

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence from the Foreign Secretary, HC 538

Wednesday 31 October 2018

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

Questions 331-427

Witnesses

I: Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Sir Simon McDonald, Permanent Under Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and Richard Moore, Director General, Political, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Jeremy Hunt MP, Sir Simon McDonald and Richard Moore.

Chair: Good afternoon, Foreign Secretary. Thank you very much for joining us this afternoon. This is your first appearance before the Committee, and we are very grateful to you for making the time. We hope to make these sessions six-monthly. We will cover quite a wide range of topics. For obvious reasons, it would be very helpful if you kept your answers as short as possible—you may find that we are coming to the area you may be straying on to anyway, but if there is something in particular, do let us know. I am going to go straight in, if I may—Royston, would you like to start?

Q331 **Royston Smith:** Thank you for coming, Foreign Secretary. May I ask how your approach to your relatively new role differs from that of your predecessor?

Mr Hunt: What a good question to kick off with, Mr Smith. First, I just want to say how pleased I am to come to this session. I hope that we can have a constructive meeting with the Committee. I have only been in post for three and a half months, so there will be many topics and areas where you are infinitely more knowledgeable than me. I will be very open with you if there are areas where I need to get back to you with more details, but I do have my political director and my PUS with me to help.

Obviously, my predecessor had a pretty distinct style, and mine is completely different. I would never pretend that they were the same in any way at all. But I would say two things. First, he talked a lot about “Global Britain”. You produced a very interesting and incisive report into Global Britain in March this year, which basically challenged the Foreign Office to say what it means. Obviously, we all want Britain to be global—we all want us to be using our influence in a positive way around the world—but one of the things I need to do is to put some flesh on the bone. That is what I am seeking to do this evening in a speech at Policy Exchange, which will answer some but not all of the questions that you raised.

Secondly—this is not a criticism of him, because he became Foreign Secretary at a different time—I would say that one of the things that is preoccupying Foreign Ministries all around the world now much more, which I want us really to have thought hard about, is the changing global balance of power. We have a China that is rising. We welcome its rise—we cannot stop it—but that is going to cause a fundamental change in the way nations interact with each other. I want us to have understood that and to make sure we are ready for it.

Q332 **Royston Smith:** You have brought in some new advisers. How many have you brought in, what background do they have, and how have they



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been getting up to speed in their new roles?

Mr Hunt: I have brought my two special advisers who were with me at the Department of Health. That is just because they are colleagues I have been working with for very many years who know how I work, and it is helpful for the Department to have people who understand that. I have one new special adviser, Tim Smith, who has come from DExEU and obviously has a lot of experience on Brexit issues. I probably should add that that is an area where I have been putting a lot of focus in the last few months, because it is obviously absolutely central for our country's future.

Q333 **Royston Smith:** I would expect you, as you came into the Department, to have looked at how it operates and how it is funded. Do you think the Foreign Office has sufficient resources?

Mr Hunt: Any Secretary of State is always looking for more resources for their Department. The Foreign Office does an incredibly good job on limited resources. We have broadly the same diplomatic reach as the French diplomatic service on about 25% less budget, so it is incredibly effective in its use of money. But I do not pretend that I will not be making significant requests of the Chancellor in the next spending review, because at this moment in our history it is incredibly important that we maximise the potential of our network.

Q334 **Chair:** I must very briefly declare an interest: my wife is currently posted at the French embassy in London. On the question of resources, the Committee was extremely supportive, in hearings with Minister Duncan, of the pay differentials between British diplomats in London and other staff in the civil service. Indeed, I raised it in the Budget debate on Monday.

Mr Hunt: If we are talking about the same thing, one of the concerns we have is that we do not have the budget at the moment to pay competitive rates for locally hired staff around the world. That is a source of great worry to us, so that is one of the issues that we will be seeking to address when we negotiate with the Treasury.

Q335 **Royston Smith:** I am sure there are many reasons why the Department will welcome your elevation to Foreign Secretary, but your form on getting money from the Chancellor is somewhat legendary, so we are expecting you to do a good job of increasing resources in the Foreign Office. Of course we now have DExEU, DfID and DIT. What specifically do you think you should be doing to work more collaboratively with those Departments?

Mr Hunt: We actually have very good relations with all those Departments. Liam Fox works on my floor in the Foreign Office. I have pretty much weekly meetings with Penny Mordaunt. Where we are right now, at this incredibly critical moment with Brexit just a matter of months away, there are three Secretaries of State-worth of work in terms of the things that have to be done, but I know that Mr Seely is planning to do a paper looking at all these structures, and we will have to rethink them



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going forward. DExEU was always planned as a temporary Department just to see us through the process of EU exit.

One of the things I have sought to do is to try to co-ordinate the work of our European posts, which are very important now but will become even more important when we leave the EU. The FCO's role in a way is to be the conductor of the orchestra—to make sure that we have consistent policy in every aspect of what we do and that it is co-ordinated. It is to make sure that what we do in Africa is tightly co-ordinated with what DfID do, and what we do on trade deals with the US, China or Australia is tightly co-ordinated with our diplomatic policy. That is really where the effectiveness of our network is going to be very important.

Q336 Mr Seely: Can I come in on that point, Foreign Secretary? I will put an argument to you; I am not sure that you will necessarily agree with it, but I think it is an important one.

Morality and ethics apart, the Russians play a bad hand very well, because they have tried to integrate as many of their tools of national power as possible. The French combine the FCO and DIT in a single entity. But we have siloed out all the powers of the FCO: DfID has a separate Secretary of State, Defence is separate, DIT is separate, Brexit is separate, the Cabinet Office owns a bunch of relationships and the Prime Minister owns a bunch of relationships. We are less than the sum of our parts.

You are saying that in the FCO you are trying to co-ordinate these things, but the problem is that you are not necessarily the top dog; you have another two or three Secretaries of State competing with you for power and influence. If you are saying that we need an integrated foreign policy, I completely agree, but what I do not understand is how we have structured our overseas policies collectively to get that.

Mr Hunt: I will look at the paper you publish and reflect on that. When I have been in the job for longer, I will be able to answer your question better, but I do not see my role as being narrowly responsible for things in the Foreign Office silo. To give you one example, I think the job of the Foreign Secretary is to maximise British influence in the pursuit of British interests and British values all over the world. That is about not just soft power, but hard power. The Ministry of Defence is incredibly important, because when we can back up our words with hard power, it immensely adds to their weight.

I think it is the job of the Foreign Secretary and the Foreign Office to make sure that all those different Departments are acting in exactly the way you want. If you give me a few months, and also give me a chance to reflect on what you say in your report, I think we will come to a view on whether the current structures are the best ones.

Q337 Mike Gapes: Foreign Secretary, you referred to bringing all the different parts together. All around the world, we have people in diplomatic posts who have come from many different Departments. In an ideal world, they should all be reporting to the ambassador or high commissioner, but we



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know the historical precedents.

I have been in this place long enough to remember the Pergau dam scandal. The Foreign Affairs Committee questioned the former high commissioner in Kuala Lumpur, who was then recalled and never went back, because of a breakdown in communication between the Ministry of Defence, which was running something there, and the FCO. How can we ensure that things like that do not happen again, particularly in an even more fragmented world than we have now?

Mr Hunt: I defer to your incredibly long experience on this Committee, going back to the Pergau dam—I must admit that that was one thing that I did not brief myself on before this afternoon's meeting.

On the basis of my three and a half months in the job, I am relatively confident that we get that sort of thing right when it comes to the interface between the FCO and the Ministry of Defence, because we now have the National Security Council, which was set up in 2010. There is a regular weekly meeting at which all the issues come together in which there is a defence interest, a foreign policy interest and a trade interest.

Where I am less happy that that kind of integration happens is in the interface between development policy and diplomatic policy, particularly our policy in Africa. I feel very frustrated when I meet African leaders who talk about the incredible growth of Chinese influence. We are the third biggest aid donor in the world, and we seem to get relatively little credit for that. I have had very good and productive discussions with Penny Mordaunt about that, but it is an area in which I would like to see our interests better aligned.

Q338 **Mr Seely:** In your opinion, how do the National Security Council and the FCO interact? You said that you have a weekly meeting. Are you beholden to the National Security Council, or is the role of the National Security Council just to try to make sure that Departments integrate as much as possible?

Mr Hunt: The National Security Council is chaired by the Prime Minister, so it has authority over all of us. Obviously the contents of the meeting are highly confidential, but if any of you were a fly on the wall, I think you would be very impressed. What we would typically get is an expert paper that a huge amount of thought has gone into. The politicians and officials interact on a completely equal basis and we have a very in-depth discussion about what the national interest is in different situations. Then we come up with a consistent policy that we all follow.

Q339 **Mr Seely:** But is this generally on—again, excuse my ignorance—operational matters, rather than just a strategic overview, so you are very focused on events, and somewhat reactive as a result?

Mr Hunt: I have heard that criticism levelled at NSCs before, but I have to say that at the NSCs that I have been to we have also had very good strategic discussions. I know just from looking at the schedule ahead that we are going to carry on having strategic discussions. It is very important that we take a strategic view because, frankly, everything is changing so



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much in the world that we have to know in which direction to set our compass.

Q340 Andrew Rosindell: Foreign Secretary, you just made a very interesting point. You said that you were not that content with diplomacy and development policies being aligned. DfID has grown and grown in terms of its budget. Of course it is protected and ring-fenced at 0.7%. The FCO, of course, has been depleted over many decades. We have seen a reduction in money spent on our diplomatic network around the world.

Do you not think it is time to review the whole situation and perhaps to integrate development back into the FCO, which is what we used to do? It seems to have taken on a life of its own, if I may put it like that, at the expense of our diplomatic outreach.

Mr Hunt: I am actually a very big supporter of DfID, and I think that they are hugely respected around the world. In fact, I think many people would say that they are the pre-eminent national development agency. They are held in huge esteem. When they were set up, though, originally under Clare Short, the world was very different. What is happening now is that we are in direct competition with countries like China for influence in African countries.

I would not want to change the brilliant development work that they do, and I think they do it extremely well, but I would like to make sure that we get credit for British taxpayers' money doing an enormous amount of good in eradicating polio, TB and malaria, and things that are fantastically important for the countries where we spend this money.

