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Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Work of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, HC 518

Monday 7 March 2022

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Members present: Tom Tugendhat (Chair); Chris Bryant; Alicia Kearns; Stewart Malcolm McDonald; Andrew Rosindell; Bob Seely; Henry Smith; Royston Smith; Graham Stringer.

Questions 595-721

Witnesses

I: Sir Philip Barton KCMG OBE, Permanent Under-Secretary, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office; Thomas Drew, CMG, Director General, Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office; and Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Sir Philip Barton, Thomas Drew and Elizabeth Truss.

Q595 **Chair:** Welcome to this afternoon's session of the Foreign Affairs Committee. We have with us this afternoon the Foreign Secretary. Foreign Secretary, it is very nice to see you. Today we will focus almost entirely on Ukraine and associated events, for very obvious reasons. We would be very grateful if you would come back to us within a month for other areas, as it has now been about seven months that you have been in post, and this is our first time seeing you. I hope that that will be okay with you.

Elizabeth Truss: Absolutely. I thank the Committee for postponing last week's session because I had urgent travel to do. I had hoped that our permanent secretary would have recovered from covid by then, but unfortunately he has had to dial in. Thank you for also allowing Tom Drew to join us.

Q596 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Clearly there is a very big change in foreign policy going on at the moment. While we all stand with the Ukrainian people today, I am glad to see a lot of the statements that you have made. This has serious repercussions for the UK's position. How do you see your foreign policy as different from your predecessor's? What are the main areas in which you would say that it is going to differ?

Elizabeth Truss: First of all, it is important to point out that since this crisis began to emerge towards the end of the last year, I, as Foreign Secretary, and the United Kingdom, have been leading in the response. I think it was in my first few weeks as Foreign Secretary that we welcomed the Baltic states to the UK. We then had the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting in Riga, where I urged allies to stop Nord Stream 2. That was followed by the Prime Minister also calling for an end to Nord Stream 2 at Mansion House.

I was the first Foreign Secretary for five years to attend the OSCE conference in Stockholm where I met Sergey Lavrov—this was by the time that Russian troops were already building up on the Ukrainian border—to make the point that, if there were an invasion of Ukraine, it would carry severe costs in terms of both sanctions and the implications for the Russian people, and particularly the extent of casualties that they would be likely to see due to the fact that Ukraine would fight back. The UK convened the G7 Foreign Ministers in Liverpool, where we brought our allies together to confirm this message—that there would be severe costs in the event of an invasion—so we were already, at the end of last year, ensuring that our foreign policy was dealing with the immediate threat that we faced in the Euro-Atlantic area.

What I have been doing is strengthening the Department in terms of, for example, establishing an information unit. We last had an information unit at the end of the cold war. We abandoned that when the end of history was declared, but the reality is that the Russians did not abandon their disinformation and misinformation. We have been working with the



Americans to release intelligence. We released the attempt to install a puppet regime in Kyiv. We released information about various false flag operations. I think that that has been absolutely critical in wrongfooting the Russians ahead of the invasion, because they have not been able to declare the false pretext that they wanted to. They have not been able to use the element of surprise because the United Kingdom and the United States in particular were making it very clear to the world what their plans were. What I would say is that we have actively pursued a more proactive policy in the face of the immediate Russian threat

Q597 **Chair:** Can we pick up on some of the points that you have just made? You quite rightly said that you have met not just with many partners but with Sergey Lavrov in the OSCE. Can you think why it is that he continued despite the threats that you very clearly made?

Elizabeth Truss: I met Sergey Lavrov three times: at the UN General Assembly, in Stockholm, and again in Moscow. At each opportunity the United Kingdom has been very clear, first of all, that we know what Russia is planning. Despite their claims that there would not be an invasion, we had very clear intelligence that that was exactly what they were planning. We want to remove the element of surprise. We want to call out the playbook that they were using. Secondly, I made it very clear that there would be a united response, not just from Britain, but from the G7, and there would be severe sanctions. The third thing that I made very clear was that the Ukrainians will fight.

You asked me why the Russians did not take that seriously. First of all, they underestimated the unity of the west. I think that what we have seen since is that they have been surprised by the severity of the sanctions and the unity not just of the G7, but countries like Singapore, South Korea and Australia, which have also joined the sanctions, as has Switzerland. I think that they also did not believe that the Ukrainians would fight. I think that the Russians have been very surprised.

We can speculate on the reasons for that. Is it Putin's relative isolation within the Russian system? Is it the fact that information has not been fed up to him properly? We saw the national security council and the extent to which people in the Russian system were able to speak directly to President Putin. We can speculate about the reasons, but there has been a serious underestimation and a massive strategic mistake in Putin pursuing those policies. We did all that we could to warn in advance. We did all that we could.

Q598 **Chair:** Is part of this because Lavrov is not part of the security circle that surrounds Putin? He is not part of the St Petersburg grouping; he is part of the Moscow foreign policy set that does not have much influence anymore.

Elizabeth Truss: That could well be true, but the Defence Secretary also delivered those messages to his counterpart. The National Security Adviser delivered messages to his counterpart. Many leaders have had direct meetings with Putin where they have delivered these messages, so we can



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speculate about why it is that Putin has made this strategic mistake and ended up cornered, essentially, but I felt that our role as the United Kingdom was to do all that we could in advance to deter a Russian invasion.

Q599 **Chair:** In recent months, many of us have spoken about networks of democracies, and the Prime Minister expanded the G7 to a sort of D10 in Carbis Bay in Cornwall. You have spoken about a network of liberty. Do you think the events of recent weeks give encouragement to that?

Elizabeth Truss: I think it demonstrates the importance of working with our allies, including non-democracies. Every country that is a sovereign nation, and that believes in a rules-based system, does not want to live in a world where a country can be invaded just because another country declares that it is not a real country.

It is very important for us to build that very strong network with the G7. I think we can do more to strengthen the G7 and give it a more permanent footing. The G7 has been instrumental in co-ordinating sanctions in this crisis, but I would like to see it on a more permanent footing—

Q600 **Chair:** Like a secretariat?

Elizabeth Truss: Like a secretariat. Having that infrastructure—the type that NATO and other organisations have—would be good. I want to see it broadened. Some 141 countries voted against Russia at the UN General Assembly. We should be getting all those countries to put sanctions on Russia. There is an opportunity to build a wider network.

Separately, the United Kingdom has been active with AUKUS, in deepening relationships with the Gulf, and in deepening relationships with India. All those deeper economic and security relationships are vital to pull countries into the orbit of rules-based, sovereign, freedom-loving nations, and away from the orbit of authoritarian regimes—namely Russia, but also China.

Q601 **Chair:** One country that you mentioned there that is, as you know, very important to the United Kingdom—and one that this Committee has focused on a lot—is India, of course. I know the colleague sitting on your left formerly served in Pakistan. Perhaps you could give us a slight perspective on why you think India did not vote alongside the 141 other countries.

Elizabeth Truss: I have spoken to my counterpart, Minister Jaishankar, and I encouraged India to stand against Russia and made it very clear that we see this as a violation of sovereignty that every country that believes in freedom and democracy should absolutely abhor. I think the issue for India is that there is some level of dependence on Russia, in terms of both its defence relationships and its economic relationships. The way forward is for a closer economic and defence relationship with India, both by the United Kingdom and by our like-minded allies. I have already been to India as Foreign Secretary, and we are working on those closer security links. We have done joint exercises—we had the carrier strike group operating with India, for example. We are looking at areas such as



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security. We are now negotiating a trade agreement. This is the way that we are going to bring India closer into a circle of countries that support freedom, democracy and sovereignty.

Chair: I will bring in two very short interventions. Bob, you wanted to come in.

Q602 **Bob Seely:** May I follow up on what you said about deterrence? I wonder whether you have a considered opinion on why deterrence failed. Putin declared in 2007 that he did not like the post cold war order any more. The following year, there was the Georgian war, and in 2014, there was the first Ukrainian war—to prevent those countries from physically being able to enter NATO. Was it the German dependency on gas? Was it our dependency on, or our liking for, Russian money? Why do you think deterrence failed?

Elizabeth Truss: I think that post cold war, the west took its eye off the ball. Defence budgets were cut; there was too much entering into trade and economic relationships without understanding the underlying strategic dependency that that would lead to. That is particularly true of hydrocarbons, which are, of course, a major part of the Russian economy, but it is also true of technology exports. We—not just Britain but the wider west—enabled the development of Russian high-tech warfare.

In essence, we provided the funding through oil and gas. Everything from financial services to broader parts of the service economy were integrated with Russia, despite the fact that we saw what happened in 2008 and 2014. At the Munich security conference in 2007, Putin made it pretty clear what his intentions were. There is no doubt that the west did not act early enough or decisively enough. The reality is that President Putin did not take the threats of deterrence seriously enough.

Q603 **Bob Seely:** What are we going to do now, do you think?

Elizabeth Truss: What we have to do now is strengthen NATO, particularly the eastern flank. We have already deployed more troops to Estonia, but there is more to do. We have to be serious about defence spending right across NATO. I am very pleased that Germany have reversed their position on supplying defensive weaponry to Ukraine, but also on the defence budget and the energy budget.

All the free world need to rethink their economic dependence. We have already started working on that with China—for example, the disconnection of Huawei and reducing strategic dependency on China. That is what we need to do with Russia. Hydrocarbons are the biggest example, but more broadly, our economic policy needs to be seen much more through the light of geopolitics.

Q604 **Chair:** So you are now making the argument for increased defence spending.

Elizabeth Truss: I do support—

Chair: In the UK.



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Elizabeth Truss: I am pleased that we have already increased our defence budget and are spending more on defence. I am not going to pre-empt the decisions of the Defence Secretary and the Chancellor at this meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee—

Chair: You are making the case.

Elizabeth Truss: I am making the point that over the last 15 years, it has been clear that NATO has not done enough. That is in terms not just of spending, but of technological development and the security architecture. What Russia has done has shattered the security architecture of Europe. And it has not just shattered the security architecture of Europe; it has sent shockwaves around the world. This is why South Korea are applying sanctions on Russia and why Japan are applying sanctions on Russia. If we do not stop Putin in Ukraine, of course it is devastating for European security, but it also sends a signal to aggressors elsewhere around the world.

Q605 **Alicia Kearns:** Thank you for coming before us. You just looked at how in the last 15 years we have failed to do enough. Looking at the last six months, you said that we need to do as much as possible. It seems that our intelligence was so solid and certain that an invasion was coming. Indeed, when we were in Ukraine, our Five Eyes intelligence partners and Baltic intelligence partners told us there would be an invasion within four weeks. It was six weeks, but close enough.

Did we consider at any point, with our allies, a pre-emptive or proactive measure such as putting in place a no-fly zone first, given that we were so certain this invasion was coming? Were there any discussions about doing something proactively and pre-emptively to stop Putin before he crossed the border?

