



Select Committee on International Relations

Uncorrected oral evidence: Yemen

Wednesday 16 January 2019

10.40 am

Watch the meeting

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

Evidence Session No. 1

Heard in Public

Questions 1 - 15

Witnesses

I: The Rt Hon Alistair Burt MP, Minister of State for the Middle East, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and Minister of State, Department for International Development; Dr Louise Walker, Head of Office - Yemen, Department for International Development; James Downer, Yemen Team, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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Examination of witnesses

Alistair Burt MP, Dr Louise Walker and James Downer.

Q1 The Chairman: Minister, good morning, and thank you very much for being here with your colleagues. As a formality, I am obliged to remind you that this is a recorded session and that a transcript will follow that can be altered if it does not represent what you feel has been said or is inaccurate. I also remind my colleagues that they should declare any interests when asking questions.

Minister, it does not need me or anyone else to tell you that the situation in Yemen is tragic and horrific. It is a very tortured part of the world. I shall begin with what sounds like a general question but one from which I think a number of specific issues will flow: namely, how do you assess and sum up the policy of the United Kingdom in Yemen? What is our involvement, what are our duties, what do you see as our responsibilities, and what do you see as our priorities in addressing the tragedy of Yemen today?

Alistair Burt MP: Thank you, Chairman. It is a pleasure to come before you again. Would you like us to put ourselves on the record at the start? I am the Minister of State at the Foreign Office and DfID.

Dr Louise Walker: I am head of office for DfID Yemen.

James Downer: I am from the Foreign Office Yemen team.

The Chairman: I hope that you will both join in with the Minister, because this is a conversation. We are not trying to score points; we are trying to elucidate the way forward in this difficult situation.

Alistair Burt MP: I am very grateful for that, Chairman, and we will indeed endeavour to answer your questions collectively. I will use the expertise of my colleagues when required.

In answer to your general question, which of course will lead on to various other avenues, the position of the United Kingdom since the start of the conflict has been to do whatever is possible to seek to restore calm and stability to the state of Yemen so that the Yemeni people can continue their journey to find a process of governance that is right for them. We are all aware of the origins of the conflict, and the UK rightly takes a strong view on the usurpation of a legitimate Government. That was the situation when President Hadi's government was attacked by the Houthi insurgency. There was a recognition, when that Government asked for help and assistance to be supplied by coalition forces led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, that it was not illegitimate for the UK to support that process in order to see a legitimate Government restored.

In doing so, and recognising the relationship with our partners, not in a conflict per se but in the region, we also very clearly understood the impact on civilians—the people of Yemen—while at the same time working diplomatically to do everything we could to see a negotiated end

to this conflict. That is because from the earliest point we had the sense that there was no military solution, in that it was unlikely that the insurgency would be able to control the whole of Yemen and equally unlikely that the forces of the Government of Yemen would be able to re-establish control solely by military means. We have sought to use our good efforts to encourage the diplomatic process that would bring the conflict to an end so that there could be humanitarian assistance for those who had been disrupted by the conflict and the process of governance could go on.

I will make two points in relation to those different elements. On humanitarian aid, we have been one of the major donors of humanitarian support in Yemen. I have figures that show what we have been able to do, working essentially through UN and other multinational agencies as we are not present on the ground. We recognise the needs of the people in Yemen.

Diplomatically, we have long supported through the UN the process of successive envoys, culminating in the recent efforts of Martin Griffiths finally to bring the parties together in Stockholm. We have given every assistance to that process. The ultimate aim, we hope, is a position that recognises the reality that in the end it is the Yemeni people who will make the decision about their own future. They are a very proud and independent people. The removal of President Ali Abdullah Saleh and his rule was important for the people of Yemen, particularly those who had previously had no voice in governance. Moreover, the process of the national dialogue that was sparked by the removal of President Ali Abdullah Saleh is perhaps still the basis on which things will be decided in the future.

I have always been strongly of the view that although there is obvious international interest in what happens in Yemen, fundamentally this will be settled only when the Yemeni people themselves make decisions about how their political process is going to develop. We have been involved in trying to ensure that the circumstances in which that process can continue are actually arrived at.

Q2 The Chairman: You say only by the Yemeni people themselves, but is that really so? What about the interferences from outside? What about the people who are believed to be fighting a proxy war there, and what about our partners in the international sense? Can you give us a little more on the broader scene? From the point of view of the people of Yemen, it does not seem that this is at all within their control; rather, it seems that there are outside forces.

Alistair Burt MP: That is quite correct. I did not mean to suggest that the situation I described us wanting to get to is where we are at the moment. My point was that when people discuss Yemen it is almost exclusively in the context of outside forces: what the coalition is doing, what Iran is doing, what the great powers may be doing. My point is that you can do all this as much as you like, but ultimately Yemeni people,

being the people they are, will make their own decisions, and the conflict will not end until that comes about.

The international position at the moment, again, is relatively well known and understood. The government of President Hadi called for help and support to be restored. That has come principally from the UAE¹ and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, although not exclusively, in a coalition designed to restore him to his position.

Yemen has not been a hugely sectarian country in the context of the Middle East, but the Houthi community is identified as a brand of Shia faith and ideology, and some of the concern about its activities was that, although it had long had an interesting relationship with the Government of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, it had been in frequent conflict with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and there had been a lot of border incursions and activity there. The attack on the government in Sanaa and their replacement with a de facto authority of the Houthis was of such concern to neighbours in the region that they realised that they had to take an active part.

The Houthis have sought support principally from Iran, although at a relatively low level of Iranian engagement on the ground, but they have shown themselves capable, once they have been armed, of conducting operations outside their borders through the use of ballistic missiles that have gone from Houthi territory into Saudi Arabia. They have also established de facto control on the ground in a significant area of Yemen.

That control is far from benign to the people who are under their authority and control. The ideological element has attracted great concern in the region as a potential movement in the very complex and fragile balances between states that see themselves allied in one way or another with the major Sunni and Shia players in the area, and any movement in that balance causes instability and interest to those outside. That is broadly where the international concern is.

For the UN Security Council, the bottom line of its position has quite rightly been restoring a government who have legitimate support and backing and acting through the UN Security Council to seek to secure that. As always, as this Committee will know very well, the UN Security Council comprises members who have their own interests, and although they work together in the best interests of this issue there have been issues between members there.