Q341 Chair: On that very point, they are not a development agency; they are a Department of state. As I don't cease to be reminded, taxation is money taken by force, and this is money taken by force from the British people. It is for interests and for appropriate use, I accept, but this is not a development agency where money is contributed voluntarily to somebody shaking a tin. It is different.

Mr Hunt: No, and one thing I would say is that regular surveys by people like Portland say that Britain has more soft power than any other country—although admittedly for that particular survey I think the polling was done shortly after Harry and Meghan's wedding, so that might have influenced the ranking somewhat. I think one of the reasons we score very well on soft power is not just because of the size of the development budget, but what it says to people about our values. I think that helps us, but I would like to make sure from a taxpayer's point of view and from a diplomacy point of view that we get sufficient credit in the countries where we spend that money.

Q342 Mr Seely: Do you have an opinion yet, or will you have an opinion in future, on whether we should be spending 0.7% according to our definitions of aid, or the OSCE's quite limited, quite confused and sometimes quite contrary definitions of aid? For example, we cannot cover all the peace-keeping operations under the aid budget. Likewise, we cannot have the BBC World Service funded by an aid budget, although



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arguably one is the backstop of aid, because without stability you cannot have aid delivered, and at the more advanced levels of nation-building and identity-building you need a free media, and the BBC arguably is the world's representative of a free and decent media.

Mr Hunt: I have a great deal of sympathy for those arguments. I am quite nervous about answering that question with a former International Development Secretary on the Committee. I basically support the Conservative manifesto at the last election, which committed us to—*[Laughter.]* I have to, don't I?

Chair: Well, it makes you almost unique in the parliamentary party!

Mr Hunt: But I do support it in reality, because if I remember rightly—Ms Patel will correct me—we said that we wanted to change the way that international definition was created and we would seek to do that to make sure that we can spend the money more flexibly, in precisely the way that you recommend.

Q343 **Chair:** I know you have been there only three and a bit months, but you must have had a pretty good overview of the Department by now, even if you have not established exactly what you are going to change and how you are going to change it. What is your single priority?

Mr Hunt: We cannot underestimate the significance of this moment in our history. The reason for that is that there are two things coming together at exactly the same moment. One of them is Brexit and the other is the fact that the world order is dramatically changing, certainly from the post-1945 settlement, but most specifically from the post-1989 settlement. We have had a period with one superpower and we are moving now, decisively, to a period with two.

The role of a country like Britain in that situation is absolutely decisive. I think we can play an extremely important role and I want us to be very clear-sighted about it. What is my priority? My priority is to make sure that we have a credible plan for the changes that the world is going to see ahead, and by "credible" I mean one that does not overstate our influence. We are not a superpower, but we are one of the—we are top of the list of other countries in terms of the power and influence we have. So I do not want us to overestimate our strength, but I do not want us to underestimate it, either. And I want us to be ready, because this is a period, the next 20 or 30 years—by 2030, the largest economy in the world will not be a democracy and we will be having to make the argument for democratic values in a much more assertive way, and I want us to be ready for that moment.

Q344 **Chair:** Given that, how do you see the work that you are doing, on our behalf, in terms of bolstering the international institutions of which we are a member?

Mr Hunt: Well, that is a very important question to be able to answer. You drew attention to that in your human rights report published in September. About half the report, as far as I could see, talked about



progressing the human rights agenda through international institutions. I think the reality is that—this is probably one of the biggest things that I have learned in my time in the job—the only way you can progress issues like that, which matter to us all, is through alliances and networks. We are very lucky to have some of the best networks of any country in the world, by dint of history and for various other reasons. But many of the international institutions that we depend on to do that are badly in need of reform.

You can take a fantastic institution like the Commonwealth, which we all have enormous affection for. The decision-making process in the Commonwealth is incredibly slow and difficult, which is why we want to reform the way the Commonwealth works. You can take the UN, which is very bureaucratic. You can look at the operation of virtually all international institutions.

I am a believer in the international order that we have had since 1945, which basically puts large countries and small countries together and asks everyone to follow a common set of rules, but I think we have to make sure we reform these international institutions and, where there is US frustration at their general slowness to act, I think we have to support the Americans in trying to reform them.

Q345 Chair: Would you agree that one of the issues that we seem to have come to is that these international institutions in a way have developed almost a legitimacy of their own—far greater than the contribution of the states that make them up—that has changed them from being a partnership network into, in some ways and differently in different organisations, a control network, and that has caused resentment. And, in a funny way, if we are going to be conservative internationalists—I use that with a small c, by the way. Perhaps you would prefer the phrase “liberal internationalists”—

Chris Bryant: No, that’s much worse.

Chair: We need to learn to love the nation state again and to realise that the first level of accountability for most citizens is the nation state, and not the supranational state in any way. Therefore, reinforcing these organisations is actually about making sure that the nation states within them have the authority that we would expect of our own.

Mr Hunt: I agree with that. I think we need to reflect that, without wanting to stir up a hornets’ nest in this Committee, that could have been one of the factors behind the Brexit vote—

Chair: We are not the Brexit Committee, as you know, and we are very pleased not to be.

Mr Hunt: I realise that, but I think that people need to feel that their own democratically elected Governments are accountable. I also think that it would be a big mistake to reject the importance of multilateralism.



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One of the baptisms of fire that I have had in the past few months was to go to my first UN General Assembly. It is an extraordinary occasion because, on the one hand, big speeches are made and it is sometimes difficult to see what concrete actions emerge as a result of all these speeches. On the other hand, it is vastly better for humanity that there is one week in the year when countries of the world all come together to try to resolve issues through dialogue, rather than through the alternatives. So I think it is very important that, when people are openly questioning multilateralism, we are the people who, practically, ask, "How can we get this to work?" We have experience of that historically, so we must not shy away from challenging multilateral organisations to be more effective and action-focused.

Chair: Clearly, I do not speak for the whole Committee when I ask questions. I know that Mr Bryant was not entirely supportive of my view.

Q346 **Chris Bryant:** Following up on that, surely it is in Britain's interest for some of these international organisations to be strong and successful. One is the Council of Europe, not least because it is part of the structure for the European convention on human rights. For Russian people, their only access to a human rights court is through the Council of Europe. You will have noticed, I am sure, that Sergei Lavrov and Chairman of the Duma Volodin have both suggested this week that Russia will pull out of the Council of Europe. Does that not worry you?

Mr Hunt: I think it would be a great shame, but the difficulty is that Russia has not been paying its dues, and there has been a very fractious relationship for various reasons. I don't blame the Council of Europe for those difficulties, but I agree with you that it would be a great shame if Russia ceased to participate, for exactly the reason you say.

Q347 **Chris Bryant:** But if we keep stoking nationalism, that is where all this goes, isn't it?

Mr Hunt: I am not sure that I would accept that we are stoking nationalism with respect to the Council of Europe, in that particular incidence. The broader question, which I appreciate that you have been thinking about very hard, is how we bring a country like the Russian Federation back into the fold of being a positive force for the rules-based international system, rather than the change that we seem to have seen, I suppose starting with the invasion of Georgia but, specifically, getting worse with the invasion of Crimea in 2014 and all the cyber-attacks and so on. It seems to have become a country that is seeking to destabilise the international order, and the question is how we bring them back into the fold, because I don't think being outside it is in their interest or ours.

Q348 **Chris Bryant:** Your predecessor said that his biggest mistake was to go to Moscow. Do you agree?

Mr Hunt: I think the frustrating thing is that there does not seem to be Russian willingness to come back to being a supporter of the international order. If you look at a map of Europe and you mark all the countries where there have been cyber-attacks that have originated from Russia,



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very often it is interference in referendum or election campaigns, so it is very hard to know what it will take to get the Russians to change their mind.

My view is that one great success of British diplomacy this year has been the reaction to the Salisbury attack on 4 March. Essentially, when people do something totally unacceptable, and seem to have motives that we cannot quite understand, you have to simply say that your diplomatic objective is to make sure that the price is too high for them. I think that, in their quieter moments, people in the Kremlin will look at this year and ask themselves whether it was actually worth going ahead with the Skripal attack, because they have paid a huge diplomatic price.

Q349 Chris Bryant: But they are winning hands down, aren't they? They are destabilising and fracturing the European Union. They almost certainly played a role—whether successfully or not—in encouraging Brexit, and the British Government will not even investigate that.

Mr Hunt: I don't think they are winning hands down, but I would not want to minimise the scale of their activities. For example, this year we have started to see the redrawing of a red line against chemical weapons use that had started to fade. When we, as the west, failed to intervene after the use of chemical weapons by Assad in 2013 in Syria, people started to wonder whether it would become okay again to use chemical weapons.

There is a lot more work to do, and I do not by any means say that the job is done, but we have started to redraw that red line. The Russians will look at this as a year when democratic countries were surprisingly resilient in the face of all those threats that you mentioned. However, I do not for one moment say that the job is done.

Q350 Chair: Following on from your answer on Russia, there is a growing body of opinion—particularly in the United States, but also elsewhere—that questions whether Russia, and indeed China, can be brought into what we call the liberal international order. What do you think? Do you think that the liberal international order is either liberal or international anymore, or is it more regional, even if that region is loosely described as “the west”? Is there such a thing, and can it realistically be promoted?

Mr Hunt: I am actually a very strong supporter of what you describe as the liberal international order. I think it is a huge achievement for humanity. If you actually look at all the statistics on the number of people dying in conflicts, life expectancy, trade and so on, they have all gone in a very positive direction. The result has been dramatic reductions in, for example, people living in extreme poverty and so on.

I am a supporter of the system, but I don't say that it does not need to reform. At the moment, Russia appears to be pursuing a policy of destabilising it wherever and whenever it can, which is why we have to be resolute with people who share our values in saying that we are not prepared to let that happen.



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China is more complex. They actually have a very big stake in that liberal international order, because they want to expand their trade. It is easy to forget that, despite China's wealth, their GDP per head is still only 20% of America's. They see themselves as having a lot further to go, in terms of development. However, that is why it is important to engage with China, because we actually need them to support that international order.

Q351 Chair: So is China's rise benign? We have seen, for example, direct challenges to very clear international orders, such as the law of the sea. We have seen China violate and ignore rules and decisions as set down by international rules-based organisations, which in that case was the United Nations. We have seen the aggression with which intellectual property is pursued by some in China. What do you see? Do you see a benign rise or do you see a partner?