Elizabeth Truss: The proactive thing we were doing was supplying defensive weapons to Ukraine. We were the first European country to do that. It was quite controversial at the time. Others did not necessarily want to follow. We are seeing a much wider range of countries giving defensive weapons to Ukraine. We led the way on that.

The issue with the no-fly zone is that Ukraine is not part of NATO. There is a difference between us helping Ukraine in their self-defence under the UN charter and actively becoming involved. That is the difference. We were pushing very hard, with our allies, for more defensive support into Ukraine.

What is our overall strategy? To ensure Putin loses in Ukraine. Of course, we tried to deter him by being public about this, but the first part of the strategy is supporting Ukraine economically, so we had the Ukraine-UK forum. Dmytro Kuleba came over to London. We supplied support for the navy and we supplied UKEF support for energy—strengthening Ukraine economically, but also making sure it had the defence weapons it needs. In fact, we started this in 2015, with Operation Orbital training up soldiers and so on.



The second part that we agreed on internationally was the sanctions package. By December at the G7, the G7 Foreign Ministers had agreed that there would be severe sanctions, and we were very clear in our messaging to Moscow that there would be severe sanctions. I think that there is a question about how seriously they took that, and why they did not take it seriously, but we were very clear with the messaging.

The third part of the strategy is isolating Russia in the international community. Part of doing that was calling out what they were doing in advance of the invasion. We have been much more active in disseminating information and releasing intelligence to show the Russian playbook.

Q606 Alicia Kearns: There is a difference, though, between bolstering and calling out. Was there any meaningful discussion—it did not need to be within a NATO context; it could have been bilateral between the UK and our Baltic and eastern European partners, or with the US—about actually doing something on the ground that would prevent that action? It seems like the Defence Secretary was very clear from as far back as October that we would not be going in, despite the fact that we signed a treaty with the Ukrainians saying that we would protect them were this ever to happen.

Elizabeth Truss: I think it is absolutely fair to say that at NATO we were very clear about the article 5 responsibility that we have towards fellow NATO allies, and how that is different from the situation in Ukraine. We were the most forward leaning in Europe on supplying defensive weapons to Ukraine. Others have taken time. Most countries are now supplying those defensive weapons, but to what you are saying, Alicia, given that they were not even in the space of supplying defensive weapons to Ukraine we were not going to end up in the space where they wanted active intervention. There are all kinds of issues with active intervention that would bring NATO into direct conflict with Russia, which is an escalation. Certainly, the discussions that we were having were around sanctions, economic dependency, and supply and support to Ukraine, because that is what we were able to do at the time.

Q607 Andrew Rosindell: Foreign Secretary, you spoke about strengthening NATO, and alluded to the importance of spending more on defence, which I think is vital, but we in the United Kingdom have played our part for many years. Others have not done so. Others have not been spending the same level on defence that we have been, and other countries in Europe have failed to join NATO; yet it is really their duty to be part of NATO. I think of Sweden, Austria and the Republic of Ireland. Isn't it time that we urged them to play their part as well and join the NATO family?

Elizabeth Truss: There are quite a few countries that want to join NATO that have not been able to, and it is a decision for NATO members. What has happened as a result of this crisis, which has been a huge wake-up call for Europe, is that countries are changing their entire energy policy, their entire defence policy and their entire sanctions policy. We need to relook at European security architecture. It needs to be tougher. It needs



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to be stronger. There needs to be much stronger support on the eastern flank, and everybody in NATO and beyond has to play their part in it.

Of course, we have the JEF arrangements with the Nordic states. That is very positive and very much welcomed by Sweden, Finland and others, but we need to do more. To the Chair's original question on our foreign policy, I was very clear about the objectives of the network of liberty, which was to develop closer security partnerships and closer economic partnerships with countries around the world to help to create better economic and defensive security in the long term. The issue is that now we have an immediate crisis because we did not do enough. I am not just talking about Britain; I am talking collectively. We have not done enough for the past 20 years.

Q608 Chair: Can I bring you back to the network point that you make? One of the great strengths that the UK advertises, quite rightly, is the network-building effect that the Foreign Office has, or has had, over several generations. Do you think that the 5% real-terms cut in FCDO spending from 2019-20 through to 2024-25 will help that network building or hinder it?

Elizabeth Truss: On the subject of the Foreign Office budget and resources, I would always like more.

Chair: We are here to help you, Foreign Secretary.

Elizabeth Truss: One thing that pains me more than anything is the fact that over the years, we have sold off some of our embassy buildings—that was a huge mistake, and I certainly do not want to see any more of that happen. I always want to make sure that we have enough diplomats out in the field and here in London. I am sure that the permanent secretary will say more about this, but we are protecting the number of people in our organisation; we are not cutting the number of staff. We are, though, redeploying staff to key geostrategic areas, so that we have more people working on economic security; on information and, particularly, disinformation; and on fighting the technology battle.

Q609 Chair: I appreciate your point, Foreign Secretary, and I am sure that when you were Chief Secretary to the Treasury, you argued against every embassy sale.

Elizabeth Truss: I absolutely did. My boss at the time, Philip Hammond, did not necessarily agree with me. I can tell you that the then Foreign Secretary and I discussed it frequently, and I was always on his side.

Q610 Chair: There we go. I will be delighted to see the letter that you publish on that, because it will be fascinating to see the account of the various embassy sales. Can we focus, though, on this question of spending? This is not just about not reducing the number of personnel. We have opted out of the European Union, and that means we have to invest more in bilateral relationships. That is not headcount-neutral; it is an increase. We have significantly greater interests in many parts of the world, as advertised by a former Foreign Secretary, and more embassies, including



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in Chad; that is another increase. Where are we cutting back on seeking influence in order to increase those posts? Or are we simply trying to skin the cat a little thinner?

Elizabeth Truss: We are not reducing our staff numbers. We are redeploying staff to priority areas.

Q611 **Chair:** I hear that, but we are increasing our number of posts, so we either have fewer people in more posts, in which case we have less effect in our posts, or we increase the number of staff. Staying staff-neutral does not really help.

Elizabeth Truss: I think Philip wanted to come in on that.

Sir Philip Barton: As the Foreign Secretary has said, we are maintaining overall numbers in the organisation. In terms of expanding our global network, we have opened about 10 new posts. They are mostly quite small, so we can do that by rearranging, and by deploying some headquarters staff overseas. It is not that we are moving people from one bit of the network and denuding it in order to staff another bit of the network. We are roughly maintaining stability across the network. We are looking at making sure, first, that in headquarters, we drive up efficiencies from some of the merger activity where we had duplicate functions, and secondly, that where we have our people is in line with the Foreign Secretary's and Government's latest priorities.

Elizabeth Truss: It is also worth saying, Chairman, that we are working on our workforce plan for next year. We are in the throes of finalising the workforce plan and the development budget for 2022-23. I will be able quite soon to give you more detail on exactly where people are deployed, but we are not yet at the final point of those discussions.

Q612 **Chair:** Okay. Can we come straight back to the Ukraine question? Clearly, one area where there will be enormous pressure on your resources in the coming days and weeks is on the support needed for countries such as Poland, Hungary and Romania, which are dealing with migrant numbers the likes of which we have not seen in Europe since 1945. This is pretty striking. What support is the UK giving people in those areas, and the countries that could do with assistance from us?

Elizabeth Truss: A couple of weeks ago, we sent out forward deployment teams to borders in Slovakia and Poland. We have sent out humanitarian teams as well to support the Poles. We are one of the largest donors of aid already. I think we have donated £294 million in aid, of which £120 million is humanitarian; £100 million is on the energy sector, and £74 million is fiscal support. It is also worth saying that the DEC Ukraine appeal, which we launched jointly with DEC, has already reached £100 million. It is probably one of the quickest instances of raising funds.

I mentioned Poland and Slovakia, but we have also deployed teams to Hungary, Romania and Moldova, and we have readied more than 1,000 British troops to provide further humanitarian support. In fact, the Prime Minister will announce more humanitarian support later this afternoon. We



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really are at the forefront of providing support. We are also providing consular support in all of those locations.

Q613 **Chair:** You will be aware that other humanitarian groups are operating. What support are we able to give to ensure that people like the ICRC are able to have the access that they need in Ukraine to offer support to the civilian population?

Elizabeth Truss: We are doing all we can to push for humanitarian corridors. The issue has been the lack of military to military conversations, so the humanitarian corridors have not necessarily been protected in the way that we would want. Some of those teams have been able to access Ukraine and we are providing aid to them. Tom, I do not know whether you want to say a bit more about that.

Thomas Drew: That is right, and also your trip to Geneva was also very much focused on all of that. Some of the funds that we have talked about being disbursed have been through the ICRC and others.

Q614 **Alicia Kearns:** On the point about humanitarian access, in our sanctions regime—which is absolutely welcome—there is an issue in which there is no opt-out specifically for humanitarian organisations such as UN resolution 2615, which was agreed for Afghanistan. The US passed legislation in January to make sure that their sanctions regime resiles any humanitarian actor to deal with any actor that has been sanctioned, no matter how distasteful. Will we put in place the same opt-out for our sanctions regime?

Thomas Drew: In short, yes. I do not know about the same opt-out, but we are making sure that on the back of our sanctions regime we do not end up impacting on the humanitarian work we are going to do. It will not be exactly the same as the US system. One of the tensions is that you want to get a sanctions regime through as quickly as possible, so then you can work out general carve-outs.

Q615 **Alicia Kearns:** So there will be a carve-out coming specifically to protect them, because they do not feel they have that protection at the moment.

Thomas Drew: I do not know specifically how we are going to do that, but we can get back to you on that.

Q616 **Chair:** Can you write to us on that?

Foreign Secretary, the UK not only leads in terms of our donations but—I hope—in influencing others to support. The UN is saying that only about 5% of the \$1.1 billion that it has asked for to support Ukraine has so far been achieved. What are we doing to help it fill that gap?

Elizabeth Truss: I met the UN when I was in Geneva last week. We helped with their flash appeal. We will be doing more work to galvanise humanitarian support over the next few days, and in fact that is what the Prime Minister is discussing at the moment with Prime Minister Trudeau and Prime Minister Rutte from the Netherlands.



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Q617 **Chris Bryant:** How many additional visas have been given to Ukrainians by the UK since the invasion began?

Elizabeth Truss: I do not have the figure—

Chris Bryant: It is 50.

Elizabeth Truss: The Home Secretary announced that—

Q618 **Chris Bryant:** Are you not ashamed by that?

Elizabeth Truss: The Home Secretary has announced two routes. One is the family visa route, and the other is the sponsorship route. I know the Home Office are working very hard to issue visas.

Q619 **Chris Bryant:** So you are not ashamed that other countries are taking in tens of thousands, and we, who have known longer than any of the other countries that this was going to happen and should have been preparing for it—your Department should have been preparing for it—have only managed to give out 50 visas so far.