So my point was that of course there is international engagement and involvement now on the military side, but after years of conflict we have reached the broader realisation that this will not be won in conventional military terms, and that, accordingly, if there is to be peace, stability and security, Yemen must not again be exposed to ungoverned space, which can be used by terror groups—al-Qaeda was a concern some years ago in

¹ The United Arab Emirates

the Arabian peninsula. We all know that that ungoverned space can be exploited.

If that is to come to an end, the conflict has to stop and the political processes begun after Ali Abdullah Saleh stopped being President must continue. But my point was that, for those to be a success, although there will be interest from those outside, the parties on the ground must demonstrate great independence. The Houthis are not a proxy of Iran in the same way you could argue in other places, and the government of the state of Yemen are not a proxy of their coalition partners, who are trying to restore them to rule. All of us who have experience of the Yemenis know that, at the end of this, unless they are in charge of their own governance and country, the guns in the back of the knapsacks will come out again.

Q3 Baroness Helic: Good morning, Minister. My question is also probably slightly related to our domestic situation here. We have a very close relationship with our allies in the Gulf that goes back decades. The United States has a particularly close relationship with Saudi Arabia, which is one of the major players in that part of the world and in this particular conflict.

Given that they have such a close relationship and we are so distracted with our domestic issues, such as Brexit, do we have the same level of influence in that part of the world, particularly with the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, and do they listen to their traditional friend and ally?

Alistair Burt MP: That is a great question, but I would not have expected anything else.

Our position remains very similar, as does our steadfastness in recognising what the coalition was designed to do in Yemen, which has been contrary to quite a bit of media and political pressure. A common view outside this place, as the Committee will know, is that this is some form of Saudi invasion trying to put pressure on a poor group in Yemen fighting for its rights, et cetera. Nothing could be further from the truth, as we know, and the United Kingdom, at the dispatch box and publicly, has been able to say, 'That is not the case. These are the issues. This is what we think is important'. That has meant that our influence there has been very steady.

Our humanitarian support is deeply appreciated. We are a major donor, behind the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and the work that we have done diplomatically at the UN through Matthew Rycroft and now Karen Pierce—we, of course, have been the pen holder there—has been much appreciated. So that influence remains very strong.

The broader import of your question is about United States influence, in a way, and what it is doing in the region. It appears perfectly clear to us that the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia is extremely strong. They are worried about the influence of others in the region, so they see the Saudi position and its various alliances as a

bulwark for security and stability in the region, which might be threatened by the activities of others, principally Iran.

It seems to me that, in that process, the American position is therefore strong in relation to this, but, of course, the American position in other parts of the Middle East has been slightly more contradictory. Again, as we all know, stability matters, constancy matters, and states may be looking at the United States' position quite carefully and wondering at what stage things might change. Syria is an example of where American policy has been one thing, then another, et cetera.

Throughout all this, our policy has been relatively straightforward and clear. Accordingly, that and the influence on the humanitarian side, our understanding of what the coalition, the partnership, is designed to do, and our diplomatic efforts, which in the past year have included visits to Tehran to try to understand more closely the relationship which the region needs to have with Iran, have put us in quite a good position.

Q4 Lord Grocott: You have used the phrase a couple of times in relation to both Britain's and the UN's involvement in the area that we are dealing with a Government which has 'legitimate support and backing'. In other words, that assessment is pretty crucial to Britain's involvement and the UN's view of the situation.

In the spirit of genuine inquiry, can you tell us how one assesses that a government have legitimate support and backing? It is a pretty important assessment to make when intervening, however indirectly, in a situation like this.

Alistair Burt MP: There are two things. First, a militant insurgent group with no elected authority seizing the reins of power is to be regarded with great concern, and there is no legitimacy whatever in the Houthi rebellion, however it has been presented. When the group took over the government administration in Sanaa and then sought to pursue the President of the Republic of Yemen to Aden and beyond, it was clear that it was acting unilaterally with no constitutional backing or anything else.

In contrast, the Government of President Hadi, who took government control after President Ali Abdullah Saleh left in a constitutional process that had been agreed in Yemen, had the legitimacy of the offices of state that ensured that they continued to be recognised by the United Nations and others. It is really a rebellion against a government. Obviously at present there is no way of testing the authority of President Hadi, because the circumstances do not exist in which that can be done.

However, the President was part of a process of national dialogue which Baroness Helic will well remember. It was designed to recognise that the rule of President Ali Abdullah Saleh was not a Westminster democracy. Let us be clear: this was a man who played off his opponents very skilfully and used the violence against him to a degree in order to go to others and say, 'Unless you help me, these people will take over the Government. You wouldn't want that, would you?'

It was not a comfortable system of governance. Hence, as a part of 2011, there were changes in Yemen, and the voices of younger people, women and others, along with the continuing issues in the south and the issues that had been thrown up by the unification of Yemen, needed to be heard as a new constitutional structure was brought forward. Before that could be completed, the Houthis began their activities. That is where I think the United Kingdom's understanding of the position is and why we have taken the view that we have.

Q5 **Baroness Smith of Newnham:** Minister, thank you for your opening remarks. You have talked a little about the role of Iran. I think I heard you say that the Houthis have the support of Iran, although not on the ground, but that they are not a proxy for Iran. If that is the case, what do we think Iran is actually doing there?

Alistair Burt MP: You have opened up a whole series of issues here. It is fair to say that my view that the Houthis are not a proxy for Iran would be challenged in some areas. I formed that view because of the evidence on the ground. From my understanding, Iran has taken the view that the actions of the coalition and the government of Yemen in relation to the civilian population needed some assistance. There is a degree of obscurity about equipment and those who might be training, but I do not want to go into too much detail on that. However, publicly Iran has taken a position that recognises and understands what the Houthis are doing.

You can get various answers to your question about what we think Iran is doing. There is the straightforward view that the activities of Iran in the region as a whole are associated with issues of instability, whether that is the backing of Hezbollah in Lebanon, its activities in Iraq or anything else that the Committee will be aware of.

But, again, as we all know, Tehran sees life very differently. The Iranians view themselves as being surrounded by people who are supplied with arms and weapons from elsewhere. There are various centres of authority in Iran that do not always see the world in exactly the same way, but fundamentally the Iranians believe that they have a justification for seeking to protect themselves and to look for alliances and support elsewhere.