Mr Hunt: You could point to evidence in both camps. That is why this is an important moment, and why it is important to engage with China. By engaging, I do not just mean talking with China. We have to have serious discussions with China, to try to understand what sort of international order they want.

If I may go back to your earlier question, one of the features of the international order since 1945 is that, for the first time, it has been based on a set of underlying values, not just on big countries having their interests in their own backyards and keeping out of other big countries' backyards. As we move forward to a new order, the question is whether we go back to the Westphalian model of big powers having their spheres of interest and keeping out of the way of other big powers, or whether we sustain a system that is based on fundamental values that we all share. I, for one, think it would be a terrible tragedy if we moved to a values-free international order.

Q352 Chair: I have to say that I agree entirely. I think that China's interests are very much in the rules-based system. Without rules, its ability to resource its population would be very severely endangered. I would be interested to hear what we are doing to help to adapt the rules that—let us be honest—were written in the post-war world, when China's voice was much quieter and its economy much smaller. What are we doing to ensure that China has its legitimate right to have a voice in these rules?

Mr Hunt: We have supported institutional reform in all the big institutions that China is a part of, and we support giving China a stronger voice to reflect its growing influence and power, but we also want China to do the same when it comes to the WTO. We want it to recognise that the deal that it got with the WTO was based on its being a much poorer country. We need America to be part of the WTO as well, so there needs to be pragmatism in both directions.

Q353 Chair: This is a side question, perhaps, but you are aware that the constitution of the IMF says that it is to be headquartered in the world's largest economy. Are we looking for a new site in Beijing?

Mr Hunt: That is a very interesting point that you have raised with me before, but I have not had a chance to get advice from my excellent officials.

Chair: Nicely done. Priti, do you want to come in?

Q354 **Priti Patel:** Thank you, Chair, and apologies for my lateness.

Speaking of the international rules-based world order and the role of multilateral organisations, we have a great play in this country and we major significantly on bilateral relations, but we are seeing a significant power shift in the world, not just in terms of democratic institutions but in terms of undemocratically accountable organisations and countries. How do you feel we will achieve long-term reform of some of the multilateral organisations that we have already touched on, such as the UN, the IMF or the World Bank, where there is such a disproportionate shift? Yes, we welcome China in these big debates and big organisations, but where do you think we can leverage our foreign policy levers much more, to actually drive the type of change that you feel we need to see to support that wider liberal approach in terms of the international rules-based order?

Mr Hunt: It is going to be challenging, because these are often very unwieldy institutions. There are things that we have not got right. This may be something that you were planning to come on to later, but in our relationship with India, in which I know you have a great interest, I do not feel that we have got near our full potential. The two largest democracies in the world are India and the United States; we spend a huge amount of time thinking about our relationship with the United States, yet in a way India is an even more extraordinary democratic success story.

The only thing that I would say to the pessimists is that I do not think any other countries are in anything like as strong a position as we are, in terms of reinvigorating those alliances. We have so many historic links, so many friendships, and geographical proximity to Europe. If there is a country that could become an invisible chain between the democracies of the world—to use a phrase from my Policy Exchange speech—I think it could be the UK. If we did that, we would be playing to one of the great strengths of British soft power, which is that people see Britain as a country that takes on things that are not just in the narrow British national interest, but in the global interest. They see us taking a lead on climate change, on human rights, on the UN convention on the law of the sea—things that are important for everyone. I think that is what people want from Britain. I hope that we rise to that challenge and do that.

Q355 **Priti Patel:** Do you feel that we are in the right space as a country? Your Department has established the Global Britain doctrine or narrative, which is evolving over time. When overseas leaders and Governments and countries look at the UK, they see the Brexit debate and that tag rather than the wider influence that we can demonstrate through our bilateral and multilateral influence.



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Mr Hunt: I would like to see us being a lot more confident and optimistic. I think one of the things you notice—I am sure all of you have noticed exactly the same as I have—is that when you go to other countries, we are held in a lot higher esteem than we seem to have for ourselves.

I don't see this as a jingoistic thing; I think it is a responsibility. As the Chair was saying, I think there are some very serious threats to our values and our way of life. I grew up in the 1970s and 1980s. My dad was in the Navy and he was spending his whole time preparing on exercises for the cold war. That was a period when all of us who were around thought that we couldn't take our democratic values for granted, because there was a very real and present threat with the Soviet Union.

I think we are moving into a period where we must, once again, say that we cannot take our way of life for granted. Britain has a really big responsibility and a big role that we need to play.

Q356 **Ian Austin:** Can I ask, Foreign Secretary, how you are planning to raise the profile of human rights in the FCO?

Mr Hunt: You can, but in some ways, I have been very pleasantly surprised to see how much work the FCO is doing on human rights. I think that you can point to some really significant campaigns, such as the prevention of sexual violence initiative that William Hague started. This year, we saw Dr Mukwege getting the Nobel Peace Prize—I was privileged to meet him in the DRC about 10 years ago—and that has been incredibly important. On the modern slavery campaign, after our resolution in 2017, we got over 80 countries to sign up. The 12 years of girls' education launched by my predecessor is also starting to gather a lot of momentum.

Because I want to continue that, I have announced today that we are going to have a big campaign on media freedom. It is not the easiest of things for politicians to charge to the defence of journalists, but I do actually think that this is something we have got to start thinking about much more actively. Obviously the Khashoggi case has partly prompted that. When you look at the fact that in 2017, 65 journalists were killed across the world, and 326 were imprisoned—

Chair: Some by some of our close allies.

Mr Hunt: Indeed. The thing about human rights, to answer the question very directly, is that what I have learned—and I have raised human rights issues in China, in Burma, with the Iranian Foreign Minister, with the Saudi Foreign Minister and with Russia—is that you have to do it in different ways with different people. When it is an ally, you have much stronger private channels. With other people, you might do it publicly.

The key question is whether you actually raise it or not, and whether you are prepared to have those awkward conversations. I was very encouraged to read in your report on human rights that someone you spoke to said that they didn't think there was any country that was doing more for human rights. I think we absolutely need to continue that.



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Q357 Ian Austin: You just mentioned Russia. What role do you think the Magnitsky powers can play in this? What more can Britain do to target people guilty of corruption and gross human rights abuses, particularly in Russia? In that context, we recently held a session in Southampton, where a member of the public there asked us if we would ask you—

Mr Hunt: This is sounding like PMQs.

Ian Austin: —what more we could do to strengthen relations with Russia. It is important to draw the distinction between taking tough and punitive action against Putin, who I think is a corrupt dictator, and the people around him, who have enriched themselves massively by looting the Russian economy, and impoverishing the ordinary people of Russia. This is not an anti-Russian issue. I see it as being on the side of the Russian people—taking action against a Government that is stealing from them.

Mr Hunt: I totally agree with that. The starting point has to be to remember the courage of people like Sergei Magnitsky, who was just a regular corporate lawyer but who paid the most horrific price for his courage and for stepping up to the plate at an unexpected moment in his life.

You see people who are victims of the system all over Russia, such as the Ukrainian film director Oleg Sentsov and people like him, who are incredibly brave individuals. We have never had to face any of the moral dilemmas those people face. We have been lucky enough to be born in a free country and to take that for granted. Our starting point has to be humility and remembering how brave other people are.

I could not agree with you more. Our argument is not with the Russian people; it is with a regime that behaves in a totally unacceptable and sometimes murderous way. The Magnitsky legislation, which is obviously in the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act, does not come into force until we have control of our own trade policy, which is obviously a post-Brexit measure. It is important when it comes to dealing with people in the regime who have enriched themselves who we might want to target. Unfortunately, it will not deal with all the brutality that you get in some of those regimes and there are other things we need to do, but we have discovered in recent years that this can be a pretty effective way of targeting some of the individuals who are associated with human rights violations.

Incidentally, I support what President Macron said last week about the EU being prepared to impose sanctions against people who are responsible for human rights violations. At the moment, the EU does not do that. We do it for chemical weapons and we have agreed to do it for cyber, but the Dutch, for example, are very keen to be able to target sanctions at the people responsible for the downing of MH17. We would strongly support them in that.

Q358 Ian Austin: We have other powers that we could have used more quickly and more extensively, such as unexplained wealth orders and so on, to



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target people from Russia guilty of corruption. We have not been nearly as swift in acting on that as the States, for example, who have a published list and have taken much more extensive action than we appear to have taken. From what you have said, can we take it that you will be pushing for quicker UK action?

Mr Hunt: I have to say that in the discussions that I have had, which go back only a matter of months, I have never had any sense that, for example, the Government was protecting the commercial interests of the City of London at the expense of doing the right thing when it comes to Russian human rights issues. I am sure there is more we can do and I would always want us to do everything we can.

Q359 **Chair:** There is an area of this that may not fall under your direct area of responsibility, but that certainly has a strong knock-on effect. We looked at this through our “Moscow’s Gold” report. Companies House, for example, has allowed the registration of individuals with frankly laughable levels of checks, to the extent that some directors are named Mickey Mouse—literally. It is extraordinary, the looseness by which some are able to use the organisations of our state to launder and channel money. That money is then very often used to corrupt and undermine allies, and we know of incidents where it has delayed a NATO exercise. The fact that it has done so is pretty extraordinary. How are you going to use your office, which quite rightly is one of the great offices of state, not just in the area that is directly your remit, but to support the wider interests of the nation in rooting out this corruption and making sure that our institutions are as clean as possible?

Mr Hunt: It is a fair challenge. We have made progress on the Companies House issue with our register of beneficial ownership.

Q360 **Chair:** That only works if the names in the list are true. It doesn’t work otherwise.

Mr Hunt: I accept that, and I am very happy to take away that particular issue, but my understanding is that the point of a register of beneficial ownership is to try to deal with those kinds of issues. Obviously there is a role, as Mr Rosindell will know, for the Overseas Territories in that respect.