Elizabeth Truss: I can assure you, Chris, that we have been preparing for it. We have been preparing for it since well before the end of last year. That is when we sent our forward deployment teams to locations in Poland and Slovakia to provide direct support to people leaving Ukraine.

Q620 **Chris Bryant:** So why is it only 50 then?

Elizabeth Truss: It is really a matter for the Home Secretary exactly how the visa process works—

Chris Bryant: No, because part of it is done by you and your Department. People have to come to your posts to be able to get—as they did in Afghanistan, where it was exactly the same issue—their biometric details taken.

Elizabeth Truss: I believe that is a Home Office responsibility that operates out of our posts. It is Home Office personnel.

Q621 **Chris Bryant:** People have to go to your posts to speak to Home Office personnel—so you are saying that it is the Home Office's fault that we have only managed to do 50. How does someone in Ukraine at the moment get biometric details for a visa to come to the UK?

Thomas Drew: I can give one example on that. The Foreign Secretary is absolutely right: it is a Home Office responsibility, but of course the Foreign Office fully supports that. To give an example, only last week we opened up a pop-up visa application centre 25 miles or so across the Polish border on the main road from Lviv. We expect that the number of appointments will be around 6,000 a week. That is just one example of the things we are doing.

Elizabeth Truss: But that is run through the Home Office. I think it is important to note that.

Q622 **Chris Bryant:** Passing the buck doesn't work as a Government Minister.



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It really doesn't. You are all part of the same Government.

Elizabeth Truss: Absolutely, but this is the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Q623 **Chris Bryant:** Yes, and you are here as the only person speaking for the Government. Some of us were arguing for a very long time that we should have been condemning Nord Stream 2 and getting it closed down. The British Government pointedly refused to do so until remarkably recently. It feels as if you have been playing catch-up.

Elizabeth Truss: I argued for that in November last year.

Q624 **Chris Bryant:** In November, yes, but some of us have been saying this for 10 years, and the British Government kept on refusing to say it. That is why some of us are a bit sceptical about this message of, "We have been leading the world."

Elizabeth Truss: I suggest you ask the people of Ukraine.

Q625 **Chris Bryant:** We did when we visited.

Elizabeth Truss: They see the UK as the leading supporter of Ukraine and think we have been proactive in supplying defensive weapons and economic support and in calling Russia out. Both the Prime Minister and I said that Nord Stream 2 should be stopped in November last year.

Q626 **Chris Bryant:** Very late in the day.

Let me go back to the issue of visas. What are the opening hours of the post you have just referred to and any other facilities open since the invasion? Are they open at the weekend?

Thomas Drew: I don't know the opening hours, I am afraid.

Elizabeth Truss: This is, as I said, run by the Home Office. It is a Home Office matter. Of course, we work closely with the Home Office, so this is a cross-Government effort.

Q627 **Chris Bryant:** We have posts still in Ukraine, do we not?

Elizabeth Truss: We do not. Our ambassador has left Ukraine because of the serious security situation.

Q628 **Chris Bryant:** But you don't know whether those posts are open at the weekend?

Elizabeth Truss: My understanding is that the main way people apply is through the visa route, which is, I believe, open continuously. It is a service run by the Home Office in situ.

Thomas Drew: If I may add, I know that the Home Office has also surged resource into the neighbouring states that are also be taking applicants from Ukraine. As I say, the nearest one to Ukraine is just across the border in Poland.

Q629 **Chris Bryant:** My understanding is that none of them are open after 5 o'clock on a Friday afternoon. At a time of international crisis, it seems a



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bit of an own goal. You see people at Berlin's railway station standing there offering their home to six, seven or eight Ukrainian refugees, and Britain did not even have a new scheme in place.

Elizabeth Truss: We have had people, as I have said—forward deployment teams—in Poland and Slovakia for the last few weeks, helping with the humanitarian effort and getting people through the border. The Home Office has set up the new visa routes, which it is administering. It also has online services. I could ask the Home Secretary about the opening hours, and I'm sure we could get back to you with those.

Q630 **Chris Bryant:** Just on other refugees, we were interested in Afghanistan as well last year, and, as I understand it, there are still 12,000 Afghans who have been brought to the UK but are still in temporary accommodation. What plans are there for Ukrainians when they come here? Will they be in a queue behind the Afghans who are still waiting for accommodation, or is there not a plan in place?

Elizabeth Truss: I know that the Home Office is working on this.

Q631 **Chris Bryant:** But you don't know?

Elizabeth Truss: No.

Q632 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Foreign Secretary, can I take you back to the points you have made on the European security architecture? The Government released over the weekend their six-point plan for dealing with Ukraine. It always worries me when Governments talk in those terms; it sounds a bit like a Lib Dem by-election leaflet. Can I press you on the final three points of that plan? Those aim to "prevent the creeping normalisation" of Putin's behaviour, "pursue diplomatic paths to de-escalation" and, finally—this one caught my eye—"begin a rapid campaign to strengthen security and resilience across the Euro-Atlantic area". How do you plan to do that, and does it involve revisiting the fundamentals of the integrated review, which many of us now think needs to happen and happen quickly?

Elizabeth Truss: This is one of the issues that we were discussing at the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting on Friday. The threat to European security is much graver now than it was. That is a statement of the obvious. We need to strengthen support to the eastern flank. We have already doubled our deployment to Estonia. Others are doing more. We are increasing our maritime support; we are increasing our air cover. The discussion we had at NATO was about how we can increase that, but also about how NATO pursues greater technological reach in terms of hybrid warfare and challenging misinformation, and how we ensure that there are enough resources behind NATO. That is the point that is being made about defence spending. There is a recognition that we need to shift up a gear.

Q633 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Spending is always easy to call for, isn't it—let's be honest—but strategy is what I am trying to get at here. There is NATO, and you are right to be talking about strengthening that—



Elizabeth Truss: There needs to be more deployment, particularly on the eastern flank.

Q634 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** And the JEF countries doing more. However, in terms of the integrated review, one of the things that many of us said when that was published was that the UK Government should pursue a comprehensive defence and security treaty with the European Union. They have not done that. Do you think they should now?

Elizabeth Truss: I attended the European Union foreign affairs committee alongside the Canadians, the Americans and the NATO Secretary-General. Throughout the crisis, NATO has been working very closely with the EU. The EU will be attending the next NATO meeting and I support that close working continuing.

Q635 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** That is not the question I am asking, though. I am asking about the UK Government having a comprehensive defence and security treaty with the European Union. If your six-point plan is going to become real, what does it look like?

Elizabeth Truss: What I am talking about is much closer working between the EU, with NATO and with broader allies, as well as us strengthening our additional relationships, whether that is the relationship with the JEF countries or the relationship directly with the EU. We need to strengthen all that security architecture.

Q636 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** So is a comprehensive treaty of the kind I am talking about on the table? Is that part of the conversation at all?

Elizabeth Truss: I would say the key part of the conversation is between the EU and NATO. That is the important way in which this is being done. We are seeing very rapid changes across the EU. I have talked about Germany's changes to its defence policy. We are seeing very rapid changes. But my view is that the west has to be united and we all have to work together. This has been a sudden change, which has shaken the whole security architecture of the west. Over the coming months, we will need to make sure that we have a strengthened architecture in place for the future. The UK is an absolutely core part of that. As the largest defence spender in Europe, we are a core part of making that happen.

Q637 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Surely a comprehensive treaty of the kind I am talking about would make sense.

Elizabeth Truss: I wouldn't jump ahead to exactly what the structures would look like. What I am talking about is the concept, which is countries spending more on defence, having more deployment, particularly on the eastern flank, and making sure that we are more closely aligned between all the partners involved, including those that are not members of NATO.

Q638 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** How do you plan to feed into the forthcoming strategic concept at NATO?

Elizabeth Truss: At the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting in Riga, I talked about the need for us to address technology developments—quantum, AI,



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disinformation. I think the UK and the US have done a lot on exposing intelligence and calling out the Russian playbook, but there is more we need to do. The Russians have been effective over the last 20 years in the information wars, including with their own public, who have not been told the truth about what is happening. NATO needs to do more work on that front. We need more hardware deployment as well. This is a wake-up call and NATO needs to do more. That is recognised by the Secretary-General and all the members of NATO.

Q639 Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Just to take you on to another area, the International Court of Justice is currently considering Ukraine's case against Russia. If the court orders Russia to suspend its military activities in Ukraine as a provisional measure, what consequences will that have, and is there any way to enforce it?

Elizabeth Truss: We were a key part of referring the atrocities in Ukraine to the ICC. I think it is the largest group referral to the ICC in its history. We will continue to pursue the Putin regime being held to account. I cannot speculate about what will happen next, but we are very clear that Russia has serious questions to answer on the appalling invasion of Ukraine.

Q640 Stewart Malcolm McDonald: In terms of the atrocities that are being committed in Ukraine by Russia, in your sanctions packages are you pursuing those around the world who are a party to that, whether they are state or non-state actors, without whom Russia would not be able to commit some of the atrocities that we are seeing?

Elizabeth Truss: We are able to target anybody of strategic or economic interest to the Russian Government, so certainly we are looking at all options.

Q641 Chair: May I just pick up on this ICJ—or, rather, International Criminal Court—question? Do you believe that the invasion of Ukraine is a crime against peace?

Elizabeth Truss: I believe it is an illegal invasion.

Q642 Chair: I am quite specific about the terms that I am using. Do you believe that it is a war of aggression?

Elizabeth Truss: That is a matter for the ICC, but I believe it is an illegal invasion.

Q643 Chair: It is quite specifically not a matter for the ICC, because under treaty the ICC does not have jurisdiction over that. It is, however, a matter for the Russian criminal code, article 353. It is also a matter that was adjudicated in Nuremberg in the Tokyo trials of 1946-47. Do you believe that the invasion of Ukraine by Russia is a war of aggression?

Elizabeth Truss: It is certainly an aggressive act. I would need to look into the specific legalities of what you mention.

Q644 Chair: The reason it matters is that the ICC specifically does not have the capability or capacity to investigate wars of aggression. It is not



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charged with it. It does not have it within its treaty, and therefore it cannot do it. Do you believe that a new international tribunal should be set up to look into whether or not this is a war of aggression, to collect evidence of its being so, and perhaps to charge, as was done before, those who began this war with the criminal conspiracy of beginning a war of aggression?

Elizabeth Truss: We think the best route to hold Putin to account for what he has done is through the ICC, but I am certainly willing to look at other routes.

Q645 **Chair:** The ICC clearly does not have this capability.

Elizabeth Truss: No, I hear what you say, but I am certainly willing to consider other routes.

Q646 **Chair:** You are willing to consider supporting an international tribunal that people like Philippe Sands and the chairs of I think now over a dozen foreign affairs committees have called for?