The search for alliances and support is done in such a way that it appears threatening to others, but I am with those who say that sooner or later all of this has to be worked through, with no concession to the things that people do that are wrong and threatening. Unless we are going to avoid a terrible conflagration between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Israel, Iran and others, at some stage there has to be an understanding of this. None the less, those who act in a way that supports illegitimacy and threatens others directly through the supply of weaponry that may be wrongly directed is a cause for concern.

That is my general sense. I think it is known that there is some relationship between the Houthis and Iran. As I say, there is a measure of academic difference as to the degree of that control, but our

assessment is that the Houthis are very independent minded, but that in a struggle like this they will take support from where they can get it, and it suits Iran to have an interest.

I should say, because I hope we do not lose sight of this, that when it comes to the current situation on the ground, which I am sure we will come on to, Iran played a part in ensuring that the Houthis attended the talks in Stockholm. That should be missed in all this. I want to put that on the record.

The Chairman: That is a good point.

Lord Wood of Anfield: I should like briefly to follow up on that comment. I appreciate that the distinction is much more subtle than that, and much more subtle than most people might think, but it is so interesting precisely because the ostensible case for the military presence of the Saudis, for example, is in large part to do with preventing the spread of the Iranian sphere of influence. This is not a purely academic distinction; it is actually crucial to the fundamental case for external engagement in the military conflict.

Alistair Burt MP: That is absolutely right, and of course Saudi Arabia has direct experience of ballistic missiles and other weaponry being fired by the Houthis which the United Nations has designated as being of Iranian origin. It is correct to say that Saudi Arabia is not going to take the risk of a border that could be under the influence, if not the control, of another power that it considers to be hostile. This is all part of the risks and dangers in the region of conflicts that appear to be localised but of course have wider import.

That, again, stresses the vital necessity for UN and UK diplomacy to do everything it can to seek to descale these risks. However, it is absolutely correct to say that you can in no way ignore or minimise the physical impact of weaponry coming into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that could threaten not only Saudi Arabia but international areas. When a missile was targeted at and landed in Riyadh airport, there was no excuse or explanation for that, because the downing of an airliner or an attack on an international airport that could have led to the loss of international life would have been a significant moment in the region. The conflagration in response would also have been significant.

Q6 **Baroness Hilton of Eggardon:** You refer to the legitimate Government of Yemen. I probably ought to know, but I am not sure what system of election they have and whether the Houthis are represented in any way.

Alistair Burt MP: This is a convenient moment to bring in James Downer.

James Downer: The Houthis are not elected in any way that we would recognise. They came to power at a time of great instability in Yemen, in effect through the threat of force, as much as by force. The Minister alluded earlier to the distinction between the situation as it is now and the kind of political outcome that we want to work towards. The latter is

an inclusive political arrangement in which all the groups, including the Houthis, would have some stake and some say in how Yemen is managed. However, they certainly did not reach the position they hold now through any kind of democratic process.

Baroness Hilton of Eggardon: Would they have had elections? After all, Saudi Arabia does not hold elections.

James Downer: They have had elections in the past. The former President, President Saleh, was elected. President Hadi was the Vice-President of Yemen and came to power as part of the arrangements that saw President Saleh removed from the political scene by agreement among Yemenis at that time.

Alistair Burt MP: I have a research note in front of me: 'Ali Abdullah Saleh, the former President, stepped down in November 2011 following almost a year of Arab Spring mass protests and pressure from the US, the GCC, the UK and the UN. The transition road map known as the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative saw the transfer of power to Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, Saleh's Vice-President of 14 years'.

That was the process in coming to power. The Houthis and the Southern Movement were not included in the power-sharing arrangements, but that, of course, is what led to the work on the National Dialogue, because a new system was absolutely anticipated as a result of the events just described. It was that process which the Houthis disrupted by their activity to usurp the government of Yemen.

The Chairman: Lord Purvis, I am going to ask you to come in later, because I want to move on to the specifics of what is happening on the ground. I shall certainly call you in later.

Q7 **Baroness Anelay of St Johns:** Good morning, Minister. You just referred to the National Dialogue. The dialogue that has recently been in train has been the Stockholm meeting and then the Stockholm Agreement, so I take you to that.

What is your assessment of how that agreement is holding, against the background which we know Martin Griffiths reported: that it was a great success in the first instance, in that both parties turned up and, after some initial bureaucratic approach to discussions, engaged in talking to each other, which is encouraging?

After that initial encouraging development, what has been happening from your point of view in assessing the results of the declaration, and what kind of support is the UK giving now and as the agreement proceeds?

Alistair Burt MP: Briefly, Martin Griffiths, and Mark Lowcock of OCHA,² reported to the Security Council on 9 January. That is the most up-to-date report of how things are going on the ground.

² The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Broadly, the Stockholm talks were a success just by taking place in the first place and by there being a definitive agreement that came out of them afterwards, principally in relation to Hodeidah, but not exclusively so. What Martin Griffiths was able to report last week was broadly positive. Both sides have largely complied with the agreement on the ceasefire in Hodeidah, and the relative calm there reflects the benefit of the Stockholm agreement.

The UN monitor, General Patrick Cammaert, has chaired several meetings with parties to work on the details of the redeployment of forces and the humanitarian access issues agreed in Stockholm. Martin Griffiths' report to the UN includes phrases such as the agreement 'sends a very clear signal of the international community's support for the achievement that we were able to bring together in Stockholm and our plans subsequently to build on the momentum gained'. It speaks of support from both the Government of Yemen and the Houthi authorities. It says, 'Abdel Malek al-Houthi'—the ostensible leader of the Houthi movement—'firmly told me in no uncertain terms of the decision and commitment of his movement to implement all those provisions that were agreed in Stockholm'.

The effect on the ground has been for things to be much quieter than there were. There are sporadic incidents—there are bound to be as people test out the ceasefire—but broadly it is stable. Mark Lowcock's view—we may come on to the humanitarian aspect quite separately, and Louise may give more details then—is that it is better and easier than it was, but it is far from dealing immediately with all the problems that are there.