In terms of what I can do very directly, right in my direct area of responsibility, last week I had a discussion with the Swiss Foreign Minister in Bern about working closely with Switzerland to make sure that if we stop people keeping their money in London they cannot just transfer it over to Switzerland. Actually, I was very encouraged to see that the Swiss are in exactly the same place as us. They do not want Switzerland to become—

Q361 **Chair:** You are aware, of course, that rightly a lot of pressure is being put on the National Crime Agency and, indeed, on the Home Office to exercise the powers under things like unexplained wealth orders, but many of them cannot exercise those powers unless our embassy network—our diplomatic network—has at least helped them to highlight which individuals they should start looking at. Can you assure us that our



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embassies will work incredibly closely with the security forces in the more general sense—the National Crime Agency and so on—working to protect the United Kingdom in a much broader sense than is sometimes seen?

Mr Hunt: Yes, and I would not want you to think that nothing has been happening. The figures I saw show that we have collected I think £1.4 billion from the Proceeds of Crime Act in the period since 2010¹. The Home Office has agreed to review the tier 1 visas that were issued pre-2015, which could have been issued to a number of the individuals we are concerned about. I think there is a general feeling that we do not want to let people get away with this, and we are very sensitive to precisely the concerns you raise.

Q362 **Chair:** You do see your role as Foreign Secretary, in charge of the embassy network, in extending the reach and interests of the United Kingdom as part of our defence?

Mr Hunt: Yes, because of our earlier discussion about the liberal international order and upholding the values in which we all believe.

Q363 **Mr Seely:** On this point, there is a sense that the agencies were not listened to enough, because the interest of the City was to not crush them too much where money was coming from. I think that has now damaged our credibility. As well, we have had stories in *The Telegraph* today, and there was a piece in *The Times* not so long ago, about a number of Members of the House of Lords—it does not matter which political parties they are from—seen to be doing the bidding of some fairly unsavoury characters, whether oligarchs, Russians or other figures. There are some well-known names in the House of Lords who are sadly refusing, or finding it very difficult, to come and talk to us. How do you feel about all these people and the damage that they are doing to our democratic credibility?

Mr Hunt: Without wanting to be remotely glib, I think that the very fact that we are having this kind of discussion demonstrates the importance of a free press and transparency. Sometimes we forget that there are many countries, and many democracies, where this kind of discussion does not even happen in the first place. It is interesting that the Freedom House rankings say that of the 193 UN countries there are 116 democracies, but only 88 countries that they describe as “fully free”.

We have to recognise that transparency and openness are very important. It is matter for the House authorities to make sure that conflicts of interests are dealt with, but I would strongly support making sure that no-one is in practice ever able to use their position to further the interests of a foreign power.

Q364 **Chair:** May I interrupt very briefly and say that on that very point we have written to you specifically asking whether any Members of either House have had, or sought to have, influence over policy using their

¹ Note from witness- £1.4 billion was taken from offenders between April 2010 and March 2017.



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position. We have had an answer back from the Security Minister Ben Wallace on this, and we would be very grateful for your assistance, including minutes of any meetings that may have taken place.

Mr Hunt: Okay.

Q365 **Chris Bryant:** I applaud all the things that you have said, but I just want to take you to task a bit because I think your analysis of the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018 is wrong. You said yesterday and have repeated today that that this can only come in when Brexit happens. That's just wrong. There is no reason why it cannot come in now. We are fully able to introduce additional sanctions to those imposed by Europe. We did in 2011 in relation to Iran, for example. There is no reason why we could not introduce this and make it effective now. I urge you to look back at that, but let's say, for the sake of argument, that you are right: when do you think you would implement the Magnitsky element? Would it be if there is a deal with a transition, or at the end of the transition?

Mr Hunt: On the basis of this question I shall take it away to look at it in more detail, but my understanding is that because trade policy is currently under the purview of the EU, we cannot do economic sanctions until we have left the EU and indeed, if there is a transition period, the end of the transition period, because we are still subject to EU rules during that period. But I shall, if I may, take that away to look at whether there are other things that we can do before that. We certainly have the ability to do other things; it is just the trade sanctions element of it that I understand we could not do.

Q366 **Chris Bryant:** But if we are then talking about none of the things that we voted for earlier this year, or for that matter in the previous Act the year before, really coming into effect for another two and a half years, there will be quite a deal of frustration, because now is the time when we would like to see this being progressed.

Mr Hunt: Let me say two things. If, when I get the proper work done, it turns out that there are lots of things that we can do, no one will be more delighted than I am; but if it turns out that, unfortunately, I am right on this, we shall exert maximum diplomatic effort to get an EU consensus to do these things. I would say that actually in the past six months, under both me and my predecessor, our record has been quite good on getting the EU to come around to support us when we need to.

Q367 **Chris Bryant:** I completely agree with that, and I have heard other Governments say that if it had not been for Theresa May in the room, the EU would have been dropping its sanctions on Russia, so all plaudits to the Government for that. My next question then is, how are you going to do it when we have left? How will you secure these same policy outcomes that we want out of the European Union when we are no longer a member?

Mr Hunt: That is very important question. I think that one of the things that we want to make sure that we maintain post Brexit is a close



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partnership with the EU on all these kinds of issues. At the moment, what would happen is that, typically, I would have a discussion with EU colleagues, probably starting with the French and the Germans, to say, "I think we need to do these and that sanctions. What do you think?" We would come up with a position and try to get a consensus among the 28. I am not sure that that will necessarily change after Brexit. In fact, I will go so far as to say that I hope it does not change, because while we shall have the power to do our own thing post Brexit, it will always be more powerful if we act in concert with the EU. They will try to do the same thing. I think we would want to do that wherever we could, so one of the things that I am very keen to ensure is that we continue a very co-operative and mutually supportive relationship with our friends in the EU so that we can avoid divide and rule, and ensure that we have much more diplomatic punch.

Q368 Mike Gapes: May I ask how we are going to be engaged and involved effectively in the room in Brussels or wherever? We have had previous exchanges with your predecessor and officials about PESCO and about what the British Government's position was. Will we still have an equivalent to UKRep sitting in Brussels to try to co-ordinate? Has that yet been worked out? If it has, will you tell us?

Mr Hunt: We won't be in the room, I'm afraid. That is the reality—

Mike Gapes: Not even observing?

Mr Hunt: But we would be absolutely delighted to attend the Foreign Affairs Council in an advisory capacity, or a different capacity. At the last Foreign Affairs Council I went to, I met the Ukrainian Foreign Minister, so they have people from outside the EU there, and I would hope that we shall be invited to take part in a different capacity. I think that is very much in the EU's interests as well as ours. We think UKRep will continue to be the centre of EU expertise inside the FCO. There are about 150 people; we have been expanding it and we will continue to expand it. It will be extremely important that we maintain a close relationship with the EU. Obviously, the role will be different.

Q369 Mike Gapes: So we will need more people dealing with Europe indefinitely if we leave the European Union?

Mr Hunt: We will. We have upgraded our diplomatic networks so we have—

Q370 Mike Gapes: That is part of the Brexit dividend, is it?

Mr Hunt: It is part of the reality of Brexit.

Q371 Mike Gapes: We'll spend more money dealing things that currently we do by being inside the European Union. The FCO has limited resources and we were supposed to be having Global Britain. In previous sessions and reports we have commented on this, but are you saying that this will be long term and not just temporary?



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Mr Hunt: Without wishing to ruin a very pleasant party by getting into big debates about Brexit, the answer is that we gain because we gain freedom of manoeuvre in a number of areas where we do not currently have it, but it also means that we need to increase our diplomatic efforts with the EU 27. For example, the FCO now has full ambassador-level representation in all 27 EU states, which we did not have before. We have expanded our representation in UKRep. The EU will be our big next-door neighbour and, quite rightly, we will put an enormous amount of effort into maintaining good relations.

Q372 **Mike Gapes:** In terms of resourcing, has the Prime Minister or the Chancellor said, "Yes, we understand that, therefore you will not have to move resources from elsewhere in the FCO because of it"?

Mr Hunt: I hope today's announcement reassures you. We announced that we are expanding the number of overseas posts by 335 and the number of UK posts in the FCO by 328. Nearly 1,000 extra people will be working for the FCO across the world by 2020. We will expand our presence in Europe and outside Europe, too.

Q373 **Mike Gapes:** We will look at the small print. Perhaps you could write to us with the details.

Mr Hunt: I would be happy to do so. *[Interruption.]* Sorry, I have just received a note: there will be senior ambassadors in all EU member states, which is what we did not have before. We already had ambassadors everywhere, but they will now be senior ambassadors.

Chris Bryant: They weren't any good before.

Mr Hunt: They weren't senior but they were all excellent.

Chair: We accept that they have been upgraded. Let's not comment further.

Q374 **Ian Murray:** May I keep you on Brexit for one more question? You seem to give the impression that you want to take a much greater role in the Brexit process than perhaps your predecessor did. Would I be right to think that? How will you do that?

Mr Hunt: Everyone has to take their view of how they want to prioritise their time. When I arrived in July, I took the view that Brexit would be the single big foreign policy change that we absolutely need to get right, and that the Foreign Secretary needs to get stuck in and be involved in it, to ensure we do everything we can to get the best deal for Britain. I have made that a priority for my time. My predecessor took a great deal of interest in Brexit, but I have made it a very big priority and over the summer I spent a lot of time going around as many European countries as I could. I think I have met nearly all my EU 27 counterparts for substantive bilaterals.

Q375 **Chair:** It is quite something that it required your arrival to make a change in Britain's single Department responsible for overseas outreach to be engaged with the single greatest strategic change in our foreign policy in



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40 years.

Mr Hunt: Yes—well it seemed to be the right thing to do.

Chair: I am not denying that it seemed to be the right thing to do; I am just astonished that it was not done before.

Q376 **Ian Murray:** You have been in the role for just three months and you have managed to get the mention of the FCO's policy commitment to further integration of the single market off the website, which your predecessor was unable to do in all his time as Foreign Secretary. Congratulations on changing the Foreign Office website.

Mr Hunt: I'll take credit for it even though I had no idea until you told me.

Q377 **Ian Murray:** I knew it would be changed just before you came! Is there a tension between the UK's trade agenda and the good work the FCO is doing on human rights?

Mr Hunt: I don't think so. We have to be quite realistic about how effective trade policy is as a tool of furthering high standards on human rights. My own view is that sometimes trade policy is effective as a sanction. Where a country does something that is completely unacceptable, sometimes you decide to do economic sanctions, although the Magnitsky discussion we had earlier is interesting, because I think it is becoming clear that, very often, sanctions against an individual are more effective than sanctions against a state. But when it comes to the negotiation of trade deals, I am not personally convinced that there is a huge impact on human rights policy. I think that in the end the two are pretty different.