Elizabeth Truss: I am willing to look at it, yes.

Chair: Thank you.

Q647 **Royston Smith:** Thank you, Foreign Secretary. I want to come back to what Stewart was talking about, and what you said in response—and what you said earlier—about the defence infrastructure of the west being shattered by Russia and its act of aggression, and about our not having done enough to prevent this invasion. I wonder what you mean exactly by that. The armchair generals in my constituency, for example, think that they all know what we should have done in the past and what we should do in the future. It just so happens that they all have a different view on what we should have done in the past and what we should do in the future.

“Shattering the defence architecture of the west” is quite some term. Are we suggesting that the west has been so weak that Putin feels that we could not deter any act of aggression? If that is the case, what do you envisage we should do to prevent that in the future? As I understand it, when we have NATO and all its combined might and resource, if we were talking about a military conflict—we really hope that it does not come to that, and that we can prevent any more in Ukraine—we would not be impotent; we could defend ourselves. Yet “shattering the defence architecture of the west” sounds like quite a statement.

Elizabeth Truss: First of all, we have to be clear about who is at fault. Putin is the perpetrator and the aggressor here. I think some of the commentary almost blames the west for what has happened. I do not accord with that. Putin has made a strategic mistake: he did not understand how hard the Ukrainians would fight, and he did not understand the level of unity in, and the severe sanctions that would come from, the west. I think that is an important point to make.



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There has been a certain amount of complacency following the ending of the cold war—the so-called end of history—that we were living in a safe, secure neighbourhood and did not really have to worry; Russia had become a free-market democracy, and everything was fine. Our defence spending across the wider west, and our posture with respect to economic dependency—becoming more dependent on Russia for oil and gas—ignored the bad possibilities that could happen. There was a certain amount of turning a blind eye to what happened in Crimea and in the Donbas region.

We are now at a stage where the failure to act more decisively earlier means that we face a greater cost in acting now. My point would be that the cost in the future would be even higher, and that is why we need to do everything we can to impose the toughest sanctions possible, to get as much defensive support into Ukraine as possible, and to give as much support to the Ukrainian Government as possible, to stop Putin in Ukraine, which is our agreed objective.

Q648 **Andrew Rosindell:** To go back to Stewart's question, and to build on what I said in my first question, surely the last thing we should be doing at this stage is signing new treaties with the European Union. We should be saying to EU countries that they should collaborate with us through NATO. It should be the other way around: EU countries that are not in NATO should join NATO and contribute through the NATO system, rather than allowing the EU to become a separate security and defence organisation.

Elizabeth Truss: NATO is clearly extremely important and is the guarantor of security for all its members. We have a very strong, iron-clad commitment to article 5. We are seeing various countries that are members of the European Union step up their defence efforts. Frankly, how countries want to step up their defence efforts is a matter for them. We are not a member of the European Union; we do not make those decisions for them.

What I think is important is that, regardless of whether countries are members of the European Union, we all have a common interest in European security. It is absolutely vital that we work together and are not divided on that. That is why, alongside the Americans and Canadians, I attended the European Union foreign affairs committee; it is why I also attended the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting. I am prepared to work with any country, any organisation, that stands up for freedom, democracy and sovereignty. We have to be relentless in that pursuit.

There are two things that deter aggressors. One is hard security. We have talked about more deployment on the eastern flank; we have talked about the need to invest in higher-tech weaponry; we have talked about cyber-information warfare. The other thing is cutting off the supply of finance to those rogue states and not becoming economically dependent on countries that have expansionist and authoritarian attitudes and desires. That is ultimately what will protect us. We have to focus a lot more on what we want to do rather than on the specific format.



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I am a huge supporter of NATO—I think it has brought peace over generations—but we do need to modernise it. It does need to step up.

Q649 **Andrew Rosindell:** I agree with everything you said, Foreign Secretary, but it was being implied earlier that because we have not agreed a comprehensive agreement with the European Union, we are somehow at fault. In fact, other countries in the European Union could have participated in NATO a long time ago and supported a strengthened NATO, which we would all support. It is not really our fault that we are not part of this comprehensive agreement and, frankly, we have better things to do. We should be strengthening NATO and building up more of a global alliance, rather than giving the EU a greater role, when we all know that when the chips are down, the EU is always left waiting when tough action needs to be taken. It is always the United States and the United Kingdom—it is particularly the Anglo-Saxon countries—that are always there to defend freedom when needed. As you will have noticed, Foreign Secretary, Germany changed their policy—but about time, too. They have not been contributing for a very long time. Is it not time that the rest of Europe did the same?

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Someone's had their Weetabix.

Elizabeth Truss: I completely agree that the UK has shown leadership on this. That has been recognised by the Ukrainian people, and we have seen others follow our approach of supplying defensive weaponry, supporting the Ukrainians, training their army and increasing our deployments to the eastern flank. But I want to praise Germany for their change in stand, because that will have a huge impact. I want to see others follow their lead.

I also praise the EU for moving quickly on sanctions and for working with the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Japan to do that. The EU were present at the G7 meeting in December. I had a one-to-one with Josep Borrell. We agreed on the severe package of sanctions. He had done a lot to push it within the EU.

I am not precious about which organisation is pushing the measures, whether that is economic sanctions or supplying defensive weaponry. What I care about is whether it gets done. I am immensely proud that the UK has taken the lead in speaking out, whether on Nord Stream 2 or on sanctions—we are now pushing for a full SWIFT ban, a full bank asset freeze and the next stage of sanctions—but we are working with our partners, because what Vladimir Putin wants is a divided west. He wants us arguing among ourselves about treaty X or treaty Y; he does not want to see unity. That is the biggest thing that has shocked Russia—that we are prepared to work with each other. That is more important to us.

Q650 **Andrew Rosindell:** A final point of clarification: if it is unity you want, is it therefore the British Government's policy to encourage the remaining EU countries that are not in NATO to join it as soon as possible?

Elizabeth Truss: I would like to see NATO strengthened in every possible way. I certainly do not think it is a matter for Russia or China to decide



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who is in NATO. There are 30 members of NATO and the fact is that we need to make sure that all members have to have a say in who is able to join NATO, and we need to be able to follow through on the commitment to article 5 for those countries that join NATO. I completely agree with you, Andrew, that NATO needs to be strengthened, and that is what we are working to achieve with our friends and allies.

Chair: May we move on? First, I will put on the record praise for the Estonian Government, who are now buying 60 F-35s—that is more than we have—the Latvian Government, who are increasing their defence spending to 2.5%, and the Lithuanians, who are doing the same. Germany’s increase is, I think I am right in saying, about 150% of our total budget, so in total that makes it about three or four times our full defence budget. That is a hell of a change from Ostpolitik.

Q651 **Bob Seely:** I have a few questions on several related themes, including today’s Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Bill. Some kind of Bill has been promised since 2018. I would love to know your opinion on the delay. Why has it been delayed for so long, and why has it taken a major war to bring it in finally? Is this the end of a process and will the Government pat themselves on the back, or is it the beginning of a process in which, for example, we might bring in an updated Espionage Act, or a foreign lobbying or foreign agent registration Act, reform of libel and data protection rules, and more rules to tighten the use of harassment suits against journalists, campaigners and the like? Why have we been slow? Is this the end or the start of a process?

Elizabeth Truss: The answer is that this is not the end of the process. We are determined to crack down on all the practices that you talk about. In terms of the specific amendments that we are bringing to the economic crime Bill, we have previously been unable to bring these measures in, but we do think, due to the severity of this crisis and the political impetus around it, that we are now able to get those changes through.

Q652 **Bob Seely:** It is quite concerning that it is taking a very long time to sanction these bad actors, the oligarchs close to Putin. Why have we done that when, as Chris Bryant suggested, we could just read out the names and the reasons on the Floor of the House and use privilege?

Elizabeth Truss: I do think it’s important to go back to what happened around the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Bill in 2018. The Government faced a number of amendments that made it harder to get sanctions agreed and made it cumbersome and slower.

In particular, the Bill went through with no limits to damages available to sanctioned individuals and entities, so in 2019 we had a case where the Treasury had to pay out \$100 million of public money. The problem with that is that it inherently makes the Government more risk-averse if they are potentially facing huge damages.

Secondly, it was required that there was an impact test against the Human Rights Act 1998, and there was also the addition of an appropriateness test, including the requirement to consider significant effects of sanctions.



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All of these amendments to the Bill have made it harder for us to get through sanctions designation. It has taken longer for our lawyers to gather the evidence compared to international comparators like Canada, the United States, or even the EU.

The reason that is the case is that there was a group of people in the House of Lords—supported, it has to be said, by Opposition parties in the House of Commons—who pushed for those amendments. We had Lord Pannick and Lord Judge push for a more rigorous process for imposing sanctions, particularly the inclusion of the appropriateness test. Lord Pannick welcomed amendment 9 to the Bill, saying he was satisfied that it would impose a real discipline on Ministers putting stuff through.

I think this is important. Anneliese Dodds, when the Third Reading of this Bill went through, said that the Bill gave Members excessive power, which could not be justified by the need for speed. So even after all these amendments were added in the House of Lords, the Labour Party was still saying that the process was too fast. She called for additional bureaucracy through a cross-Whitehall committee to scrutinise sanctions.

So we had a group of lawyers and peers in the House of Lords who pushed for more cumbersome amendments that really placed a very high bar on our lawyers being able to look at this stuff, which was supported by the Labour party in the House of Commons. I think Chris Bryant warmly welcomed the amendments to the Bill during the Third Reading.

So we have a very cumbersome sanctions process because all those amendments were added. We are now in a position, because of the severity of the situation, to get rid of a lot of those amendments that were put on the Bill. That is what we are doing. We are removing the appropriateness test and we are capping the damages on judicial review. This will enable us to rapidly sanction anybody sanctioned by our allies.

The Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Bill is introduced today; if Parliament passes the legislation by Monday 14 March, we will be able to sanction those hundreds of individuals by next Tuesday, 15 March. But we are only able to do that because we now have the political will to get this Bill through without those amendments.

Q653 **Bob Seely:** It is a shame it is still being so delayed, but let's move on.

Elizabeth Truss: We started acting before Christmas. We tripled the size of our sanctions team. We have brought forward secondary legislation. On 10 February we broadened our designation criteria; on 28 February we brought action against banks and critical industries; on 1 March we laid two further SIs, on the central bank and the port entry ban. My point is that the sanctions legislation had been added to hugely in the House of Lords, making it more cumbersome, and we needed to have confidence that if we introduced primary legislation, it would not just be blocked by the House of Lords. That is the issue. We brought this legislation forward as soon as we could. It is pretty soon after—

Q654 **Chair:** To date, the EU has been more nimble on sanctions than the UK.



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Is that what you are saying?