I spoke yesterday to David Beasley, the head of the World Food Programme. He also describes a more positive attitude from the Houthis, which is important because it is Houthi areas in particular where access has been difficult. Visas have been difficult to get, and work on the ground has been harder, as have the difficulties of physically getting in. He said that one of the benefits of the agreement is that the spotlight has been shone on Houthi control, perhaps for the first time.

We have worked for a long time on the understanding that the world's media looks very carefully at the coalition and what it is doing, but Houthi-controlled areas have largely escaped any attention. Accordingly, ensuring that there was proper humanitarian access was important to us, but criticism did not go very far. It does now, which is a benefit of the agreement, so the initial responses to the agreement have been that the ceasefire is holding and there have been beneficial effects on both sides.

On what we have been doing, the Foreign Secretary has been very active. The previous Foreign Secretary also took a significant part in the small-group meetings of like-minded nations that were essential for progress. Diplomatic progress came about as a result of that constant effort. There was no sudden breakthrough. Confidence between the parties is incredibly low.

We did everything that we could as pen-holders at the UN to encourage the efforts of successive envoys. In November, the Foreign Secretary travelled to Saudi Arabia and the UAE. He visited Iran. He went to the Stockholm peace talks in December and met leaders of both delegations. He was the first British Minister to meet representatives of the Houthis. We drafted the UN Security Council Resolution, which was painstakingly put together. Lord Hannay will understand the process extremely well, much better than me.

Making sure that there was a resolution that enabled the special envoy to do his work was very important. This is not an easy situation. Different sides took different views, so getting the wording correct was important. A Resolution that did not work would have been worse than useless. The fact that our painstaking work complemented the efforts of the envoy to create a space for an agreement that has held and has had beneficial effects is a good step forward. It does not end the problems, it does not end the conflict, it does not deal with all the humanitarian aspects, but without it we would be in a very much poorer position today than we are at present.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: Thank you. I know that others have questions they would like to follow on with, particularly on the humanitarian issues.

I have two questions about the Stockholm agreement. One is with regard to Hodeidah. There has been some discussion about the fact that there are different understandings between the Houthis and the Hadis about the implications for Hodeidah with regard to the agreement to withdraw weaponry. Do you think that that lack of detail and common understanding will be positive or negative when the parties meet again? They should be meeting again relatively soon.

My other question about the agreement relates to the release of prisoners. Are we close to that being finalised? Clearly it would be a significant public sign of movement.

Alistair Burt MP: In relation to the latter, talks are still ongoing. I spoke yesterday to His Excellency the Foreign Minister of Oman. The state of Oman has been immensely helpful as a conduit of information to parties whom it is not always easy for everyone to speak to. I am very grateful for Oman's efforts in relation to this. We had a conversation about how we could help the parties to move on regarding the transfer of prisoners. It is still very much a live issue that is being discussed.

In relation to the ambiguity on forces, my sense is that a resolution can go only so far. It is really about confidence building. Confidence between these parties was exceptionally low. It is also complicated by the fact that it is not just those two parties in the room, as we know, and not just the parties with coalition partners et cetera also having an interest. I mentioned before, as the Committee will know, that Yemen itself is very complex. Martin Griffiths estimated that there could be as many as 1 million combatants, because various other groups have joined the groups

in the confrontation. Each has expectations of what may happen next. That also has to be included in consultations and decisions.

On Hodeidah, the work of the UN monitor and the fact that the Redeployment Committee has met a number of times is where that work needs to be done. At this stage, my understanding is that we should keep those talks going, because it is not the letter of the law that anyone will necessarily adhere to. We will see things beginning to move when those with weaponry who are facing each other have confidence in what the other is going to do.

There are times when you have to leave things to those on the ground who are directly involved. They have the broad support of those who want to seek peace and they have made their statements and declarations. However, as I mentioned earlier, Martin Griffiths was able to report directly on what the leader of the Houthis had said about implementing the decisions. That is the sense that we have from the government of Yemen as well, so let us see some of these things move forward. Indeed, as we look to the next steps and the next talks, that will be the acid test of how things are moving along.

Q8 Baroness Coussins: I was going to ask this question later, but because it follows on and to some extent overlaps with what you have just been saying, I will put it to you now instead.

One of the outcomes of Stockholm was the commitment to enhance the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism. Has there been enough time yet for you to make an assessment of how effectively that is working? Also, can you tell us what the UK's role in it is and whether you think there is still further scope for improvement?

Alistair Burt MP: I will ask my colleagues to say a little about UNVIM. My sense is that the work that has been done on that so patiently over the past year or so has helped with the availability of ships that can come in and unload. There are still problems with that, particularly in Aden where there are blockages. Hodeidah has been affected as much by commercial problems—the problems with the economy, which we may want to talk about later. Commercial ships will not dock if they cannot sell their produce. On the UNVIM inspections, I do not think there have been any huge changes in the past month. I would be grateful if my colleagues could talk about that.

Dr Louise Walker: As you are aware, UNVIM was created to help to give some assurance about what is going into the Red Sea ports, particularly with regard to commercial shipping. At the end of 2017, after the ballistic missile attack on the international airport in Riyadh, access restrictions were imposed on the Red Sea ports.

One of the things that the UK did was to send within a few weeks people who are essentially UK experts to increase the capacity of UNVIM to carry out actual physical inspections. They would board fuel ships with sniffer dogs and climb down into the holds in order to look at what was going on.

We have increased those visible inspections tenfold and we have also worked with the Saudis and UNVIM to improve the procedures so that there are fewer delays in getting the paperwork through and sorting out the communications. Right now, we are in quite a good place, because we have a well-functioning system that actually works and is not a barrier to shipping in that way.

On what UNVIM might do post-Stockholm, we have not worked out an exact plan yet. The UN will make a proposal and set out a plan. We are thinking about doing things like moving some of the UNVIM personnel, not UK personnel, so that instead of being in Djibouti they would be on the ground in Hodeidah. They could then do some of the work there to facilitate the operation of the port.

Q9 Lord Reid of Cardowan: I do not want to divert too much from the humanitarian issue, but I have one question on which I hope you can comment briefly.

We have discussed the main protagonists, who, as you say, are in the room in Stockholm and progress has been made. To what extent does the al-Qaeda presence, particularly in the southern area, complicate or threaten progress between the major parties to this conflict?