Q378 **Ian Murray:** But you did say, in answer to the first question from Royston Smith earlier, that democratic values will have to be asserted in a much different way when China—I assume you were talking about China—becomes the largest economy. How can you square those democratic values, which I assume means human rights, with some of the issues about Chinese human rights and Saudi Arabia? You said earlier that you share a floor with the International Trade Secretary. Have you discussed the human rights implications of arms sales to Saudi Arabia, for example? Have you discussed temporary suspensions? What is your relationship like with the International Trade Secretary in terms of these big human rights issues with regard to the UK's trade agenda?

Mr Hunt: Of course I discuss those issues on an ongoing basis. Take the example of China that you mentioned. With China, it is clear that you can bring up human rights issues in private, but if you bring them up publicly, you just lose access and the ability to have any influence at all. When I was in China, I brought up not just cases that are directly connected to British foreign policy interests such as Hong Kong, but the issues of Chinese lawyers in detention and the detention of the Uighurs in Xinjiang province. I brought those up in meetings with Foreign Minister Wang and Prime Minister Li, so I do bring them up. I brought them up in a different way from the way you would bring them up with other countries, but I think the key thing, if this is something that we believe in, is the fact that

we may do it differently in different countries, but we do always do it. That's what I always try to make a point of doing.

Q379 Ian Murray: When was the last time you had that conversation with the International Trade Secretary with regard to Saudi Arabia, as an example?

Mr Hunt: When was the last time? Within the last month. Obviously, with the discussions in Parliament about arms sales to Saudi Arabia, we stay in touch on these issues the whole time.

Q380 Ian Murray: Can I focus on one other issue? We are all delighted with the news in the last few days about Asia Bibi being released in Pakistan, but I have had constituents—I am sure all of us here have constituents who are currently detained, many on death row in Pakistan, because of blasphemy laws. How are you interacting with those Governments with regard to those big human rights issues, and how is that interacting with potential trade deals post Brexit?

Mr Hunt: First, as the Prime Minister said today, many people welcome the news about Asia Bibi. I want to be a little bit careful about what I say about it today, if you'll forgive me, because we do want to make sure that there is social stability in Pakistan in the days ahead and this is a potentially very sensitive issue there.

I think the answer to that question is that if you have a constituent with an issue, you should come and tell us, if you haven't already. What we do in those situations is that we try to work out what is the best way of making sure that justice is done. Sometimes that means raising issues publicly and sometimes it means raising them privately. Pakistan is a country where we have a very good private relationship, and we have the ability to raise these issues in private better than we do with other countries. Sometimes it happens publicly because that is what families want, such as in the case of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.

My general approach to this issue is a very straightforward one. We have one of the best diplomatic networks in the world, and it should be at the disposal of British citizens who get into difficulties through no fault of their own. If someone is facing trial for a crime they did not commit, or if we think someone has been unjustly detained, the Foreign Office should be there to support them.

Q381 Chair: Very briefly, how many blasphemy cases are you assisting with on a consular basis in Pakistan at the moment?

Mr Hunt: I do not know. I can write to you with the answer to that question.

Chair: We will be grateful.

Q382 Ian Murray: I am delighted to hear that you have read our Committee's human rights report, as you said earlier. In our report, one of our recommendations is that we would like human rights to be one of the clauses in future trade agreements. Is that something you agree with?



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How will you, as Foreign Secretary and the upholder of human rights in the UK Government, ensure that that will happen?

Mr Hunt: I am happy to have a longer dialogue with you about that, but I have a concern as to whether that would actually give us the leverage on human rights that we want. One of the issues is that there are some countries that have a very good human rights record that would end up being very insulted if we said to them that we are prepared to sign a trade deal with them only if they agree to a human rights clause. There is a particular issue that because of Brexit, we will be aiming to sign trade deals with everyone at the moment, so it is a unique moment in our history. I am not convinced that that would further the human rights agenda, but I am very happy to engage more with you on that issue.

Q383 Andrew Rosindell: As Foreign Secretary, you are also effectively, although unelected, the Foreign Secretary for the Overseas Territories. They do not vote for you, but you decide all their international policies and such like, and similarly for defence and other things. Is it not time that the Overseas Territories stopped being treated as foreign in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and were treated more like a domestic Department? Similarly, with the Crown Dependencies, should they not be treated differently because they are British and not foreign?

Mr Hunt: I must say that I feel they get very good representation from you, Mr Rosindell. From what I have seen, I do not think that any Foreign Secretary would ever not be aware of issues of great concern to them. I am happy to look at any proposals you have for changing our constitutional relationship. This is a time when we are thinking big thoughts about how things happen going forward, but we would want to make any changes only if it was with the consent of those Overseas Territories. On the whole, we think they are a great asset to Britain and we hope that they think we are an asset to them, but the arrangements that we have are with consent, and we want that to continue.

Q384 Andrew Rosindell: And the same with the Crown Dependencies?

Mr Hunt: Indeed.

Q385 Andrew Rosindell: Do they figure in any sense in your Global Britain strategy? When you are promoting—I hope boldly and vigorously—all that Britain has to offer when we leave the EU and we are free to make our own way in the world again, will the Overseas Territories and the Crown Dependencies be up there with every other part of the British family and be consulted, involved and promoted in the same way?

Mr Hunt: Absolutely. Just as we are looking at all our historical relationships in every corner of the globe, we are asking ourselves the question as to how we can reinvigorate them and how we can make the most of them with the new global role that we have.

Q386 Mike Gapes: Can I take you to our relations with Saudi Arabia? Clearly, I am sure you would agree, the UK-Saudi relationship has been and is very important for strategic, intelligence, economic and security reasons, but clearly there are problems. It has just been announced by the Turkish



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prosecutor that Mr Khashoggi was apparently strangled as soon as he went into the consulate in Istanbul. What is the Government's position now on that murder? Specifically, what representations have we made, or are we making, to the Saudis about human rights in the light of that matter and others?

Mr Hunt: The Khashoggi murder is incredibly shocking. I think I have spoken more openly and more strongly about it than any Western Foreign Minister I am aware of. I have made it very clear that, if the press stories were true, as it appears increasingly likely that they are, what happened was completely contrary to our values. I last spoke to Foreign Minister al-Jubeir on 20 October about our very real concerns, and we continue to have regular contact with the Saudi authorities.

I have also been up-front with people that our response has to be considered, for two reasons. First, we have a commercial relationship, and there are jobs in the UK at stake in the north-west and the south-west. When it comes to arms sales, we have our procedures, which were put in place by Robin Cook, and I think we need to follow them. They are very straightforward: they say that we do not give licences for the sale of weapons if there is a clear risk of a breach of international humanitarian law. There is an independent process that advises me on whether that is the case. If I were advised that it was the case, that would be a very serious matter, but as things stand at the moment, I have not been given that advice.

The second issue of real concern is that there is a very challenging situation in the Middle East. There is a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran in the Yemen, which has the potential to escalate into a much bigger and more dangerous conflict, and there is always the risk of Iran obtaining nuclear weapons. In that context, and looking at other interventions that we have made in that region in the last 20 years, we have to be very careful about the unintended consequences of any action we take. That is why I think it is important to take a considered approach in this case.

Q387 **Mike Gapes:** On Yemen, you will be aware that yesterday the United States made a very significant shift, calling for a cessation of hostilities within 30 days. Presumably if there is a cessation, action of some kind will follow. Until now, the British Government has not been pressing for a ceasefire or for a UN resolution to bring about a ceasefire. Your Minister Alistair Burt told the International Development Committee yesterday that he would back a ceasefire only if Martin Griffiths, the UN envoy, came to him saying that the situation had changed. Does the United States' announcement last night mean that the situation has changed?

Mr Hunt: I don't think so. I think what Alistair Burt was talking about was a formal ceasefire. When you have a formal ceasefire, it has to be monitored; unfortunately, as we know, it often gets breached and the situation can deteriorate. We are strongly supportive of what the United States called for yesterday, which is a cessation of hostilities. That is not the same as a formal ceasefire, but in some ways it could be more



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effective, because it is basically an agreement between the Saudi coalition and the Houthis that the Houthis will stop firing missiles into Saudi Arabia and that the Saudi authorities will stop any military attacks on civilian areas. It has the potential to open up a humanitarian corridor, so we very much hope it will happen. We have been doing a lot of work on Yemen—I hosted an important meeting on Yemen at UNGA. We want to give this initiative as fair a wind as we possibly can.

Q388 Mike Gapes: I must declare that I went to Saudi Arabia in April and saw the effect of the missiles that you have spoken of. I went to Najran and saw missiles with Iranian markings that had been fired into the south of Saudi Arabia from Yemen. They are not particularly accurate missiles, but they have hit schools, clinics and houses in a Saudi city. I was also on an aircraft flying back into Riyadh airport when a missile came in and exploded into Riyadh airport. I am conscious that it is not all one way, but clearly the Saudis are carrying out a massive air attack against the Houthis. You have referred to the possibility of a cessation of hostilities, but Martin Griffiths has tried for months to get a cessation between the Houthis and the Saudis and that hasn't happened. We have also got this southern transitional council in Aden and elsewhere in the south, with UAE backing, which is fighting against al-Qaeda and the other groups in that area, as well as against the Houthis. How can we get a ceasefire, given that there are so many different components, without the international community starting to assert some real pressure?

Mr Hunt: I will in a minute bring in my permanent secretary, who was actually deputy ambassador in Saudi Arabia, to give a comment on that.

I met Martin Griffiths last night. To reassure you, he is not using the word ceasefire—this is the cessation of hostilities, which he thinks is possible. What the US announced is very much the plan that he is advocating and we are supporting. We want to do everything we can to seize this opportunity, which we do think is real. Sir Simon, do you want to add to that?

Sir Simon McDonald: Two sentences. The Saudis have a persistent strategic interest in Yemen, over decades and longer, and they are defending that strategic interest as they see it, but the focus now is on two things. The first, as the Foreign Secretary said, is the cessation of hostilities, but then there is the political process, and Martin Griffiths is key to both of those things.