Elizabeth Truss: What I am saying is that the legislation in the EU, Canada and the US is less onerous than our legislation because this was put through in 2018, when we were in a minority Government. Lots of extra clauses were added by Lord Pannick and others in the House of Lords, supported by the Labour party. That is the reality of the situation.

Chair: Absolutely. I have heard you very clearly and I am sure others have, too.

Bob Seely: Can I ask a couple more questions? On a different subject—

Q655 **Chair:** Not on a different subject now. We will bring in others now, and then come back to you.

On the question of sanctions of others, the Duma sanctions are clearly an element that has been covered by the EU. Are we going to do that, or is that something we cannot do at the moment?

Elizabeth Truss: We have said we will do that, absolutely. I just want to make a broader point. What is the purpose of the sanctions? The purpose of the sanctions is to debilitate the Russian economy so that Vladimir Putin does not have the money to fund his war machine. Let us look at the overall picture of what we have done relative to what the EU and the US have done. On banks, we have sanctioned 259 billion-worth of banks, compared to the US on 240 billion and the EU on 34 billion. On defence, we have sanctioned 35 billion-worth; the US has sanctions of 10 billion-worth and the EU has not done any defence sanctions.

Q656 **Chair:** The only thing that concerns me about all this is that we called out dirty Russian money in 2018 in our “Moscow’s Gold” report. This suggests to me that that money has been swishing around quite happily for the last four years, and maybe even collecting a bit more, while other countries may have been doing something to get rid of it. Is that true, or is it just completely by chance that we have had a lot more money and therefore have been able to do something about it?

Elizabeth Truss: The point I have made is that the way we have done our sanctions since this crisis emerged, we have hit more of the Russian economy than—

Q657 **Chair:** I get that, but is that because more of it is sitting in London, though?

Elizabeth Truss: No. It is because we have targeted banks that the EU and the US have not. We have targeted defence companies that the EU and the US have not. In total, we have targeted 364 billion; the US has targeted 340 billion and the EU has targeted 124 billion. I have said there is a specific issue of individuals, because of the cumbersome amendments put on the sanctions legislation in 2018, which were supported by Chris Bryant at the time. You are on the record, Chris, for supporting the amendment.



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Chris Bryant: I supported the amendment to introduce the Magnitsky sanctions. I was one of the people who had been arguing for them for many, many years. What you have just read out is not in *Hansard*, so I hope you will correct the record. I did not speak on Third Reading.

Elizabeth Truss: I have been told you did, so I can get the details.

Chris Bryant: I've got it here: Helen Goodman, Sir Alan Duncan, Jo Swinson. I did not speak on Third Reading.

Elizabeth Truss: I will get my officials to check up on that.

Chris Bryant: Mark Francois, Nigel Evans.

Q658 **Bob Seely:** Can I just add one other principal point? I get the fact that you are going after major institutions, but do you accept that there are two forms of Russian foreign policy, the official state policy and the banks you are going after? Do you accept the way that oligarchs have been used informally by the Kremlin to turn economic power into political power? They are significant players and part of the Russian regime in their own right. Specifically, in this country, one of the most important roles has been to channel vast sums of money to tax havens, which they have done very successfully, guarded by the financial institutions and the lawyers who have effectively protected that caravan of vast sums of money flowing from Moscow, via London, to those tax havens. Therefore, these kleptocrats are implicitly part of the informal Russian state. Do the Government accept that? They talk about understanding hybrid war, but I sometimes wonder whether they understand the reality of hybrid tools.

Elizabeth Truss: I accept that we need to sanction these oligarchs who are supportive of the Putin regime. I want to do that as quickly as possible. What I am saying is that there are impediments in place because of the way the legislation was passed in 2018. By the way, we have not had confirmation from the House of Lords that they will pass the economic crime Bill. I am assuming that, given the severity of the situation, they will. It is only because we are in this situation now that we are able to pass this primary legislation. I suspect if we had tried to do that a few months ago, we would not have got it through. We certainly faced a situation in 2018 where we had these cumbersome amendments added that made our position worse than those in comparable countries.

We should not overestimate the influence of the oligarchs in Russia. The fact is that Putin has operated in a very narrow circle in deciding on this war and to go forward with this war. He has ignored repeated warnings from others about the cost to Russia. This is why I believe the main purpose of the sanctions is to debilitate the Russian economy. That is why our No. 1 objective has been to take out the financial services sector and to target the defence sector, because we think that is where the maximum impact is going to be, rather than just focusing on the oligarchs. I am not saying the oligarchs are not important. If I could wave a magic wand and sanction all the oligarchs on my list tomorrow, I would do it. The legislation we are now introducing will allow us to do that next week.



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Q659 **Bob Seely:** That is the first of other Bills, including tightening up other procedures and a new espionage Act and a new lobbying Act that you are also going to be looking at and supporting, I hope, Foreign Minister.

Elizabeth Truss: Yes, although you will be aware that they are under the auspices of other Government Departments, but we are certainly looking at all those things.

Chair: I am going to come to Alicia and then Henry.

Q660 **Alicia Kearns:** You mentioned that we are seeing atrocities on the ground. I think we have all been horrified by the images we are starting to see, but I think the lessons of Syria are that there is evidently much worse to come. What is our plan to prevent atrocities in the next coming days and the next 48 hours? What red lines or repercussions are there for their continued use of cluster bombs and for thermobaric weapons. Ultimately, we have to plan for chemical weapons and what our response will be to those.

Elizabeth Truss: I fear that you are absolutely correct in assessing that, because the plan is not going according to what Vladimir Putin had set out, we are likely to see worse and worse ammunition and techniques being used. We saw the reckless attack on a nuclear power plant. We are seeing the use of cluster weapons. We are likely to see a very, very serious attack on Kyiv, and that is extremely concerning. We are calling it out. We have already asked the ICC to investigate the potential that war crimes have been committed. We are doing all we can to accelerate the provision of a humanitarian corridor, but we are looking at a barbaric prosecution of war by a dictator.

Unfortunately, that is the position we are in. We need to be prepared for this to draw out longer term. A lot of the economic sanctions I have talked about only work over time. We have seen the Ukrainians are prepared to fight. Even if there is success in taking the cities, even if there is success in Russia being able to occupy some or broader parts of Ukraine, the Ukrainian people are not going to give up. Ultimately, this will be a failure for Putin. What is so horrific is that his failure is going to end in so much tragedy and not just the appalling tragedy we see visited on the Ukrainian people; the appalling tragedy for the Russian soldiers who have been sent in. There are reports of thousands of soldiers already who have been killed. This will hit the Russian population as well.

Q661 **Alicia Kearns:** The difficulty is that no amount of heroism survives in the face of chemical weapons use, thermobarics or any others. Have we yet put in place post-chemical weapon exposure plans so that we can send in appropriate aid? Also, will we consider—I recognise it is unlikely you will be able to confirm this today in a public setting—meaningful repercussions, cyber-strikes at the heart of Russian critical national infrastructure, that are fully deniable, or actions such as that? Because Putin has already declared that he sees us arming the Ukrainians as an act of war—that our sanctions that are, in essence. We cannot allow the Ukrainian people's bravery to be the stalwart against such weapons use; there have to be repercussions.



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Elizabeth Truss: There will be repercussions. There has been a referral already to the International Criminal Court and it is being investigated. There are already numerous atrocities that have been committed that are being investigated. Of course, we are doing all we can to support the Ukrainians. I am working very closely with the Ministry of Defence and the Ukrainian Government. In fact, on the day of the invasion, Ben Wallace and I had a call with our counterparts to co-ordinate how we support Ukraine, and we are working through NATO with our international allies on this.

Q662 **Alicia Kearns:** My desperate ask is this: we know that no amount of threatening of legal action is going to stop him, so there must be some sort of agreement—behind the scenes, secretive, fully deniable; whatever it needs to be—or action, should we see continued atrocities, particularly of this nature.

That takes me to a wider point. For a long time I have talked about atrocity prevention in the Foreign Office not being what it should be. We have only just stood up the conflict centre, which took many months of lobbying. Is it time for an atrocity prevention strategy across the whole of the Foreign Office, and for every single post to have a framework that it can apply? Otherwise, we are not going to see early enough atrocity prevention flagging, and we are not going to know exactly what preventive and reactionary measures actually stop atrocities going further and further. Leading on atrocity prevention around the world is something meaningful that global Britain could do, but it needs institutional change at the heart of the Department.

Elizabeth Truss: I agree with your point on atrocity prevention. What we are facing in Ukraine is a dictator whose invasion plan has not worked; it has not been as fast as he would have hoped to take the cities, and he is turning to more and more extreme measures. While we are doing all we can to support with defensive weaponry and with humanitarian support, including some of the issues you have covered, Alicia, we are not in a position where NATO is getting directly involved. That is the stark reality of the situation we are in. It is appalling—it is unconscionable—but we have seen Putin prepared to use those types of weapons in other countries. That is the horrific reality of the situation we are dealing with.

Q663 **Alicia Kearns:** However—apologies, Chair; this is my last point on this question—the fact is that the Foreign Office is not set up in any way to have a framework. When I worked on the Syria desk and the Iraq desk and the counter-terrorism desk, you were expected to suddenly become an expert on atrocity prevention, when we were already so far down the line of recognising that atrocities were occurring that there was no meaningful way to stop them, to limit the bloodshed or to take action. This has happened in Ukraine, Xinjiang, Burma, Syria—you name it. If the Foreign Office was to use its conflict centre to create a framework for atrocity prevention, where every post had to have an atrocity prevention strategy and we had a core set of expertise, be it sanctions, counter-disinformation, military, humanitarian and so on—a core set of resource in the centre of the Department—we would see earlier flagging of



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atrocities, we would see desks not struggling to suddenly become experts on atrocity prevention, but being able to pull on a central resource, and we would end up with earlier flagging of potential atrocities and earlier stopping of them.

Elizabeth Truss: I think we have been flagging atrocities pretty assiduously during this campaign, and collecting evidence. The issue is that Putin is pursuing these with—

Q664 **Alicia Kearns:** But this isn't about Ukraine; this is about how we fundamentally change the Foreign Office's internal approach to atrocities in the long term. It has been failing time and again because we do not have the expertise or the resources or the frameworks in place to support people. It is too late for Ukraine, but we could look now at preparing posts to be able to support future atrocity prevention.

Elizabeth Truss: That is certainly something I will look at.

Thomas Drew: I will add something on what happens afterwards. You spoke earlier about accountability for atrocities. We spoke about the ICC, and you asked about crime of aggression tribunals. I should mention, linked to that, the UN Human Rights Council, which voted 32-2 last week to have a commission of inquiry. The other area is the OSCE, where we joined 44 other states and Ukraine to launch a mission on violations of human rights. I thought I would get the wider package out there as well.