Alistair Burt MP: As I indicated earlier, the risk of ungoverned or troubled space being exploited by al-Qaeda remains very real.

In relation to the talks and the discussions, I do not think that it complicates things to a great extent, beyond reinforcing in everyone's mind the dangers of not reaching an agreement and therefore allowing those who would exploit the space for terror purposes more of an opportunity to do so. That is a concern for all of us, including those who are involved in the engagement itself. That is my sense of where things are.

Q10 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: I should like to ask a question about the negotiating and peace process going forward. Perhaps you could say something about our and the UN's expectations for the next stages in what I suppose could be called the Stockholm process, or the process started at Stockholm.

Minister, everything you have said has been enormously valuable, but it does illustrate the complexity of this situation, given the outside players and the inside actors who are involved. Have you given any thought as to whether our input, which has been quite substantial but perhaps could be stronger, would be helped if you had A Special Representative or someone similar to pull the threads together and work with all the parties? As you say, the Foreign Secretary has now spoken to the Houthis, so there is no ban on finding out where they are coming from. You can never really move these processes forward if you are not able at least to listen.

As you know, I and several of my colleagues in this House have made a suggestion in the context of Syria about the desirability of doing this, but I am not raising that again. Have you given any thought to that? Anyway,

your thoughts on the future of what could properly be called the peace process would be helpful.

Alistair Burt MP: We tried to ensure that the UN Special Envoy had as much backing as possible. I think the Committee is aware that there had been two previous Special Envoys, but for one reason or another they were not able to bring the parties together. It was probably too soon. There was an expectation among some of the parties that they could achieve their objectives by military means. The envoys found on occasion that the avenues to the people they were speaking to had been blocked. Martin Griffiths has been able to break through that, and our best endeavours have been used to give him the support and space that he needed in order to be able to do his job.

That coincided with the long-term process of the small-group talks between the states that were engaged, obviously including the United Kingdom and others, to feed back into the process and to work through the UN Security Council, which has not always been easy to do, and thus to produce what we have at the end.

We have our ambassador, Michael Aron, who works out of Riyadh because he cannot be in Sanaa. Because things have moved on, I do not at this stage have the sense that an extra designated individual is absolutely necessary in order to complement the work that is already going on, because there are those engaged on behalf of the UK who are doing that. If the Foreign Secretary thought that it was necessary, we might move in that direction. He has taken a keen interest in trying to resolve these matters, and of course the pen-holding in the UN helps to do that job anyway. I will look at this again, because, as you have rightly asked, what is the next stage?

We have great confidence in what Martin Griffiths has already been able to do. He has created a degree of confidence between the parties that has been enormously helpful. As I say, when talking yesterday to an external actor to that, the director of the World Food Programme, he made a direct reference to the change in atmosphere that had come about as a result of the diplomatic progress and how it has been assisting him on the ground. I take that as a mark of the progress that has been made through the existing processes in which we have played a major part.

At present, as we look ahead, the special envoy wants to get the next stage of the talks agreed. No date has been fixed for that, but it is very much in people's minds that it will happen. There have been offers from one or two states to host them. They are unlikely to be held in Stockholm again, but they will probably be outside the immediate area.

Work is in active progress at the moment to set these up and to consider what might be considered at that time. We will give all sorts of help and encouragement in that regard. If anything extra is needed, we will certainly do that. Again, I will go back and discuss with colleagues

whether we need to appoint an extra individual to supplement the work that is already going on.

- Q11 Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** On a quite different aspect, presumably, as always in a situation like this, the external players are very important. Above all, the Governments of Saudi Arabia and Iran have great capacity to act either positively or negatively on the peace process and the attempts to move things forward. Unlike the United States, we have diplomatic relations with them both, and I take your point that the Foreign Secretary talked about this when he was in Tehran, and indeed when some Iranians came through here. I think they had some contacts with the Foreign Office, too—the ambassador from their side, who was responsible for Yemen.

Have you given any thought at all to how we might strengthen the disincentives to both Saudi Arabia and Iran to meddle negatively in this process, which will always be a temptation? This Committee, when it did a report on the Middle East some time back, suggested that we ought to indicate quietly to the Saudis that if they did not co-operate in efforts to de-escalate this and to bring a solution about, there would be consequences for our willingness to continue supplying them with military supplies—not a cut-off, but perhaps a suspension of certain contracts if they did not.

Do you not think there is a need to keep the feet of external actors in Yemen to the fire during what is a very precarious process?

Alistair Burt MP: I may not follow your line all the way, Lord Hannay, but you open up something of huge interest to me and to us. It is the sort of moment when I would say, 'How long have you got?', because we could spend all our time dealing with this.

I am very much on record, as Minister for the Middle East, for both DfID and the FCO, as talking about the region, looking at the various conflicts there and saying that any one of these, if there is a misjudgement, could lead to some form of catastrophe. Accordingly, we look at each one on the basis of what we can all do to descale it. This involves some very direct conversations with our friends. Clearly, I cannot, and you would not expect me to, break diplomatic confidence by going into too much detail, but those conversations must be a mixture of, 'What can we do to help you?', 'What are you doing that might be making the situation more difficult, either wittingly or unwittingly?', and 'How can we get people off the hooks they are on?'

This Committee will understand very well that you can in no way minimise the degree of apprehension and lack of confidence among various states in the region that have huge, existential fears for their states. That means that discussions externally about what these states might do have some impact, but some of these issues are fundamental to them, and going about this very carefully is of huge importance.

I have found really helpful my conversations not just in Tehran, with my opposite number, Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, but in many

places around Europe. That in no way precludes our concerns about Tehran, which we have made very public and very clear. As you have said, you need to talk to everybody, and if you cannot talk to those with whom you have the greatest difficulty you are precluding an opportunity to make changes.

This applies equally to our friends in the region when it comes to the things they might do, which ostensibly are absolutely defensive and fundamental to their defence but that can be seen in an entirely different way elsewhere. Much depends on trying to find a way through in circumstances where each regards the other's conduct as entirely reprehensible, and where the other must take action first before they contemplate taking action themselves. That was the very essence of your life's work, and the essence of what we do through the FCO. We have those direct conversations.

