and that I was exaggerating. I was not; we really do need to look at the 21st century threats that we face. In my view, it is things such as utilities that are the weak points. A poor nurse somewhere opened an email and a virus spread throughout the NHS. We have seen that happen once and it cannot happen again. We cannot have our water or electricity industries undermined. It worries me that we are not robust enough when it comes to a whole spread of things. I know that people are aware of it but more work needs to be done. I do not think that we have any space for complacency when it comes to defending ourselves against these potential threats.

Then of course there is the ongoing argument about interference in our political system with regard to propaganda: who is paying for what, who is accountable, what they are doing, why they are investing in this way, what effect it might have and how do we control it? We have controls in the old-fashioned 20th century way but not in the 21st century way, and we need to catch up in relation to that.

The Chairman: We have kept you for a long time, but there is one final issue. We come back to good old Whitehall and the machinery of government. At the moment you are asking the questions on this but you may have to provide the answers in the future.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: I just want to follow up by asking you whether you think there is any scope at all for working out if not international legal structures then international 'rules of the road' for handling cyber issues. If so, in what way would you like to see that carried forward?

Emily Thornberry MP: It is really difficult. As we know, there have been discussions and other countries have interpreted this in a completely different way. They say, 'We have interference in our country through Facebook', so they see it in a different way. We simply cannot have the Wild West here, which is what we have at the moment, so efforts have to be made and we have to talk about this. If we do not, it will be very difficult to dismantle later. In my view, this issue should be a priority. I do not know what the answer is, but that is always the way, is it not? We need to have collective work on it.

Q229 **Baroness Anelay of St Johns:** The overarching principle that you have espoused is the importance of the UK showing leadership in a world where, as the Chair said in his introduction, change happens very fast. you then made clear that there is a lack of time in which to respond—I am not quoting you exactly but paraphrasing. You said that we need to think through complex situations. In that position, do we have the

capacity in Whitehall to deliver post-Brexit? If not, how do you think Whitehall might be restructured to achieve that support for showing leadership?

Emily Thornberry MP: It is a difficult question. You could almost turn it on its head and ask how Whitehall is structured at the moment even to be able to deal with Brexit. There has been a great deal of not thinking this through, as David Cameron admitted, with Whitehall not even having been asked to make contingency plans in case the referendum went the wrong way. It is quite clear that we have all been caught on the hop.

I might have gone a bit native already without even going into the Foreign Office, but I have a great belief in the experience and intellectual capacity of some of the very impressive people whom I have met there. There is a promise to make sure that our voice is heard properly, so I would be a strong advocate of the importance of the Foreign Office. It is difficult to know whether the balance is right in terms of those in Whitehall and those out in the field, whether they have been tasked with the right things and so on. That is obviously something that one would need to talk to the civil service about in the light of the priorities that we would have as a new Labour government. However, I think that the time for underestimating the Foreign Office is over.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: As you have said, if there were a Labour government, you would need to set out your priorities clearly. Would one of the priorities be restructuring the departments in Whitehall?

Emily Thornberry MP: I do not think I will get into that because we do not know when the Labour government will arrive. It will come and it is just a question of when, but I am afraid that I do not want to get drawn into that at the moment. I can understand why things have been difficult for the Foreign Office having had two departments carved out of it and, frankly, having the leadership that it has had until recently. It must have gone through a very difficult time.

Q230 **Baroness Smith of Newnham:** When the former Foreign Secretary gave evidence, he talked about going east of Suez and so on. Perhaps I could probe slightly further on your answer to Baroness Anelay's question. Earlier you made a point about trade and development being entirely separate and the need to keep them separate.

Emily Thornberry MP: Separate to development.

Baroness Smith of Newnham: Yes. There is clearly a fixed budget line of 0.7% for international aid, and defence benefits from the NATO 2% commitment. What do you envisage for the Foreign Office? Would you envisage pressing for more resources to enable powerful voices in Whitehall and in our embassies to do more, assuming that Brexit goes ahead?

Emily Thornberry MP: There is an argument which I am not convinced by, given that our presence abroad consists of defence, diplomacy and development. The other two major international departments have a

fixed budget but the Foreign Office does not, and I am not convinced by that.

I think that you are interested, as I and my team certainly are, in the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund. It seems to be money that comes from the different departments, particularly from DfID,⁵ which is very transparent about what it spends its money on. It goes into this larger fund but I am not really sure—we have been trying to find out—exactly how it is used. I think that the Foreign Office benefits from it quite a lot but there is not the transparency that, frankly, I think there should be. That worries me. If we are talking about budgets, we should be able to ask questions and get straight answers. I am not saying that there should not be a Conflict, Stability and Security Fund; I am asking what it is being used for and by how much the Foreign Office is benefiting.

The Chairman: Shadow Secretary of State, we have kept you for an hour and a quarter and have asked you some impossible questions. Rightly, you have answered a good many of them with further questions to which none of us knows the answers, and we have skirted quite successfully around the Brexit quagmire as well. Obviously the issue ahead of us is that, with or without Brexit and with or without Mr Trump, we are going to need new foreign policy approaches and you will be involved in them. Thank you very much for getting us this far. It has been helpful and illuminating, and we are grateful to you for your patience in answering our questions.

Emily Thornberry MP: It has been a great honour to be invited. Thank you very much.

⁵ The Department for International Development