Q665 **Chair:** Can I come back to the point about atrocities that you highlighted, Foreign Secretary? You voted in 2011 to intervene in Libya because of the atrocities being committed there, and you voted to intervene in Syria in 2013 because of the atrocities being committed there. What is different in Ukraine?

Elizabeth Truss: We are doing all we can to support the Ukrainians in their valiant self-defence of Ukraine. There is no prospect, as the Defence Secretary has been clear, of NATO troops going into Ukraine. That is the difference.

Q666 **Chair:** Just to be clear, the difference is the unwillingness of allies to cooperate; otherwise you would support it?

Elizabeth Truss: No, I'm not saying that, I'm saying that we don't support it.

Q667 **Chair:** It's just a straight question: what's the difference between intervening in Libya in 2011 and intervening in Syria in 2013, and intervening in Ukraine in 2022? All of them have got mass human rights violations, you have already told us that there are atrocities being committed, you have already told us that you are referring the Russian Government—

Elizabeth Truss: There is—

Chair: Sorry, may I finish? You are already telling us that you are referring the Russian Government to the International Criminal Court because of war crimes. What is the substantive difference for your



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different approach to these different countries?

Elizabeth Truss: We don't want a situation where NATO is at war with Russia. That is the difference.

Chair: Thank you. That makes it clear.

Q668 **Henry Smith:** Foreign Secretary, thank you for being with us today. If I could take us slightly back to talk of sanctions, of course Russia's aggression and the Putin regime's war on Ukraine has been the main focus of sanctions, from both the UK and our allies. Indeed, we will be developing that further. But of course, Belarus has been involved in supporting Putin. Lukashenko has been the current useful lackey of Putin, allowing troops to train on his soil. In recent days, of course, we have seen a slight retrenchment on that position from Minsk, being a little concerned about its involvement—not that I think we can trust what is coming out of the regime in Minsk. Can you say a little more about what action the United Kingdom, and its allies, is looking to take against the Lukashenko regime in Belarus and how we are looking to mitigate against that sort of support that the country is seeking to provide the Kremlin?

Elizabeth Truss: You are right that Belarus has been aiding and abetting the Putin invasion of Ukraine. We have already got sanctions on Belarus; we will be applying more sanctions, and the measures in the economic crime Bill will help us do that quicker.

Q669 **Henry Smith:** So there are specific further, targeted sanctions that are being worked on right now against Belarus?

Elizabeth Truss: Yes.

Q670 **Henry Smith:** Talking about other countries in the region—this time not necessarily in terms of sanctions but in terms of the threat posed to them by the Putin regime in Russia—Moldova is a country that is neutral and that also has a part of its territory, Transnistria, that is effectively partially occupied by Russian troops. What support is being provided towards Moldova? It has been said that many people's covid lockdown project was to learn to play an instrument or cook better. For Putin, it was to go through the Kremlin archives and see how he could recreate Russian imperialism. What kind of threats do we see towards countries such as Moldova and others if Putin is not stopped from taking his action in Ukraine?

Elizabeth Truss: I fear that it was not a covid project by Putin. He openly made his comments about the desire to restore wider Russia in his 2007 Munich security conference speech, so this has been on the cards for some time. It has been a long held ambition, and frankly the west should have taken him more seriously long before. I agree with your analysis on Moldova. What is happening in Transnistria and the threat that we are seeing on the Moldovan border is very concerning.

The UK has sent humanitarian teams to support Moldova, and we are looking at what more we can do, as are our allies across NATO. It is a serious concern. We are also seeing that with Kaliningrad and the threat



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there to the Baltic states. The invasion of Ukraine is, of course, absolutely appalling in itself, but there are also wider, fairly immediate security concerns, including Moldova.

Q671 Graham Stringer: If I may, Foreign Secretary, I will take you back to a couple of answers you gave earlier. You have been admirably candid about what has happened over the last 20 years, particularly about, if not a dependence on the supply of fossil fuels, then the integration of them into this country and elsewhere. The President of the United States has been talking about not purchasing any oil from Russia in the future. Are you considering as a real possibility the stopping of purchasing oil and gas from Russia? I know we do not purchase much directly, but there is some.

Elizabeth Truss: We have been very clear that we want to see more action to reduce dependence on Russian oil, gas and coal. We are talking with the G7 about having a timetable to do that. Some countries are extremely dependent on Russia, particularly for gas, and to very high percentages, so we don't just need a timetable, we also need to find alternative supplies for that gas—potentially from the Middle East and other parts of the world—or indeed greater investment in nuclear and renewables to be able to wean off gas.

On the oil proposition you mentioned, Graham, we are looking at what we can do on that front. There is no doubt that we have to cut off the supply of money into the Russian Government, and the No. 1 supply of money into the Russian Government is hydrocarbons. That has to be part of the solution. Putin has been able to fund the war machine—his army—to the extent he has because of hydrocarbon revenue. That is ultimately what it comes down to.

Q672 Chair: It does not appear to have funded them very well.

Elizabeth Truss: The invasion may not be going according to plan, but it is causing huge devastation, and I sincerely fear that we are likely to face worse very soon.

Q673 Graham Stringer: It is going to take a long time, but don't you think we should be talking to major oil and gas producers—Qatar, Saudi Arabia, even Venezuela, where there are sanctions—to ensure that nobody is dependent on Russian gas and oil? Are efforts being made to do that? Surely, it could be done quickly.

Elizabeth Truss: One of the successes of the response to the crisis so far is that we have co-ordinated across the G7. We can take unilateral actions as the UK, and we are prepared to do so, but to be effective we have to make sure that there are not alternative markets for leakage of Russian oil, gas and coal to go into. That is why it is important for us to co-ordinate at a G7 level and more widely to reduce dependence. We also need to work with countries like South Africa and India to reduce their dependence—whether it be on Russian defence, Russian oil and gas, or their export markets.



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Q674 **Graham Stringer:** Foreign Secretary, you have been very candid about the failures of the west in general to listen carefully to what Putin has been saying for some time about his ambitions to take back all of what was previously the Soviet Union. There is an article in today's *Daily Mail* by Dominic Lawson saying that everything was there to be seen and that this major failure is because of one particular ambassador. I don't want to name him, because he is one of a number. It is a failure of the Foreign Office. It is not unique. The Foreign Office has called people who warned about Putin cold war warriors. It didn't want to have anything to do with them.

Over the last 30 years, of the big changes there have been—the fall of the Berlin wall, the Arab spring, this dreadful war that has started recently—the Foreign Office has been off the field of play, really. It has not managed to warn people. Do you think there is something fundamentally wrong in the way that the Foreign Office gathers information and develops policy?

Elizabeth Truss: In this crisis, we have been at the forefront of warning what Putin was planning, of—

Q675 **Graham Stringer:** That is three or four months, Foreign Secretary. I am talking about a much deeper problem over a longer period.

Elizabeth Truss: I think that the problem, which I have talked about during this session, is about not just the west but the wider free world taking its foot off the pedal, abandoning a lot of the infrastructure we had in place during the cold war, and thinking that peace would be eternal and that we could divert money to other things—that we didn't need to spend on defence, we didn't need an information unit and we didn't need the same level of focus on those policy areas.

I don't think that was unique to Britain. It happened across Europe—we have been talking about Germany and its approach—and it happened in the United States as well. There were a lot of famous comments around the debate in the United States—you know: "Focus on China; Russia is no longer the threat we should worry about—we should be on China." Of course, a weak NATO is likely to embolden China, so I see tough policies on Russia and China as being complementary.

I have now heard from my officials that Mr Bryant did welcome the Bill, but not the amendments, so I want to correct the record on that subject.

Chris Bryant: Thank you.

Elizabeth Truss: I'm sorry—it was wrong in my notes, so I apologise to Mr Bryant. It was written wrongly in my notes.

Q676 **Graham Stringer:** I have one final question, which is the obverse of the question that Andrew asked you before. You said that you wanted NATO to be strengthened, which is welcomed. There are obvious countries that could join NATO. During the EU debate, I shared a platform with one of your predecessors, David Owen, who was very clear that one of the major reasons he changed his view on the European Union and wanted to



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come out of the EU was that there was a drive within the European Union for a European army. He thought that would mean that, in any conflict, there would be two centres of control—NATO and the European army—which would be disastrous in any large conflict. In welcoming new members to NATO or wanting countries to join, now that we are out of the EU, are you arguing that there should not be a European army?

Elizabeth Truss: I am reluctant to tell other countries how to run their defence policy. I think NATO is the best way of organising our collective security in Europe. It has proven itself over time, and we now need to strengthen it. We are not a member of the European Union. We decide our defence policy ourselves. We work with all our like-minded allies, including the JEF countries, the EU, the United States and Australia. AUKUS is an important part of strengthening the global security architecture, as well.

We are not a member of the EU. I don't want to give EU member states advice on how to organise their defence policy. The advice I do give to them is that we need to reduce strategic dependence on Russia and take a much tougher stance. The fact that we haven't taken a tougher stance has led to the emboldenment of Vladimir Putin.

Q677 **Graham Stringer:** Let me ask the question in a slightly different way. The two major military powers within Europe are ourselves and France. Should we not be arguing strongly, with both France and other colleagues in NATO, to enhance that relationship? The relationship with France, since we left the European Union, has not been great for obvious reasons, but shouldn't we be trying to enhance that? That is not telling any other country how to follow its defence policy; it is just saying that it is sensible for the two largest military powers in Europe to work more closely together.

Elizabeth Truss: We do work very closely with France, and we continue to build that relationship. As we see Germany scaling up its defence, we will also be working closely with Germany. I think that is important. However, I do not see those things as exclusive.

The United Kingdom has a multiplicity of defence relationships around the world, and part of what we need to do is to work more closely with the likes of India and Japan. We are negotiating a reciprocal access agreement with Japan at the moment, for example. Our current status enables us to be very nimble and flexible in the way that we do things, and to take a lead, as we did with supplying defensive weapons to Ukraine. We should continue to use that to impel others to act. I think that that is our useful role here.

Chair: Forgive me. I will come very quickly to Alicia, who has to go soon. Alicia, do you want to ask your question, very quickly?

Q678 **Alicia Kearns:** Thank you. Briefly, my question is about preventing spillover and distraction efforts on opening a second front in the western Balkans. I should declare that I am chair of the APPG for Bosnia and Herzegovina, and I am very grateful for the efforts of raising it at the NATO ministerial meeting, and also to Sir Stuart Peach. What planning



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and efforts are the Foreign Office currently putting in to essentially shore up the stability of Bosnia?

Elizabeth Truss: You are very correct; it is a major concern. We had a meeting last week with the Prime Ministers of the western Balkans. The Prime Minister and I had those meetings. We are doing what we can to strengthen the institutional arrangements, including targeting those who are leading secessionist movements.