For those who are being challenged physically by missiles being fired at them, knowing that they have a partner who will not see them physically threatened is very important. The United Kingdom's stand with their partners in the region has been very important, but it has in no way obstructed the talks and conversations about how we end all this. We are on record as having said for a lengthy period of time that we do not see a military solution to what is happening in Yemen, when it has been quite clear that some elements in the coalition partnership might have disagreed with that and believed that one more heave would see success.

I think events on the ground have proved that that would probably not be likely, and with the combination of diplomatic moves and responses from the other side there may be no need for one side or the other to seek that overwhelming military solution, because there is a better answer available.

That is the sphere in which we will work. However, our conversations need to keep people's feet to the fire, as you say, and to recognise the threats that they feel they are under and to try to find a way through that.

The Chairman: I see all the dilemmas, Minister, but the former Foreign Secretary told this Committee a year or so ago that he felt that we were 'still narrowly on the right side' of the threshold when considering the provision of arms to Saudi Arabia. So we are involved and we have judgments constantly to make. This is a pretty central matter, is it not?

Alistair Burt MP: Yes. This comes into a specific area of international humanitarian law that governs our arms exports and everything else, and I am happy to offer a comment on that.

What I am sure the Foreign Secretary was referring to at that stage was the judgment that has to be made as part of the arms export process about the adherence to humanitarian law of any partner with whom we have export licences. Because of the circumstances surrounding various incidents in Yemen and the fact that the coalition itself has had inquiry

processes during which it believed that there were questions to be asked about an air strike or something like that, that matter has clearly been very much on the mind of Parliament—of all parliamentarians—and of the Government, and the Government need to take legal judgments from the Attorney-General as to whether international humanitarian law is being adhered to.

The Foreign Secretary said that we had seen the Saudi-led coalition partners themselves admit to errors in what had happened, and because of their processes and procedures and determination to stay on the right side of international humanitarian law, our judgment was as the Foreign Secretary said and remains that they are on the right side of international humanitarian law. If that judgment changes, it will be a matter of public record, and will be known.

On our commitment to those who have been under attack and under threat, that was not a narrow decision; it was recognition of the threat that they were under, and support for that.

Again, having said all that, our strong determination has been that only a diplomatic solution, a negotiated solution, is the right solution to the events in Yemen, and we have been consistent on that while recognising the activity on the ground to push back an insurgency that had sought to overturn a legitimate Government.

The Chairman: Okay. That is a very clear summary. Let us come on to the humanitarian aspects in all their horrors and deal with those, because they are the ones of greatest concern to many, many people.

Q12 Baroness Hilton of Eggardon: My question follows on directly from what you have been saying, in that the Foreign Secretary's comments about where the balance lay was two years ago, since when there have been allegations of atrocities by Saudi Arabia and the Houthis, and the well-documented allegations, such as the bombing of marketplaces and wedding parties by Saudi Arabia. Have those been taken up specifically with the Saudis, or do they just come under your rather general heading of the balance being appropriate?

Alistair Burt MP: We monitor all incidents of alleged international and humanitarian law violations using all available information. That analysis includes matters that might give rise to concerns about Saudi Arabia's approach to international humanitarian law, such as the equipment used and whether a military target has been identified.

We raise this with the Saudi authorities, and all this, together with other information about their processes and attitudes, is used to form an overall view on the approach. We are always deeply and genuinely concerned about reports that a number of civilians are killed in an air strike. I have to say that we are aware that there are occasions when there might have been other causes, and we cannot completely exclude the possibility that, in some instances, attacks by other forces—not

Saudi—such as Houthi artillery and mortar attacks, may have been influential.

People in the region are very quick to recognise the importance of getting their side of the story out first and clouding the issue, and we have to be very conscious of that. None the less, it is sufficiently clear that airstrikes have been a cause of concern, and we look very hard at individual incidents. They are assessed in the UK as best as they can be.

There is a process by which the coalition looks at incidents in which it might have been involved. This does not exist on the Houthi side or on the side of any other party to the conflict, so we have to take that into account as well. Accordingly, we have to make the best judgments that we can, but we regularly raise issues of compliance with the Saudi-led coalition.

The Chairman: We could talk about the particular question of food supplies. Do you want to pursue that Baroness Hilton?

Baroness Hilton of Eggardon: Not particularly. Baroness Smith was going to pick up on it.

The Chairman: Just before we get to food, we had a note from the UAE embassy recently that said that peace had been achieved in the city of Hodeidah 'without damage to Hodeidah port or to the city's civilian population. This required extraordinary self-restraint by Yemeni forces and their coalition allies'. What is your response? Do you think that is a fair assessment?

Alistair Burt MP: Things could certainly have been much worse in Hodeidah. Forces backed by the UAE have been very active there. There is no doubt that at some stage in the past the UAE believed that peace would come to Yemen only if Hodeidah and the port was secured by government of Yemen troops, and that in doing so there would be a significant loss of life and a very difficult military situation.

The coalition no longer holds that belief, hence the importance of the negotiations and the talks. There have been incidents in Hodeidah, and we are sure that some civilian damage must be the case, but equally it could have been a great deal worse had the agreement that Martin Griffiths has been able to create not been reached in relation to the port and to the redeployment of forces.

Q13 **Baroness Smith of Newnham:** I have a general question about aid and the extent to which food is getting through. A *Guardian* report suggests that perhaps some food is getting through, but the UAE ambassador has implied that the Houthis are diverting food aid for sale on the black market. To what extent is food aid getting through? Is there a problem of diversion? Could the United Kingdom be doing more?

Alistair Burt MP: If I may, I will pick out one or two aspects of Mark Lowcock's report. He is the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian

Affairs and Emergency Relief Co-ordinator. He was able to tackle this quite straightforwardly.

I will read out a couple of things and then mention something from the WFP. He said last week at the UN: 'The Stockholm Agreement, and your Resolution 2451, is already having an impact. Reports from humanitarian agencies in Hodeida indicate that civilians are a little more confident and a little less afraid that they will be victims of air strikes or caught in crossfire as they go about their lives ... I cannot yet report to you that the wider humanitarian situation in Yemen is any better. It remains catastrophic'—and he describes it.