Q389 Mike Gapes: Would that political process not just be between the coalition and the Houthis? It would presumably also have to include the other actors within Yemen, because the writ of the Hadi Government does not run in very many places.

Sir Simon McDonald: It runs in quite a lot of the country—

Mike Gapes: But not in the south very much.

Sir Simon McDonald: Indeed.



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Q390 Ian Murray: Can I go back to the previous point that Mr Gapes made about the UN resolution? The UK is the penholder at the UN on Yemen. What would it take for the UK to lay a new UN resolution on Yemen?

Mr Hunt: No one would be more delighted than we would be to be in a position where we could lay a resolution that meant that a ceasefire happened and held, but at the moment our judgment is that it is just a bit too premature. We want to create the conditions first of all for this US-backed Martin Griffiths plan to lead to a cessation of hostilities. Then I think the next step is a UNSC resolution, and that would be very much what we would be looking at.

Q391 Ian Murray: So you would lay one if this Griffiths plan works?

Mr Hunt: We think that the first thing is for this plan to stabilise the situation. We think there is a chance that could happen. I don't want to exaggerate that. I think the point that Mr Burt made yesterday was a very important one: all the evidence is that ceasefires don't hold unless there is a political process alongside it. The Martin Griffiths plan is essentially the cessation of hostilities that allows a window for the political dialogue to resume. I think he wants it to resume in Sweden. Then we might have the space to have a ceasefire backed by the UN.

Q392 Ian Murray: There has been a bit of speculation over the last 24 hours or so that the US's movement on Yemen recently has been as a result of the Khashoggi tragedy and the murder, and trying to dilute the seriousness of that. Is there any truth to that? What would your views be on that speculation?

Mr Hunt: I don't think it is in any way trying to dilute the seriousness of it. I think we think that the Khashoggi murder is an incredibly serious thing and, as I said, is completely contrary to our values. Any opportunity that we have to get movement, both on the Saudi coalition side, but also on the Houthi side, is something that we would want to exploit.

Q393 Ian Austin: How long do you think the British Government have been concerned about Saudi Arabian behaviour? I don't know if you are aware, but I gather your predecessor has just declared £14,000-worth of hospitality from the Saudis shortly after stepping down as Foreign Secretary. Do you think that that is appropriate?

Mr Hunt: I was not aware of that.

Chair: Mr Johnson can answer for himself.

Q394 Ian Austin: How long do you think the Government have had these concerns?

Mr Hunt: I think we have been very aware—as I am sure the Committee is—that as a country with global reach, we have relationships with all shapes and sizes of countries. If we are going to have a positive role in the Middle East, as we aspire to, we have to have partnerships with many different countries.



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I do not think we have ever been under any illusions. There are aspects of the Saudi system, under the current Government and previous Governments, that we have never been remotely comfortable with: the guardianship system, women not being able to drive, capital punishment and so on. That has always been the case, but we have also been realistic that sometimes in the interests of peace and stability it is important to have these partnerships.

Q395 Chair: More immediately, perhaps, how long has the Foreign Office been concerned about the actions that we have seen more recently, such as the breaking up of the Gulf Co-operation Council, the prosecution of the war in Yemen, and the support for various actors who frankly raise more questions than give answers in places like Syria and in other parts of the world?

Mr Hunt: We have looked at the new Saudi leadership, and frankly there have been things that we have thoroughly approved of and things that have caused us great concern. We have had some of both. Women being able to drive is a huge social reform that all of us were incredibly encouraged by. Our hope was that that might be a very decisive step in a more liberal and open direction, but other things have caused us great concern. Obviously when we finally find out the results of the investigation into the Khashoggi murder, it will help us to create a more accurate picture.

Q396 Chair: Is there really very much doubt?

Mr Hunt: We have had some more news on it today, and more news is emerging. What I said in the House still stands: how we ultimately decide to react will depend not only on whether there is a credible independent investigation so that the facts are clear, but on how Saudi Arabia reacts to those facts, on the extent to which we get due process for the people involved, and on the extent to which they give us confidence that this cannot and will not happen again. We are still in the very early stages of that process.

Q397 Chair: Do you share my concern about your Saudi opposite number, Foreign Minister al-Jubeir, describing the reaction to Khashoggi's murder as "fairly hysterical"? Do you agree that that raises significant concerns that the Saudi Government does not appear to be beginning to take this terribly seriously?

Mr Hunt: I agree with you: I do not agree with that characterisation at all. If these stories are as they have been reported, it is nothing short of utterly and totally shocking. Prior to dealing with the impact on the relationship with Saudi Arabia—I have been very open that there will be an impact on the relationship with Saudi Arabia if these stories turn out to be true—I think it has brought into sharp focus the fact that we cannot take media freedom for granted.

As I mentioned earlier, we intend to run an international campaign next year. We will be hosting a big conference in London on media freedom to try to make sure that we create an international consensus that prevents



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this kind of behaviour against journalists who may upset regimes in different parts of the world.

Q398 Chris Bryant: Is there not a horrific irony that this is happening in Turkey, which has one of the worst records in the world on imprisoning journalists?

Mr Hunt: There are things that have happened in Turkey that are a great concern. We continue to monitor those. You should be holding me to account—I am sure you will, actually—around whether we raise human rights issues without fear or favour with people who are our friends as well as countries with whom we have a more adversarial relationship.

Q399 Chair: Can I push you a little bit on Saudi just for a moment, given that you have an expert sitting on your left? The change in the governance of Saudi Arabia is really quite striking. It was a long way from a democracy, but it was at least a monarchy that had an in-built form of consultation within the family. It was narrow, admittedly, but there were at least different poles of power and different abilities to consult and challenge. From what we see, that is not the case today. We have gone from, in a way, a privy council, to an autocracy. Would you recognise that description? Would you also recognise that the danger is not just one for the United Kingdom or the wider world, which, let's be frank, has relied on Saudi energy to fuel our growth for the last many years, but is also a very fundamental risk for the Saudi regime and the Saudi people too? Autocracies are fundamentally more vulnerable to turmoil and sudden shifts than consultative bodies.

Mr Hunt: Unlike our very stable democracy here.

Chris Bryant: Strong and stable—you left that out!

Q400 Chair: I disagree with you, Foreign Secretary. Forgive me—I think that is a flippant line unworthy of you. For all the changes in policy that we have just seen, the very fact that we have had this extraordinary shift in foreign policy and that the state is not just stable but is growing, and that people are prospering, shows a level of stability within in a system that can endure such shocks. It would be almost impossible to imagine such a shift in an autocratic regime not having led to major civil unrest.

Mr Hunt: I retract my flippant comment, because I think you are absolutely right that, for all their faults, democracies are inherently more stable and that is why we are all supporters of them.

With respect to Saudi, I accept your characterisation of the changes in the regime. The only thing I would say is that I think it unlikely that outside pressure is ever ultimately going to change that. I think this is a very proud country with a very long history and I think, in the end, those kinds of internal changes are going to be a matter for the royal family. That is not to say that as a strategic partner of Saudi Arabia we don't have the right to insist on credible assurances that if these reports turn out to be true, we can have some confidence that they cannot and will not be repeated.



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Q401 Chair: The United States Administration has links to Mohammed bin Salman through Jared Kushner, so we are told. His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales has been a visitor on a number of occasions to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. While I recognise, of course, that you are right—Saudi Arabia is a long-standing independent state and indeed one of the first signatories of the United Nations charter—is there not influence among members of our own royal family, and friends more widely, who could carry the message to King Salman that what he is endangering is much more than himself and his son?

Mr Hunt: Yes, and I think that is the point, really. Because we have that strategic relationship, because we have friendships on all sorts of levels with King Salman and other members of his family more widely, we have the opportunity to make those kinds of representations, but I think we have to make them being realistic about the ability of any outsiders to influence internal structures in Saudi Arabia.

Q402 Priti Patel: I will make one comment, if I may. Following the Khashoggi murder, is there a sense within the British Government that the great Saudi plan, Vision 2030, has literally now become a PR exercise to change Saudi Arabia's external image to the world? If I can give a development example that was in the newspapers recently, it was reported that the UN agency OCHA had been asked by the Saudi authorities to sign an agreement whereby it would basically be promoting the good work of Saudi Arabia on humanitarian aid, vis-à-vis Yemen and the region.

Mr Hunt: I very much hope that Vision 2030 is not a PR exercise. Having attended a meeting in Downing Street with MBS when he came over in March, and having met the Saudi Health Minister at that time, I think there is lots in that vision that is incredibly promising for the people of Saudi Arabia. I very much hope that some of the reforms and economic development that it talks about will happen. If these reports about Khashoggi turn out to be true, my view is that that would be a step back and a step away from that vision. I would want to encourage the Saudi Government to live up to the excitement around that vision, because it does represent a better future for the people of Saudi Arabia. That is why I think everyone is so concerned about the Khashoggi case.

Q403 Mike Gapes: Can I take you back to the regional role of Saudi Arabia and its relations with the GCC countries? There is a long-standing proposal that came from the Saudis and went through the Arab League 15 or 16 years ago, about a comprehensive peace plan for the Middle East. Last week Prime Minister Netanyahu from Israel visited Oman, a country with which Israel does not have diplomatic relations. He was seen at the highest level, by the emir. Do you think something is seriously happening, given that the Trump Administration have supposedly got a plan? Are we ready to play a role, through the Security Council and elsewhere, if there is something happening among the Arab states—or at least the Gulf Co-operation Council states—to try and facilitate a breakthrough on Israel-Palestine? Otherwise, frankly, there is just despair as every day now we see there are incidents, such as rockets fired from



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Gaza and incidents on the border, and more deaths. Is this real? Do you think something is happening and what can we do to help it?

Mr Hunt: After I have made a brief comment, I might bring in my political director, who came with me to a meeting with Jared Kushner in the White House in August. We had a very long discussion on this issue. The answer is that we absolutely stand ready. It would be an incredibly significant thing if there could be some kind of breakthrough. The Trump Administration, as we know, are capable of big foreign policy surprises. We are waiting to see what the Middle East peace plan is that they emerge with.

We have historically had a different role from that of the United States in that region and a different web of connections. If there was potential in the plan that was announced, then of course we would want to support it. Richard, I don't know whether you want to add to that?