However, it really comes back to the point about economics. The coast has been left relatively clear in the western Balkans for increased economic involvement by both Russia and China. What we need to do is replace that with British international investment, which we are now rolling out to the western Balkans, and we need our allies to do more. We need the European Union, and the countries within the European Union, to also invest more in the western Balkans. There is also Sir Stuart Peach, and obviously Christian Schmidt has an active role as well. We need to continue to work to strengthen the investment into the region. I think that is one of the most important ways that we can provide a bulwark to increased Russian interference.

Q679 **Alicia Kearns:** I think, with the situation in Ukraine, of the trauma that Bosnians are currently going through if they see what is happening. It reminds them of the siege of Sarajevo, which started only 30 years ago next month. You mentioned the financials; there is something that the UK could do now. Republika Srpska raised £350 million on the London stock exchange in 2021. It was the only place in the world that they were able to raise money to finance their debt. Is that something that you could look at, in terms of how we cut off their access to our financial capital?

Elizabeth Truss: Certainly. And, of course, the economic crime Bill provisions that we are putting through will enable us to better target the secessionists in Bosnia—so, yes, we are on that. This legislation, as well as helping us make sure that all the oligarchs are sanctioned in the case of Ukraine, will also help us target Belarus, and secessionists in Bosnia as well.

Q680 **Alicia Kearns:** Just before I come to you, Mr Drew, my final question about it is that Ukraine obviously demonstrates the consequences of insufficient deterrence. We know that, in Bosnia, the Brčko district would be the key point in any conflict. We can place troops, legitimately, in Brčko district at the request of the federal Government. Has that been considered? If not, could I urge you to consider that and, also, at the same time, our rejoining EUFOR, because it is not a European organisation—Turkey and Chile are members—and uplifting our troops, not just to EUFOR but also to NATO?

Elizabeth Truss: I will discuss all of that with the Defence Secretary on our next meeting, which is very soon.

Alicia Kearns: Fabulous. Thank you. Apologies, Mr Drew.



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Thomas Drew: No, not at all. Hearing you have to go, I have an update on the humanitarian carve-outs you asked about earlier. There was a meeting this morning with various representatives from the sector, including the ICRC. As I said, we want there to be a carve-out and we want the humanitarians to be able to do what they want to do. At the moment, they are telling us that the broad licence to enable humanitarian assistance that we have in existing legislation is okay. We are checking with them—we checked this morning—but if that changes, we will, of course, do what we need to do.

Alicia Kearns: I don't think they think that the CPS is going to come after them, but they want clarity in law that is completely clear.

Q681 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Very quickly, as I am conscious of time, the Russian embassy here in the UK is still at full pelt, and I think I am right in saying that it has not been downgraded at all. Could you explain why that is?

Elizabeth Truss: First of all, I think it is helpful to work with our international partners on taking action on diplomats, because I think it is more effective. Secondly, we still have our embassy operation in Moscow, which provides a way for us to communicate with the Russian population, among other things. We have to be careful that any action we take is, in the balance, of benefit to the United Kingdom, not of benefit to Russia, but all these potential actions are on the table and are under consideration.

Q682 **Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** Can I ask about something you said on 27 February on Sophie Raworth's Sunday morning programme, with regards to the international brigades? You said you supported people going to fight in Ukraine. Then, the following morning, the Defence Secretary had to almost undo your words by saying on the "Today" programme that you had not been suggesting that untrained people travel to Ukraine. Could you clear up what you meant?

Elizabeth Truss: The Defence Secretary is right. I had not been suggesting that untrained people travel to Ukraine. In fact, our travel advice is very clear that people should not go to Ukraine. What I do say is that the Ukrainian people are fighting a just war and that we support them in doing that.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Thank you.

Q683 **Chris Bryant:** Thanks very much for earlier. My memory is shocking, so sometimes I have said things that I didn't think I had said, but I am pretty sure that I didn't say that. In fact, having checked, my speech on 1 May was remarkably good.

Elizabeth Truss: Even if you do say so yourself.

Chris Bryant: Well, nobody else is going to say it, are they? So I thought I might as well. Interestingly, on that day, there was an amendment to that Bill to create a register of ownership of overseas entities, which you voted against. I am glad you will be voting in favour of it today.



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Following on from what you said earlier about sanctions, it is about the mixture of social, cultural, sporting, financial and economic sanctions—and some of those are more important than others. I am not sure if you are aware that the premiership is very popular in Russia. Despite calls for it to stop broadcasting into Russia, it is still doing so. Do you think it would be a good idea if it stopped?

Elizabeth Truss: That is certainly something I am prepared to talk to the DCMS Secretary about.

Q684 **Chris Bryant:** I think she is in favour of them stopping. You might as well just go for the full—

Elizabeth Truss: I do not like to tread on her turf, Chris.

Q685 **Chris Bryant:** All right. You probably won't want to answer this question either, then. The Government have said they are going to publish a review into tier 1 visas. Do you know when that will be?

Elizabeth Truss: I do not, but I know that the Home Secretary is working very hard on that. On all these sanctions, the No.1 objective is debilitating the Russian economy, which is why I pointed out the figures. We are targeting a greater proportion of the Russian economy. The other objective is isolating Russia, so I do think these measures are important.

Q686 **Chris Bryant:** There might be a third reason, mightn't there? Most Russians are not getting undiluted news; they are getting propaganda from the Russian state, so anything that makes them realise that things are not quite right in the world and that they are being isolated probably contributes to that. It is good news that some of the British-based accountancy firms have decided to pull out of Russia. I guess you would support that.

Elizabeth Truss: I think that is very positive. It is also very positive that we have seen Visa and Mastercard withdraw. We all saw the scenes on the Moscow subway when people could not use their cards. I think it is very important to send a message to the people of Russia about what is happening.

Q687 **Chris Bryant:** Would it help if McDonald's, Pepsi and Coca-Cola did the same?

Elizabeth Truss: Yes.

Q688 **Chair:** Would you agree, however, that internet service providers should remain, for the simple reason that we need to have some form of access for the Russian people to media that is not controlled by the Putin state?

Elizabeth Truss: As I said to Stewart, we always have to look at the balance of interests and what is going to have the maximum impact, but yes, communication by social media is important. It is very interesting that younger people in Russia are much more sceptical of Putin, and one of the reasons for that is, until the crisis started, they had been getting relatively free access through social media to information about what is



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happening, as opposed to Russian state TV, which is not an unbiased source.

Q689 **Chris Bryant:** Would you say Lord Greg Barker—I think he has taken permanent leave now from the Lords and has resigned today from EN+—had any business sitting in the House of Lords when he was running basically a Deripaska front organisation?

Elizabeth Truss: I am not going to comment on this specific case, which I was not aware of, Chris, but I think it is good that people are dissociating themselves from this type of organisation, and we need to see more of that.

Q690 **Chris Bryant:** We have been told on the Standards Committee that there are concerns about some of the all-party parliamentary groups that are funded by other countries in terms of security concerns in the UK, and in particular in relation to some of the members of the House of Lords. Do you have any concerns about members of the House of Lords being Putin apologists?

Elizabeth Truss: I am not going to go through a list of names, but I think that a number of people in the United Kingdom did get too close to those close to the Putin regime. I think there has been a huge wake-up call, and people are shocked and horrified at what has happened in Ukraine. I welcome people getting rid of those links and dissociating themselves from the regime.

What I would say is that the fundamental action of the Putin regime to invade Ukraine is not the fault of people in the United Kingdom. Yes, the entire west should have done more earlier to not become strategically dependent on Russia, particularly in oil and gas.

We should have done more to build up our collective defences and should have responded earlier to Putin's aggression in Crimea and in the Donbas region. I think we have just got to be careful about where the blame lies. The blame lies with the despotic regime, so I hope you are spending as much time taking them on as some of the people in Britain.

Q691 **Chris Bryant:** I have been doing this for a long time. I have been on this campaign for a very long time trying to tackle Putin's frequent and repeated excessive uses of violence, but my anxiety has always been that we, in the UK, got rather too addicted to Russian money. We kind of got infiltrated in so many different parts of British society, whether that is football clubs, political parties or whatever, and that money just became too attractive. That is why I was always worried about tier 1 visas.

Can I ask you about some of the oligarchs? Obviously, some of them have come out and stated very clearly that they are completely opposed to the invasion of Ukraine and have begged Putin to take his tanks back home and all the rest of it. I think Lubov Chernukhin has said that she is opposed to the invasion. Have you had any conversations with her?

Elizabeth Truss: No.



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Q692 **Chris Bryant:** Or with her husband about it? Do you think he should have condemned the invasion?

Elizabeth Truss: I haven't spoken to anybody connected with—how do I describe these people—any sort of Russian oligarch at all—

Q693 **Chris Bryant:** Have you spoken to Lebedev about it?

Elizabeth Truss: —since I've become Foreign Secretary. I don't think I spoke to anyone before, but I just—

Q694 **Chris Bryant:** Have you spoken to Lebedev?

Elizabeth Truss: No.

Q695 **Chris Bryant:** Father or son?

Elizabeth Truss: No.

Q696 **Chris Bryant:** Putin once—

Elizabeth Truss: The people I have spoken to are Sergey Lavrov and the Russian ambassador in London; those are the two people connected with the Putin regime I have spoken to.

Q697 **Chris Bryant:** We found that the ambassador was full of lies when he came to see us—he said it was absolutely preposterous that anybody should even suggest that they would invade Ukraine. That was—

Elizabeth Truss: This is what Lavrov said; this is what Putin said. You are right—they are liars.

Q698 **Chris Bryant:** If I understand it, the amendments that the Government have now tabled to the Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Bill mean that you will be able to sanction anybody automatically who has already been sanctioned by the European Union or the United States of America.

Elizabeth Truss: By 15 March. The Bill has to go through and then we have to lay legislation to do that.

Q699 **Chris Bryant:** So there will be another round of secondary legislation on the back of it?

Elizabeth Truss: Yes.

Q700 **Chris Bryant:** And then people like Osipov, Peskov, Sechin, Roldugin and Savelyev would all be able to be sanctioned?

Elizabeth Truss: I cannot comment on the list, but I am sure that people can draw their own conclusions.

Q701 **Chris Bryant:** The specific question I am asking is this: does it mean you then have to do another sift, or do you automatically take what the Americans and Europeans have done?



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Elizabeth Truss: As I say, I don't want to make it absolutely obvious who is on that list, but we are able to sanction all of the people you would want to see sanctioned by Tuesday 15 March.

I know, for example, that there have been proposals for a so-called names Bill, which would go through the House in one day. The only value that would add is in terms of time, i.e. there is the potential that that can be done this week, although I think it is quite difficult in terms of parliamentary time. The point I am making is that everything that could be done in a names Bill could be done by Tuesday 15 March.

Q702 **Chris Bryant:** Right. And we would still have the flexibility to move quickly—?

Elizabeth Truss: Yes.