However, in relation to aid getting through, he said: 'On 31 December, WFP issued a statement seeking action from the de-facto authorities'—those are the Houthi authorities—'over diversion of food aid from seven distribution sites in Sanaa. We know that aid diversion and attempted diversion are risks in all conflict settings. We take this extremely seriously ... Because we are committed to an effective response, we had already contracted independent third-party monitors last autumn. In their first report, they found that 95 per cent of intended food aid beneficiaries contacted across the country confirmed that they were indeed receiving food aid. In some cases, rations were not always complete. These gaps could potentially be due to funding or access constraints, or other problems. More detailed independent monitoring of this sort is currently under way'. He said that 95% of food that was designed to get through was getting through.

The WPF spoke to me yesterday and said that it is more difficult in Houthi-controlled areas. They are more restrictive with access, and they are more difficult on the ground about visas and about people working to distribute aid. Also, being quite straightforward, there is more risk of supplies being diverted or taxed as they go through in Houthi-controlled areas.

That is how they make their money. It is one of the things that make it difficult to bring conflicts to an end. There are war economies. People benefit and profit from areas of conflict, and for the Houthi leaders and those who are active on the ground this has been part of their existence. Making sure that agencies can work effectively in those difficult situations is a real-life issue away from diplomacy and everything else.

Our sense is that the Stockholm agreement and the greater availability of ships—there are currently four food ships and seven fuel ships on their way to Hodeidah—mean that the situation is getting easier, but it is still very bad. David Beasley reported to me yesterday that the WFP is currently feeding 10 million people, and that it will go up to 12 million within the next couple of months. That remains very clear.

I could do nothing, in looking through Mark Lowcock's report, but say that the situation remains incredibly difficult and is potentially catastrophic, unless access improves, the agencies continue to be able to

work and the money keeps being paid to ensure that supplies are going in. It is better than it was, but it is still very difficult.

Lord Wood of Anfield: I want to go back to the British relationship with Saudi. Is it okay to do this now, or should I wait?

Alistair Burt MP: I beg your pardon, Chairman, I did not answer the question specifically on British activity. Perhaps Louise will say a little about it to put it on the record.

Dr Louise Walker: The Minister alluded to the scale of this humanitarian crisis. It is the worst humanitarian crisis in the world, and 24 million people require some form of aid. It is staggering. If you look at the scale and the fact that aid is being delivered in an active conflict, our UN agencies and NGO partners are doing an extraordinary job. Since the start of the conflict, we have seen the plight of the Yemeni people worsen. It was the poorest nation in the Middle East before this conflict began. In some cases, people are living in communities where they cannot be accessed.

In terms of what the UK is doing, we are an important donor. We are the fifth-largest donor after Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and the United States. Our contribution this year is £170 million, which brings us to a total of £570 million since the conflict began. We fund the World Food Programme, so we are very focused on food security. We work with UNICEF.³

At the UNGA,⁴ the Minister announced a programme of £96.5 million that is focused on nutrition. It will provide screening for 200,000 children, treat 70,000 children with acute malnutrition and provide antenatal care to 800,000 women. We have done a tremendous amount over the past two years on cholera. You might remember the cholera epidemic in 2017 and 2018, the worst ever cholera epidemic in the history of the world, which took place in Yemen and affected 1 million people.

We have made progress on that front, primarily through prevention in the form of clean drinking water. A lot of the work that we do is about water and sanitation. It is particularly challenging when those systems break down. We know that public servants in Yemen have not been paid for a significant amount of time. Clean water has been very important to that. We have contributed 25% of the cost of a vaccination campaign in Yemen that vaccinated 1 million people in both the north and the south. In active conflict areas, our UN partners were able to implement a vaccination campaign. We have also done some quite innovative work with NASA and US scientists to help to predict rainfall and where we think cholera is likely to break out, so that agencies can get in front of it with door-to-door campaigns with households on how to protect themselves.

³ The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

⁴ The UN General Assembly

The other work that we do is with internally displaced people. About 3 million people have fled their communities because of the conflict. We are working with UNICEF, UNHCR,⁵ IOM⁶ and others to provide temporary shelter. When the conflict was moving close to Hodeidah we were quickly able to move several thousand emergency tents and supplies for people who were immediately fleeing. We also help IDPs with gender-based violence and provide legal support for other things that they face. That is a quick summary.

The other piece of leadership that we do is on the economy. We have a horrific humanitarian situation at tremendous scale. Getting aid in is important, but so is getting in front of the situation. Avoiding an economic collapse is essential, so we intervened earlier this year with the US, the Saudis and the Emirates to work with the government of Yemen and the central bank.

That did a few things. The riyal was collapsing, which for ordinary Yemenis meant that their riyals bought less in the market, so if there was food in the market they could not afford to buy it, so they were making horrific choices about who to feed in their families and how much to feed them. We were able to take measures so that letters of credit were issued, and we got foreign currency into the country so that commercial importers could make purchases of food on international markets. That helped to restore confidence, and since then the riyal has appreciated significantly and the prices of basic commodities, such as wheat and rice, have dropped.

That has been a very important diplomatic and humanitarian effort that has had a real effect on the ground for ordinary people.

The Chairman: Thank you. That is a very impressive list, if I may say so, Minister. We must let you get back to ministering rather than answering our questions. We have kept you for well more than an hour.

Alistair Burt MP: I am safer here than in some other parts of the building. I am quite happy to go on with this for as long as you want.

Q14 Lord Wood of Anfield: At the risk of sounding naive, a lot of people who listened to that incredibly impressive list of humanitarian accomplishments and the leadership that our Government are providing in Yemen would be astonished that with one hand the Government are performing this extraordinary work and that on the other hand they are a very close commercial and military advising partner of one of the main protagonists of the carnage that we all admit is on an extraordinary scale.

This is not a solution—I understand that—but the answer the Government always give is that we think that the military support that we give the Saudis and the continuing case for commercial arrangements on arms and related issues just about keep this side of the threshold of acceptability. I wonder whether the public deserve a more transparent

⁵ The UN High Commissioner for Refugees

⁶ The International Organisation for Migration

account of whether that threshold continues to be met. I suspect that simply asserting that it is still just about okay is not going to be enough for much longer. What is your reaction to that?

Alistair Burt MP: I went before the Commons International Development Committee a few weeks ago and was confronted with exactly this. The committee asked what it is like to be the only Minister in Government responsible for both DfID's work and the FCO's foreign policy in relation to this issue. I said that it is dreadful. It is the most difficult work I have ever had to be engaged on.