Richard Moore: Briefly, we don't know the contents of the plan yet—it is being held very tightly in the US—but it is very clear that you can't get a viable Middle East peace plan unless the Americans are invested in it. Clearly, the fact that they are working on this and developing ideas is very welcome. We are talking to them, as the Foreign Secretary said; we have dealt directly with Jared Kushner on this, as well as with the State Department, and we have made sure that they understand where we are coming from on this. We have put in our very clear advice that this has to be on the basis of a two-state solution and it has to be the sort of plan that, when it emerges, has a chance of landing well, with both the Palestinians and the Israelis, but also with key regional powers. We stand ready to support, and we hope very much that, when it emerges, it will be in a shape that we will feel able to buy into and support, but we do not yet know. In the meantime, as you say, the situation on the ground is very disturbing and contains the risks of escalation at all times, particularly in Gaza.

Q404 **Mike Gapes:** Can I press you on that? Clearly the US has withdrawn its funding from UNWRA and done other things that are worrying in relation to this process. How do you assess what the reaction of the Palestinians will be to these proposals? I have seen some very negative remarks in the last few days. Do you think the Palestinian people will necessarily take the line that is coming from their unfortunate leaderships—let's put it that way—or will they actually be thinking, "At last, there's a potential for some real breakthrough here and some kind of solution that is in our interests"?

Mr Hunt: Obviously, at the moment, Palestinians are not particularly well disposed to any plan that could emerge from the US side, but I would always urge them to be open minded, because the US does have the potential to deliver Israel into the bargain. As Richard Moore just said, there will not be a successful outcome to this unless America is part of that plan, but I think we just have to wait and see the plan before we can make that judgment.



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Q405 Ian Murray: Can I briefly go back to Saudi Arabia? People watching this—and those who watched the statements on this in the House by you and Alistair Burt—would be quite right to conclude that the UK Government have said, “Business as usual with the Saudi Arabians.” I know you do not want to comment on what may happen at the conclusion of any investigation but, on the balance of probabilities, Jamal Khashoggi died in the consulate in Turkey, and we could probably guess that that was not an accident. At what point do we move off business as usual, say, “Something’s happened here that is completely and utterly abhorrent to our values,” and do something about it? Or is it the case that the UK Government are so desperate for post-Brexit trade deals and that human rights are so low down the agenda that we will turn a blind eye?

Mr Hunt: It is a perfectly fair challenge, but I do not accept it as a fair characterisation of what I have said in the House and what British Government policy is. We have been very clear that if these reports turn out to be true, they are against our values and they will have an impact on the relationship with Saudi Arabia, but we do need to wait and find out exactly what happened and then be considered in our judgment. But this is a very, very serious incident. It is reflective of our values that we are taking this view about an incident that happened to one person because we think every single life matters. We do need to see what happens, but we are very clear that the seriousness of what happened cannot be minimised.

Q406 Ian Murray: As I understand it, the consolidated criteria that we use for selling arms to any country do not include a strict end use, as the US criteria do. Would you press for that to happen in the consolidated criteria so we can either prove that the Saudi Arabians have been using British weapons, illegally or otherwise, or disprove it? Without having that end use aspect to the consolidated criteria, we will be going around in circles for years about whether we should suspend arms sales to countries like Saudi Arabia.

Mr Hunt: I am not clear that we are not able to take those factors into account now. The judgment that has to be made, independently of me and any politician, is whether there is a clear risk of a breach of international humanitarian law. Any evidence about the use of weapons and what has happened would be taken into account by the people who make that judgment. They are among the toughest controls of any country anywhere in the world. You have heard me say in the House the long list of countries that we do not sell arms to. They are quite strict, but I do think that, having set up that process, which was revised in 2014, we should stick to it. The great strength of that process is that there is an independent judgment made as to whether there is that risk. It is not for a politician to decide, on the basis of one act somewhere, whether these contracts are acceptable.

Q407 Ian Murray: I agree that our consolidated criteria are some of the strictest in the world, and that we have signed the arms trade treaty. However, that does not mean that the UK Foreign Secretary should not



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press for our criteria to be made stronger by including an end-use provision in the sale of arms to any country, let alone Saudi Arabia. Yes, they are strict, but we could make them stricter, better and more transparent, to stop the circular argument that we are having, and have had for the last few years, about the consolidated criteria and whether arms are being used illegally.

Mr Hunt: My understanding is that our controls are stricter than those exercised by the United States. However, I think I need to write to you with some detail about why we think we broadly cover the concerns that you raise.

Q408 Royston Smith: That was a fascinating conversation about all things in the Middle East, but there is a bigger, wider world beyond that. I will come back to China. You said, rightly, that it will be the biggest economy in relatively short order, and part of that will be the belt and road initiative. What are the risks to the UK of involving itself in China's belt and road initiative?

Mr Hunt: We are looking at the belt and road initiative with a great deal of interest, and we are of course looking at potential commercial opportunities for UK companies, of which I am sure there will be several. However, we also have concerns that some of the contracts do not meet international norms on transparency. We are concerned about the debt trap risks for some of the less developed countries getting involved in the initiative—notably Sri Lanka, which has had to give a 99-year lease on its main port to China, because it was not able to pay back the cost of building the port.

We are looking at those risks, and I think we are being very clear-eyed about it. We do not want to turn down commercial opportunities, but at the same time we need to recognise that the initiative goes beyond simple economic growth, from the Chinese point of view; they see it as a very strategic foreign policy step, and I think we need to better understand how they intend to exploit their economic interests for strategic purposes before we can commit ourselves to getting involved with it in any substantive way.

Q409 Royston Smith: There are more risks than only to us, aren't there? There are risks to people we might want to trade with. You said that, post Brexit, we will want to do trade deals with everybody, and China is one of those. Lower down the list, I think I am right in saying, is India. Is there a risk that, by allying ourselves with China, we will damage a future relationship with India?

Mr Hunt: I think we need good relationships with both. I do not just say that in a glib way. I think it is really important that we have a strong relationship with India, as the largest democracy in the world. I feel that, for all sorts of reasons that you may know better than me, and as we talked about earlier, we have not allowed that relationship to reach its full potential.



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However, I also think, given China's growing power in the world—I do not think anyone can stop the rise of China, or should want to—we need a very strong dialogue with China, so that we understand their intentions and how they intend to use the power that they are rapidly accumulating.

Q410 Chair: It is interesting to think of our shared history with India. Today, many of us are wearing these Khadi poppies, which symbolise the sacrifice of one and a half million troops from the then undivided India who fought in the cause of freedom, twice—first, of course, in the First War and then in the Second.

Q411 Priti Patel: I have a quick question on the belt and road initiative and India. It is no great surprise—it is well documented—that India is a critic of the belt and road initiative. A lot of work is taking place in terms of India's bilateral relations with China, but India is critical for a very important reason, which is the neighbourhood. China will effectively be pumping billions of dollars into countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh. It may be premature of me to ask you this question—I know you have not visited India yet, Foreign Secretary—but how do you think we can, not quite square that circle with India, but give India reassurance, vis-à-vis the fact that when it comes to both Pakistan and Bangladesh, we also put a lot of money, not from your budget but from the development budget, into both those countries? Are we going to do more, not in terms of giving India money, but do more on the bilateral relationship, which is not just on trade?

Mr Hunt: I agree. You are right; I haven't been to India. It is very much on my list. I hope to go either before the end of this year or early next year. I always think the great potential with India is that when you sit down with members of the Indian Government or members of the Indian establishment, you just feel that we have so many values in common, and you wonder why we don't do more together.

Q412 Chair: Could it be because we don't give them enough visas for students, for a start?

Mr Hunt: No. That is an issue they do raise very consistently, but there are other things as well. So I think that is one of the issues that we have to discuss. One of the challenges with India is that they, for very understandable historic reasons, have a strong attachment to a policy of non-alignment, and we completely understand that, but it also makes it difficult to develop a more strategic relationship with them. So what I hope to do when I go to India and meet Foreign Minister Swaraj is to really understand what their world view is, and whether they intend to follow China in becoming more active in every corner of the world, as would absolutely be their right as a big country and a great country, with a growing economy. But I think I need to have those discussions first.

Q413 Chair: On that point, may I very quickly ask about our relationship with Pakistan in this, because of course the China-Pakistan economic corridor, which is seen by the Chinese as part of the belt and road initiative, passes through disputed areas, as we know. How do you think we should approach this, given not just our historical and, I hope, increasingly close



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relationship with India, but given the risk of worsening Indo-Pakistan tensions, and all of this at a time when, let's be honest, we are doing that statistical thing of reversion to the mean, and we know that western economies have only been dominant in the world for the last two or so hundred years, and for the rest of human history the Asian economies, either of the Indus Valley or the Chinese plains, have been the great economic powerhouses?

Mr Hunt: From our European perspective, it seems a great tragedy that there is this tension going on between India and Pakistan that persists, when both countries have got lots of other things that I am sure they would prefer to be focusing on. Our relationship with Pakistan is an incredibly important relationship from a security point of view as well as a trade point of view. We wish the new Government in Pakistan well. I met the new Foreign Minister when I was in New York and we had an excellent discussion, but, as I think you will know better than me, we have to tread carefully in that part of the world because of the colonial history and, very understandably, their desire that we should not in any way be seen to be heavy-handed.

Q414 **Chair:** Perhaps, given that next year is the 100th anniversary of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, it may be an appropriate moment for Her Majesty's Government to, very appropriately and formally, apologise for what has to be regarded as one of the worst crimes of the colonial period, and perhaps ask for, in this case, very specifically, forgiveness from the Indian people.

Mr Hunt: That is a very profound thought; let me reflect on that, but I can understand why that could be a potentially very significant gesture.

Q415 **Mike Gapes:** You might even consider visiting and signing the book of condolence, as other UK Government representatives and parliamentary delegations have done—I did so on behalf of the Foreign Affairs Committee more than 10 years ago. It is certainly a very emotional place.

You mentioned Sri Lanka. There are deep concerns about potential political developments there, as was raised in the House yesterday. Given the great efforts that David Cameron's Government went to—including by him personally—and the work we did to get the UN Human Rights Council to set in train various conditions about investigations into the atrocities and deaths in 2009, have we made any statement at all, apart from the answers to questions in the House yesterday? Are we making any representations to the Sri Lankan authorities about the current political crisis? I must declare that many of my constituents are Tamils, some of whom came to the UK as refugees and some of whom stayed after studying here because of those events. They are very concerned about these developments.