Q703 **Chris Bryant:** Because all that any of us wants is to go faster, and if the problems are that lawyers or whoever—

Elizabeth Truss: Mr Bryant, nobody wants to go faster than me.

Q704 **Chris Bryant:** I do, but anyway—just a final thing: the threats to Romania. I mention that because Putin has made some fairly clear threats to Romania in the last 24 hours. How would we respond to that?

Elizabeth Truss: There have been threats made to Romania and to the Baltic states, which is why we absolutely need to strengthen the eastern flank.

Q705 **Chris Bryant:** What? So we are sending troops to Romania? What Putin has said basically is that anybody who sent—as I understand it, the proposal is that some planes will go from one country to another country and then backfilling straight into—

Elizabeth Truss: I really, really cannot comment on that.

Chris Bryant: Okay.

Chair: We have a few things to hit on quickly. I will start with Royston.

Q706 **Royston Smith:** Thank you. Ms Drew will know more about this than most, but there are countries that did not support us in the UN and that have met Putin. In fact, on the day of the invasion, I think, Imran Khan met President Putin and he had agreed to buy oil and grain and suchlike from Russia, and in my opinion Pakistan was not particularly helpful when the Taliban took over Afghanistan. What we will do about continuing to send significant aid packages to countries such as Pakistan, who are not joining the alliance against Putin?

Elizabeth Truss: On the subject of aid, we are currently working on the aid budget for next year—the 2022-23 aid budget. We are also working on our international development strategy. First of all, our strategy is moving much more money from multilateral organisations into bilateral aid, so that we have much more control over where we are spending the money.



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Aid will also be much more geopolitically focused. We will focus on funding areas where it will lead to a more positive outcome for freedom and democracy in the future. That is the lens through which we will be looking at our aid money, alongside restoring the funding on humanitarian aid and restoring the funding on women and girls. I cannot make comments about specific money for specific countries, because we are still working on that, but when we look at the aid budget, we will look at the incentives that countries have to work in a positive direction for freedom and democracy.

Q707 Royston Smith: Understood, but do you think it is acceptable to send significant aid to countries that are not joining this coalition against a barbaric invasion?

Elizabeth Truss: I think we need to look at both the carrot and the stick. One of the things I said earlier is that there are a lot of countries that are dependent on Russia, whether for the supply of oil and gas, exports, or defence support. We need to provide them with alternatives. By that, I mean the broader western alliance. But I agree with you that we also need to look at the stick in terms of what we do when countries don't respond and are prepared to vote with a barbaric regime.

Chair: Thanks very much. Stewart.

Q708 Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Foreign Secretary, thanks for your time this afternoon. It has been illuminating. Can I finish with a suggestion and a question?

On disinformation, I have wanted us to take disinformation, particularly hostile foreign disinformation, much more seriously than we have. Last year, I published a whole report on this with nine recommendations. There is one I would like to ask you about, as I asked your predecessor, in relation to Parliament and the public at large understanding the threat and the nature of hostile disinformation. One of the suggestions I made was that we could have a, say, six-monthly written statement to Parliament from your Department, outlining in as much as it can what the threat looks like, how it is changing and how it is emerging, because I think we need to do better at building up the resilience to this threat as it evolves.

To move away from that point to my question, what is your assessment of Israeli, Turkish and French efforts in terms of their discussions with the Putin regime, in trying to find some kind of de-escalation route?

Elizabeth Truss: On disinformation, I like your idea.

Q709 Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Good. I am sending you the report.

Elizabeth Truss: I will follow up on that.

My view is that while Putin is conducting an abhorrent war in Ukraine, has not withdrawn his troops and is carpet-bombing or shelling towns and cities, I don't believe he is serious about talks or diplomacy. I simply don't believe he is serious.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I am afraid I agree with you.



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Chair: Thank you. Andrew and then Henry.

Q710 **Andrew Rosindell:** A very quick question, Foreign Secretary. I am sure you agree that in times of global instability and potential conflict, that is the point when we most value our Global Britain assets around the world. Do you agree that the strategic importance of the overseas territories at this point comes into play, particularly the British Indian Ocean Territory, Gibraltar and also Akrotiri and Dhekelia. Will you guarantee that the British sovereignty of all those places remains rock solid under your stewardship as Foreign Secretary?

Elizabeth Truss: I completely agree with you. They are all very important. I am currently working on finalising the negotiations with the EU on the subject of the Gibraltar arrangements post Brexit. We are also working to support our efforts in BIOT, where we are very confirmed as to our sovereignty.

Q711 **Chair:** Can I build on that? I am sure we all agree with Andrew on the importance of the overseas territories and praise some jurisdictions, like the BVI, who have done a huge amount for openness. Will you be introducing the various ideas suggested by Members of the House, including people like Margaret Hodge and Andrew Mitchell, to ensure that the openness of the registers we are going to be introducing here will also apply to those jurisdictions over which we exercise influence?

Elizabeth Truss: The individual sanctions that we are putting in will automatically apply.

Q712 **Chair:** But it is not just sanctions; this is also the openness of registers for corporate ownership and so on.

Elizabeth Truss: We are holding an extraordinary Privy Council with the overseas territories to talk about all those ideas and get those implemented.

Chair: Thank you. Henry?

Q713 **Henry Smith:** I am very pleased to hear your comments with regard to the British Indian Ocean Territory.

Elizabeth Truss: Lord Ahmad recently visited to confirm this as well. He visited Mauritius.

Q714 **Henry Smith:** Very good. I will be looking to seek further information on that in a future session.

Coming back to Russia and Ukraine, you have rightly spoken about the importance of the information unit. It seems from recent reports that even some really quite senior people in the security apparatus of the Russian state claimed to be unaware of Putin's full plans for Ukraine. What is the assessment of the British Government with regard to the unity at senior levels within the intelligence, military and foreign service elements of the Russian Government?



Elizabeth Truss: I think it is fair to say that we do not think that there is much room for dissent, or for voicing an alternative opinion, in the Russian Government, so I think it is fair to say that not much information may have gone to President Putin.

Q715 **Graham Stringer:** You have been very clear, Foreign Secretary, about our article 5 obligations, and that in terms of not agreeing to enforce a no-fly zone, we do not want to get involved in a direct conflict with Russia. Are there any intermediate situations that could give rise to a conflict with Russia? I am thinking about the convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide, which puts an obligation on national state parties to act. Do you think that that could lead to a direct conflict?

Elizabeth Truss: I think it is important that we look to avoid a direct conflict with Russia. It is in nobody's interests that that happens. That is why we are clear that the no-fly zone would be extremely problematic from that point of view. What we need to do is pursue these actions through the International Criminal Court, as well as working on the ground to protect the humanitarian corridors.

Q716 **Chair:** May I ask some very brief questions to close off with China? How do you think China is viewing the events in Ukraine?

Elizabeth Truss: I had a discussion with Wang Yi, my Chinese counterpart, ahead of the Security Council meeting, and made it very clear that any country that believes in sovereignty, and the Chinese were clear that they believed in the sovereignty of Ukraine, and in fact have subsequently put out a statement, could not possibly support Russia at the UN Security Council. In fact, they did not vote with Russia, which was significant. Russia has become a global pariah. It is being cut off from modern technology. Its banks have been cut off. The central bank has been cut off. I believe that China does not want to associate too closely with that, and it is important that we are very clear that China's associations with that would be condemned in the strongest possible terms.

Having said that, there is also the issue of the importance of showing strength as NATO, because the rest of the world will be watching, including China, how the west continues to respond. This is why the UK is pushing for tougher sanctions, including on all of SWIFT, and a timetable to reduce dependency on oil and gas, and continuing to supply defensive weapons to Ukraine despite what has been said. It is very important at this stage that we do not resile from our position. We need to continue to work to reduce strategic dependency on China. We need to be aware of the broader need to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific, and we need to be very clear with China, which I was in my call with Wang Yi, that any association with this invasion of Ukraine is a violation of the principles that they purport to believe in of the maintenance of the sovereignty of nations.

Q717 **Chair:** May I push you on what Wang Yi said to you? Did the Chinese



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Foreign Minister express any greater support for the Russian case, or did he express any views on Russian energy transfers to the east?

Elizabeth Truss: He did not express any views on Russian energy transfers, and there are some logistical problems for Russia. My understanding is that the relevant pipeline has not been built, so it is actually quite difficult for Russia to be able to transfer the energy that they are selling to Europe to China. You will have seen the public statement of Putin and Xi before the Beijing games, and the public statements that China have made on NATO. For the first time, China have been talking about who should and should not be a member of NATO, which is clearly not a matter for them, but I think that China do not want to associate themselves with what has happened in Ukraine, because I think they realise the strategic implications. That is very much the message that I got from my call, which I will be following up.

Q718 **Chair:** Thank you. Have you done any assessment on the implications of \$130 oil for an energy consumer like China?

Elizabeth Truss: I am sure that Kwasi Kwarteng is working on that as we speak. I know that Kwasi is meeting G7 Energy Ministers this week to talk about how we work together on this.

Q719 **Chair:** But presumably Caroline Wilson's team in Beijing will be looking at the impact on the Chinese economy of massive oil price hikes, which cannot be good for an oil-consuming nation like China.

Elizabeth Truss: True.

Q720 **Chair:** What assessment have you done of the likely logistical failure of Russian military adventures in Syria, Mali and Libya?

Elizabeth Truss: We continue to examine what is happening. We are seeing a Russian defence force that is very thinly stretched.

Thomas Drew: The Russia-Ukraine crisis is the business of the whole of the FCDO now. If you look at all our posts around the world, whether in the Middle East or in China, and the core of their reporting and analysis—I do not know the specifics of the energy analysis in China—that is what all our people are doing, because of the importance of the issue.

Q721 **Chair:** Clearly, if the logistics in Syria are as tight as those in Ukraine appear to be, and they must be more complex because they are either shipping through Turkish waters or are airlifted over Turkey, this could lead to a very severe change in governance in Damascus.

Thomas Drew: As you say, it is not just in Syria; there are other places where there are Russian military adventures, which we also worry about. So yes, you are absolutely right.

Chair: I am looking at the migrant flows from Libya, Mali and Syria over the last few years, and seeing how they could change the implications for southern Europe. I will be delighted to hear if you have any views on it in due course. We shall write to you on it. Foreign Secretary, thank you very much for doing this session on Ukraine. As I say, it has been seven



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months that you have been in post. While it is fantastic to see you—

Elizabeth Truss: Did you say several months?

Chair: I said seven. Isn't it seven?

Elizabeth Truss: No, I think it is less than six.

Chair: You came in in September, didn't you? So it is five and a bit to six. We would be very grateful to see you in the next month because clearly, although Ukraine is all-dominant at the moment, the world is changing very quickly, and the way in which you shape the Foreign Office in the coming years, one hopes, will be interesting and of great importance to the Committee and to the House.