As you say, the judgment is made that on the one hand we are doing this and on the other hand we are doing that, and what is the justification for each? Clearly what is being done through DfID and our humanitarian support is outstanding, and we would be doing it in any conflict situation while at the same time trying to resolve the conflict. The relationship with Saudi Arabia and the UAE in particular makes things more difficult.

It is difficult. I go back to the explanations that we have previously given and that I have sought to give here. There has been a very easy narrative, which I think is false. It has misunderstood the nature of this conflict right from the beginning and paints it as an attack by an external country on another, and that is simply not the case.

None the less the conduct of that has thrown up various issues of great concern to the UK Government and others. There are processes for exploring them and for trying to find out what has happened. Our legal constraints are more transparent than you necessarily alluded to, in that some time ago the United Kingdom was taken to court in relation to its arms exports and the court made a ruling that on the evidence presented to it the United Kingdom was justified in continuing its sale of arms. It is very important that that legal bar is not purely a decision by the United Kingdom Government but is a bar that is open to public and legal review, and I would go to that to say that we have been externally validated.

Notwithstanding that, and notwithstanding the constant scrutiny in government by the Attorney-General and by the system to make sure that it is right, if we were simply doing this with no other work going on to try to bring the conflict to an end, I would find my position impossible. I do not find it impossible, because everything we have been talking about for the past hour or so demonstrates that the United Kingdom has been doing to bring this conflict to an end.

We must understand the motivations of those involved in the conflict and the fears of those who have been involved in the coalition have had about the loss of another state in the region along with what they see as the instability that has followed in many parts of the region at the loss of existing governments for one reason or another. That causes them great fear—the fear that on their border there could be some hostile force that could conduct actions existentially and put them at risk. That has to be understood within the context of everything else that is going on.

I shall come back to this: dealing with this conflict and bringing it to an end provides an opportunity to say, 'If this can be solved with the involvement of those who have taken an interest and who have their reasons to be involved as proxies in the region, perhaps we can use it to help to resolve the other conflicts'. That would descale the tensions in the area. Who knows? Out of the suffering and all that the Yemeni people have been through, something just may come out of this that could help others.

The United Kingdom was not involved in that, because I think my position would be impossible. I think we are on the right side of trying to bring this conflict to an end, and I am more encouraged than I have been for some time. However, I do not say anything other than that the challenge and the dilemma is extremely painful personally.

Q15 Lord Purvis of Tweed: My question is connected to the points made by Lord Wood and Baroness Helic.

Minister, you have told the Committee that part of the reason why the UK has a continuing standing in the area is because of our consistent approach. You have been consistent in what you have said both to the International Development Committee in the Commons and to us. You say that there is the supportive principle for the neighbouring countries—the UAE and the KSA⁷—to support a legitimate Government who were under threat.

They themselves have been under threat, but of course there are different ways to approach and tackle these issues. Therefore the position of MbS⁸ when he was Defence Minister was one particular route, but there are many other different ways of trying to de-escalate the situation. As you know, some commentators have been saying that some of the movement more recently has been one of the consequences of the Khashoggi murder: MbS wanted the KSA to have a different reputational position in the world and the toughening stance of the US Congress. That slightly undermines the point about the defence of a legitimate Government and the security element.

That said, if the UK has this level of consistent influence in the area, how could we demonstrate that we have made an impact on how the Saudis and the UAE have executed the military approach over the past number of years? Unless we can demonstrate that we have had an influence on how they have contributed to the catastrophic humanitarian situation, it is hard to see how our influence has had a beneficial impact on the civilians in Yemen.

Alistair Burt MP: First and foremost, let me make it very clear that we are not a party to the conflict. We are not a party to the military conflict as part of the coalition. That is not the position of the United Kingdom. We were not involved in the military planning of what happened as the Houthi forces moved forward and so on, and of course at that stage our

⁷ The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

⁸ Mohammed bin Salman

determination was to use our influence to seek to have that resolved without conflict and violence, but the actions of the Houthis made that completely impossible.

Once others in the region began to feel that they could be and were at physical risk—as I say, there is a history of Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia, loss of life and the fear that those attacks could become more specialised in nature, that different weapons could be used and that the scale of the threat would increase—by the time military action was taken, because there had been no response to other efforts there was no consideration that anything else might have reduced the threat.

I think it is known from open source that it was the coalition's expectation that its activities would be relatively quick, but that has not proved to be the case, as of course they never are. However, the United Kingdom is not a party to the conflict, so, accordingly, looking for our direct influence in a conflict of which we are not a part is not possible.

What I would put in the balance the other way is the consistency of the United Kingdom in recognising the threats to partners and responding to them while at the same time recognising what was happening in Yemen and being very clear over a lengthy period of time that there had to be a solution that was not going to be accomplished by military conquest.

Every effort should be made to find a different answer. Our consistent support of the UN efforts, of the various envoys and of the work that we are doing has recently seen fruition in very complex and difficult circumstances in which not everyone wanted to take the same route and not everyone wanted to move towards peace—not just the coalition. None of us would have wished anything other than that this conflict had not been provoked, had not started and did not go on for as long as it has.

We have worked consistently to try to do our best to bring it to an end while recognising the threats in the region and the complex overall political situation in which it has arisen. We have sought to do that, but I fully accept that there are those who will challenge and criticise; I can understand that full well. All we can do now is continue with our efforts, use every lever we have to take the opportunity that has arisen through the patient efforts of the envoy and others, including external parties—the UAE and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia—to help everyone to recognise that perhaps there are better things that they can do to achieve peace and to support the processes.

In a situation where confidence between these parties is completely nil, we must support that very patient process, which will be of benefit not only to the people of Yemen—that should come immediately or as quickly as possible—but to others in the region.

The Chairman: Minister, you have answered very frankly, if I may say so, a lot of extremely difficult and complicated questions. We appreciate your frankness very much indeed and we are grateful for the immense

stock of experience and information that you have been able to bring to bear in meeting our inquiries. It only remains for me to thank Dr Louise Walker, Mr James Downer and you for your time. We value this session very much indeed.

Alistair Burt MP: We are very grateful for the opportunity. Thank you.