Mr Hunt: I completely understand why. I think that what everyone feels about Sri Lanka is that in many way it has been a success story in recent years, considering the absolute horror of what happened there previously. There is huge concern that this could be a step back in the wrong



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direction, as has been expressed by many Members of the House of Commons.

We have said publicly that we urge the President of Sri Lanka to respect the constitution. I hope to speak with him this week, when I will give that very same message. We will also reflect concerns, which many Members have expressed to me, publicly and privately, about the safety of Ranil Wickremesinghe. In the end, the constitution of Sri Lanka is a matter for Sri Lanka, but obviously people have concerns about Prime Minister Rajapaksa and his association with some of the things that happened previously. We will certainly be saying, as Britain, that it is very important at this moment that Sri Lanka continues to move forward with respect to all the difficult issues of the past.

Q416 Chris Bryant: You have responsibility for consular services, and therefore for Britons when they are elsewhere around the world. The Transport Secretary has said that there is still no resolution to the issue of whether flights will be able to take off after Brexit, and that there might be some disruption. What planning have you done to look after British people who might be trapped elsewhere in the European Union when flights don't take off?

Mr Hunt: We are very engaged in that process; it is one of 11 no-deal work streams that the FCO is responsible for, and our posts are absolutely ready for what might happen. We have to be honest with the around 1 million Brits who are resident in the EU that we cannot give them answers to every single question now, because were a no-deal situation to happen—obviously we are working very hard to avoid it, and we don't think it will happen—what would happen would be different in different countries; there is no one-size-fits-all answer to what would happen. We understand that people are worried. We very much hope that between now and Christmas we can resolve all of this and get a deal that is good for business and consistent with the referendum result, but it is obviously a crucial stage. The best answer to your question is that everything we can do we are doing.

Q417 Chris Bryant: I guess the question they are asking is this: which passport queue do you think British citizens, when they arrive in France, Spain or Germany, will be using from next April onwards?

Mr Hunt: I think that is a matter for EU countries, so I am afraid I don't know the answer.

Q418 Chris Bryant: I will move on to Venezuela. Obviously the situation there is very disturbing: perhaps 2.5 million people have now fled that country because of the state of the economy, the corruption and all the problems there. How worried is the Foreign Office that that is infecting and possibly destabilising other countries in the region?

Mr Hunt: I might ask Sir Simon to come in on this—I do not pretend to have deep knowledge of the situation in Venezuela, but I pick up a lot of concern in the FCO generally about it. The strategic concern we have is that, when it comes to the establishment of democracy, South America



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has been a great success story. We want that to continue. The situation in Venezuela is obviously of great concern.

Sir Simon McDonald: I have a couple of sentences. I visited Venezuela last year. Fundamentally, it is a rich country. It has the world's largest oil reserves, but its economy has been systematically mismanaged by the last two Presidents. The British embassy is keeping in touch with other elements in politics and society to keep other possibilities open, waiting for a better turn in politics in Venezuela. There is a vibrant civil society in Venezuela, which we think will grow again, but you are right that the short-term political prospects are bleak.

Chris Bryant: Brazil? Don't bother!

Q419 **Ian Murray:** I want to ask about Brazil if I may because of the election. Venezuela and some of the central and southern American countries seem to be going backwards ever so slightly. What will the Foreign Office do to engage with the new President of Brazil? He has a very Trumpesque agenda—he is pulling out of the Paris agreement, shutting down the Environment Ministry and allowing development on the rain forest. How will you engage, particularly around trade and expanding trade?

Mr Hunt: We will continue to advocate for British values—the things that all of us in this room believe in—irrespective of who the President is. Brazil is a very important country. They have a democratically elected President. We have to respect that. We will engage with them. We do not agree with a number of the things that he said in the election campaign, but that does not mean that we will not work hard to have a constructive and positive relationship with Brazil and try to find areas on which we can work closely with them.

I go back to the earlier comments about Venezuela. There was a huge dinner last night in the Foreign Office for all the ambassadors from South America. The point I made to all of them was that there is so much progress in South America—Britain has not exploited the potential of our historic relationships with South America nearly as much as we might have—but let's not go backwards on the progress made on democracy. That is one of the biggest achievements of all.

Q420 **Mr Seely:** Can I ask about Global Britain, Foreign Secretary? Is that term still being used in the FCO?

Mr Hunt: We do use the term, but my view is very much as you said in the report you published: it must not be a slogan or a branding exercise, and has to actually mean something.

In the speech I will give this evening, I am trying to flesh out what that means. It is basically along the lines that we have talked about today. We are using our huge web of connections in the world to be a kind of invisible thread linking the democracies of the world and preparing us all for the challenges we are going to face in the decades ahead.

Q421 **Mr Seely:** That is potentially a very interesting way of seeing it. If "Global



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Britain" is shorthand for anything, it is shorthand for a national strategy post Brexit. Do you believe we have a national strategy post Brexit, even taking into account some of the ideas and arguments you are putting out?

Mr Hunt: That is what I want us to ensure we have. I see that as my job as Foreign Secretary. I do not think there will be a big ta-da moment where we unveil it, but we have to have a very clear view as to how the world order is changing, what the risks are to our values, our way of life and our security, and to ensure that we are absolutely ready for it. The danger of Brexit is that it eclipses the much bigger issues that we really need to be engaging with.

Q422 **Mr Seely:** You are exactly right. The frustration here is that we do not feel that the FCO has shown us—or me, if I am speaking in a personal capacity—that there has been enough thinking about our role in the world or about our aims, values, interests and all those good things post Brexit.

Mr Hunt: I cannot speak for anyone else. All I can say is that, when it comes to my time at the FCO, when I have not been travelling, I have been having a meeting on this once a week. Richard Moore is the main man, although Simon is always there. I had a fascinating meeting with Kissinger in August. I asked him, "What's the difference between a good Foreign Minister and a bad Foreign Minister?" He said, "A good Foreign Minister is strategic." I am trying to learn from someone of enormous experience in that respect, and ensure that we take a strategic approach to foreign policy.

Q423 **Chair:** We are running out of time and I am extremely grateful for the way you have behaved with the Committee this afternoon and answered our questions so fully. I am genuinely grateful.

If I may, I am going to come back to a much more immediate subject. The Tánaiste, Simon Coveney, has been travelling a lot—he is in Paris right now, but you had breakfast with him this morning. Could you tell me how you see the relationship with the Republic of Ireland? As you will know, our first trip as a Committee in this Parliament was to the Republic of Ireland because of the importance we see in that relationship, and particularly at the moment when we are beginning to see for the first time the Limerick poppy, for example, remembering, in a very similar way to India, a shared past in the cause of freedom. That relationship matters to the United Kingdom absolutely fundamentally. Damaging that relationship is very, very bad for both of us. Can you talk a little bit about your relationship with the Tánaiste?

Mr Hunt: You are right—I had breakfast with him this morning and introduced him to two of my three children. I mention that because I think the Irish are family. That relationship is incredibly important. Given that the backstop is probably one of the two remaining difficult issues in the Brexit negotiations, it is incredibly important that we take every opportunity to understand each other's positions. When it comes to the issues of Northern Ireland, we both want exactly the same thing. It was a very productive meeting—I have met him on a number of occasions now—



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but I think this is going to be one of those times when both countries need to remember how aligned our values fundamentally are.

Q424 **Chair:** Indeed. The Irish are very much family. My father is Irish, so there we go.

Mr Hunt: My mother is half Irish.

Chris Bryant: A lot of British people are becoming Irish now, aren't they?

Q425 **Chair:** Can I just have some very final questions? The Committee went to Southampton. As you may be aware, we are doing roadshows—the Committee is going around to listen to the opinions of people in different parts of our country about on what they want from foreign policy, and more specifically from Global Britain. I will ask you very specifically a few questions on behalf of those people. What steps are you taking to counter President Trump's challenge to international norms?

Mr Hunt: First of all, it is very important that Britain remains one of only a very small handful of countries that is able to have discussions with the White House in a very open and frank way. We treat each other as friends, and that close strategic partnership is very, very important and I want to keep it—it is very important for us, and I would presume to say that it is important for them as well.

My view about President Trump is that he is not trying to tear down the international order; he wants to fight for it in a more robust way than his predecessors when it comes to reform of the WTO and NATO. We would always stand with him in his desire to reform these institutions. If he ever wanted to tear them down—I don't believe he does—we would be in a different place. We have always shown in our policy, including on the Iran nuclear deal, that when we have a different view from the Americans, we are not afraid to say so.

Q426 **Chair:** The second question that comes from our outreach in Southampton is this: how can the UK make sure that it has the foreign language abilities that it needs?

Mr Hunt: We can be proud of the Foreign Office because it's actually one of our—I am sorry. Did you ask about the UK?

Chair: The UK. I know you are doing your bit by speaking Chinese and Japanese very fluently.

Mr Hunt: It is important that you know whether you are learning Chinese or Japanese.

Chair: If I called my wife German, I am not sure the relationship would last.

Mr Hunt: Let me give you an answer not as a politician, but as a former businessman. When you are selling products in other countries, you need to speak the language of the country. It is as simple as that if we are going to be strong and successful and prosperous. It is a wonderful thing



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that the whole world speaks English, but there are plenty of places where it is not the first language. People really respect you if you have taken the trouble to get to know them. I think we need a big push on it.

Q427 Chair: The last question from Southampton is this: should the Government do more to separate foreign policy from day-to-day party politics?

Mr Hunt: Curiously, I would actually say that that is something we are quite good at as a body politic in this country. We have had a very good discussion this afternoon. Someone looking from the outside would not be able to identify the parties of most of the people involved in this discussion, apart from that very brief moment when you talked about conservative internationalism and liberal internationalism.

Chris Bryant: We are all going to be deselected now.

Mr Hunt: I say that with a great sigh of relief because previously I was Health Secretary—it was incredibly difficult to ever separate it from party politics. On the whole in this country, we are pretty good at knowing when there is a national interest that transcends party interests.

Chair: Foreign Secretary, thank you very much for your first hearing before the Foreign Affairs Committee. We look forward to seeing you very soon. We will see you, Sir Simon, in two weeks and we welcome Richard to his new post.